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To cite this article: Anna Carlile (2012) 'Critical bureaucracy' in action: embedding student voice into school governance, *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 20:3, 393-412, DOI: [10.1080/14681366.2012.712053](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2012.712053)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2012.712053>



Published online: 26 Sep 2012.



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## **‘Critical bureaucracy’ in action: embedding student voice into school governance**

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This article suggests a model for ‘youth voice’ based on a participatory research methodology, ‘Illuminate’. The article reports on research into the capacity for ‘Illuminate’ to amount to ‘critical bureaucracy’. Critical bureaucracy is presented as an approach to governance activities (here, in schools and further education colleges) which is related to ‘critical pedagogy’ in its reflexivity and sensitivity to issues of policy, power and social justice. The article reports on the testing of the Illuminate model through projects at two schools and a further education college: one on the flexible use of time in the curriculum; another on safety in school students’ lives; and the third on widening participation in the creative arts. Drawing on Freire, Foucault, and Hart, these projects are analysed according to theories of emancipatory research methods, governance, participation, and critical pedagogy, assessing the Illuminate model’s efficacy in terms of a pragmatic approach to critical bureaucracy. The analysis reveals a tension in the adoption of the combination of post-modern theories of governance and an ethic of social justice.

**Keywords:** critical pedagogy; youth voice; bureaucracy; social justice; governance; policy; participation; Freire; Foucault

### **Introduction**

This article reports on the testing of a participatory research model, ‘Illuminate Student Researchers’, developed by the author, partially in response to recommendations made on the basis of research about the causes and effects of permanent exclusion<sup>1</sup> from school. This earlier work constituted a piece of ethnographic research conducted over two years within the Children’s Services department of a large urban local education authority in England. The research (Carlile 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) pointed to a vein of institutional prejudice leading to the need for a ‘critical bureaucracy’ (Carlile 2012)<sup>2</sup> across the network of children’s services and education systems.

One of the ways in which the practice of critical bureaucracy can be informed is through an exercise in ‘studying up’ (Nader 1972). This is a

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process through which research is carried out into the inner mechanics of powerful institutions so that ‘service-users’ can be empowered with the knowledge necessary to offer pragmatic solutions. So where students have access to ‘study up’ on their schools, the potential for their ‘voice’ becomes less constrained by lack of knowledge, and policy and practice can be validly informed through listening to their stories and concerns and implementing their ideas as a key component of school or college governance and improvement (Carlile 2010, 2011).

The language and content of the stories available to student researchers is of course subject to its own mechanisms of power. So I will be describing a process, below, through which young people conducted participatory research in such a way that it purposefully *borrowed* the power of existing policy mandates around school and further education (FE) college<sup>3</sup> ‘improvement’. The development of this process, the ‘Illuminate Student Researchers’ Project’, was informed by Foucault’s (1977) conceptions of the technologies of power. Thus an understanding of how powerful constituencies construct effective discourses informed the design of the method. Illuminate student researchers were thus utilising the strategies employed by powerful authorities in order to effectively insert pupil voice into processes of school and FE college governance. The Illuminate approach might be thought of as somewhat subversive in this regard. This is rooted in the Freirian elements of its design, particularly his understanding that pedagogy should be designed in response to investigations about the experienced world by ‘teacher-students’ and ‘student-teachers’ (Freire 1970, 74) together.

This article will proceed with an overview of the background and context in which Illuminate was developed, and the theory underpinning its design. I will explain how Illuminate can be established as an important activity in schools and colleges where it is linked with senior management team interests. I will then describe Illuminate projects in two schools and an FE college, with some of the findings related to each of their chosen foci: ‘The flexible use of time in the school timetable’; ‘Safety in our lives’; and ‘Widening participation in the creative arts’. The final section of the article will critically analyse the Illuminate approach, and its usefulness as a tool for critical bureaucracy. Essentially, this article describes investigations made by Illuminate Student Researchers but focuses on analysing the Illuminate project as a form of research into student voice. In particular, I will be looking at the tensions inherent in the adoption of a combination of post-modern theories of governance and an ethic of social justice in designing a model for student voice.

## Context

The research at the basis of the recommendations leading to the design of the ‘Illuminate’ model, into the causes and effects of permanent exclusion,

was conducted on-the-job: I was a Pupil Support Officer in an urban local authority ('Enway', a pseudonym), helping young people who had been permanently excluded from school to find and succeed within new mainstream schools (Carlile 2010).

A permanent exclusion represents a critical incident where ostensibly everything has coalesced into the school's expression of abjection. At the point of exclusion, the conditions necessary to help a young person succeed in school appear to have failed. Because of this, permanent exclusion proved a useful lens through which to consider what might be wrong more generally with the education and related systems in England. The research considered the policy around permanent exclusion, as well as the experiences of those involved with it (Carlile 2010, 2011).

One of the findings of the ethnography was that those young people who were at risk of or subjected to an actual permanent exclusion from school were more likely to experience institutional prejudice: classism, racism (Carlile 2011), sexism, and on the basis of sexual orientation (Carlile 2009a). Social workers and senior school teachers wrote reports on young people skewed firmly towards a narrative of the young person in terms of his or her deficits, and often, perhaps on the basis of a hegemonic, normative world view, foregrounded or ignored details such as their sexuality, or their experiences of cultural dissonance. Further, those young people who had been excluded tended to experience such institutional prejudice more keenly both during and as a result of the exclusion process. For example, institutional racism was found where translation facilities were inadequate, leaving young people whose parents did not speak English unable to advocate or make informed choices on behalf of their children in the midst of the highly distressing exclusion process. Further, gender and class-related stereotyping rather than individual student choice was found to be a common basis for the placement of previously excluded students on to vocational courses such as 'Hair and Beauty' or 'Construction'. Woven through the tapestry of permanent exclusion from school, then, was a silencing of students' own stories, needs, contexts, thoughts, and concerns, in favour of the stereotypes and assumptions which were features of the hegemonic discourse. The recommendations pointed towards a need to privilege student 'voices' in order to inform school governance with a more nuanced understanding of students' experiences, needs and talents.

Following my departure from the pupil support role at Enway I began working in a university Department of Educational Studies. Part of my role here was to manage the partnership with schools in which secondary PGCE<sup>4</sup> students were undertaking their placements. In this role I worked with professional co-ordinating mentors (PCMs) – senior school teachers responsible for managing the progress of PGCE students in their schools. I also co-ordinated the general professional studies course on the Secondary PGCE programme, which included a requirement for students to undertake a

research project. I was originally a school teacher myself, and wanted to develop a project which would make the work of educating prospective teachers in a university–school partnership something that could be useful to pupils, teachers, schools and PGCE students. I was also concerned to continue working directly with young people in order to continuously inform my university teaching. I lectured on cultural congruence, policy and governance, curriculum development, and behaviour management, and wanted my teaching to be based in experience rather than half-remembered activities conducted before my work as a lecturer.

My positioning in terms of the research based around the Illuminate projects, then, was that of a critical pedagogue. In designing the Illuminate approach, I was attempting to deliver on earlier research recommendations in a way which was oriented politically against the powerful and concerned to mediate creatively and constructively between the needs of student teachers, school and college students, and education managers. Primarily, though, I wanted to develop a model of student voice which could borrow the technologies of power (Foucault 1977) to deliver an emancipatory pedagogy (Freire 1970). The next section expands on the theoretical basis for the Illuminate project.

### **Governance, participation and critical bureaucracy**

School-student participant research projects were the subject of a large-scale ESRC-funded<sup>5</sup> project about ‘students-as-researchers’ (Fielding and Bragg 2003). Building on this key and comprehensive exemplification of the potential for student researchers, the theory underpinning the Illuminate model emerges from three areas: Foucault’s (1975) theories of governance and docility; Hart’s (1992) ideas on youth participation; and how Freire’s (1970) understanding of critical pedagogy links to ‘critical bureaucracy’.

#### ***Foucault’s (1975) ‘capillaries of power’***

I have described, above, how the ethnographic research into the causes and effects of permanent exclusion from school revealed underlying threads of institutional prejudice. I would also argue that these threads constitute and are interwoven with capillaries of normative power (Foucault 1975). Foucault described power as flowing throughout society, through those who make policy, those who implement policy, and those who are sometimes called stakeholders – the recipients of policy. These capillaries of power are ubiquitous and unseen, and reach into each individual, leading us to govern ourselves through the regulation of our own behaviour – what Rose (1999) calls ‘governing the soul’. Institutional prejudice taints and is exemplified by the implementation of, for example, the policy and protocol around translation services, as described above. It is therefore deeply entangled with and

running through the capillaries of power. The education hegemony is traditionally dominated by adult teachers, but as Fielding and Bragg explain, '(y)oung people and adults often have quite different views of what is significant or important in their experience of and hopes for learning' (2003, 5). The Illuminate project, then, arose partially as an implementation of the idea that to challenge governance through hegemonic, normative prejudice requires a multiplicity of voices telling their own stories.

### *Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of participation'*

How children and young people might be supported to report and act on the content of their own heteroglossic (Bakhtin in Francis 2010) stories can be informed by Hart's (1992) 'ladder of participation'. This 'ladder' describes varying approaches to supporting children and young people to participate in decision-making, beginning with activities which represent 'mere tokenism', and developing into activities at the top of the scale which implement 'full citizenship'. The key element in Hart's model is that at the top of the ladder, decisions and activities are young people-initiated, but shared with adults. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to benefit from the access, life experience and expertise available to adults. In constructing the Illuminate model, then, and to ensure that the projects could effectively draw on adults' resources, I 'studied up' (Nader 1972) on school governance systems, and endeavoured to add perceived value to student research projects with an infusion of what I thought might be important to school and FE college senior management teams.

School and FE college head teachers and senior management teams in England are responsible for ensuring that their institutions achieve a good Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) report. Ofsted inspections – part of a technology of power and surveillance (Foucault 1975) – are carried out every one to three years, and funding and reputation is linked to the resultant grade. Each Ofsted report includes a set of recommendations, and in order to achieve what is known as 'a good Ofsted', schools need to be able to show that they have addressed these. To show that recommendations are being addressed, they form the basis of an action plan known as a SIP (school improvement plan), and this is given to subsequent Ofsted inspectors as evidence, albeit a constructed piece of evidence that, as with other 'performances for inspection', merely represents on paper the notion that their advice has been taken (Ball 2003; Gillies 2008). Despite the distance between the SIP and action – an 'abstraction' leading to a culture of 'virtualism' (Miller 2003) – a SIP does have the effect of fixing a school or college senior management team's focus. And the language of Ofsted favours the word 'impact': SIPs which identify a desired and preferably measurable 'impact' and provide for its measurement are seen as efficient and effective.

Shore and Wright (1997, 4), in the introduction to their edited volume on the ‘Anthropology of Policy’, ask, ‘What are the mobilising metaphors and linguistic devices that cloak policy?’ I would argue that in the context of school and FE college governance, ‘impact’ is a ‘mobilising metaphor’. As a consequence, I use the word ‘impact’ to engage the interest and commitment of school and college senior management teams in the Illuminate participatory research projects. So in brokering the offer to an educational institution of an Illuminate project, I ask whether there is a specific area for development; something the school or FE college would like to research – perhaps, even, an issue which can produce a tangible *impact* on the goals of the SIP. This is one way to deliver what I call ‘critical bureaucracy’ in action: consciously using official protocol and language to lend legitimacy and power to the project. This strategy draws on the link with the resources of significant adults required by Hart’s (1992) model for participation and citizenship.

### ***Freire’s (1970) ‘critical pedagogy’: the roots of critical bureaucracy***

The idea of ‘critical bureaucracy’, introduced above, is linked to Freire’s (1970) concept of a critical pedagogy. He was interested in the power of dialogue and critical thinking and concerned that teachers should be asking questions about their own role in an inequitable system. He explained that ‘(e)ducation which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated’ (1970, 74). In other words, a constructive, dynamic and socially just education requires teacher and student to consider and make decisions together about how and where learning and schooling takes place. In their discussion of the kinds of student–teacher research collaboration which aim to operate within these parameters, Fielding describes a process of ‘radical collegiality’ (1999, in Fielding and Bragg 2003, 55).

Although I identified as a ‘critical pedagogue’, during my work and research on permanent exclusion in the Children’s Services department at Enway, I often asked myself whether I was actually a ‘street-level bureaucrat’ (Shore and Wright 1997, 5). My quandary was then about how I as a *critical* bureaucrat could align my ethic of social justice with models of policy and practice which appeared inequitable. But despite the well-documented inequities in English schooling on the basis of class, ethnicity, and gender (e.g. Ball 2008; Blair 2001; Cooper 2002; Francis 2005; George 2007; Lloyd 2005; Phoenix 2009; Reay 2008), there are pockets of possibility. There were many examples in Enway of attempts to work creatively within the policy framework in order to redress systemic inequities. For example, my manager at Enway allowed me to redesign a ‘reintegration support’ form to include a space for the opinion of the ‘parent/carer’ or

‘pupil’ where previously there had only been space for the school representative’s opinion. This kind of work is an example of what I have called ‘critical bureaucracy’, and it makes the field of authoritarian power a contested space.

In the designing of the Illuminate model, I wanted to challenge the inexorable nature of Foucault’s (1977) conception of the internalisation of authoritarian hegemonic power. This required the development of opportunities to promote in-depth collaborative and critical thinking across the children’s services workforce, and of practices of small islands of local and specific critical pedagogy and critical bureaucracy. This work requires researchers, frontline workers and professionals to ‘pay attention’ (Back 2007) to the ways in which the development and delivery of ‘policy’, infused with institutional prejudice, might be causing inequitable, socially unjust effects. The challenge is to provide opportunities for students and parents to use the information gained from ‘studying up’ (Nader 1972) in this way and to develop the skills necessary to pay attention on their own behalf.

In the investigation of a model for student ‘voice’ influenced by Foucault’s (1977) understanding of hegemonic power and Freire’s (1970) approach to emancipatory education, then, is the contribution that this research might be able to make to a more reflective, responsive and critical bureaucracy. This article investigates the possibilities for social justice in schooling despite an inequitable hegemonic education system.

### **The Illuminate model**

An Illuminate project lasts about 12 hours, delivered across an academic term,<sup>6</sup> and tends to involve around 12 young people, divided into research teams of three. It can also be condensed into four half-day or two day-long sessions, if necessary, and this flexibility enhances its applicability across a range of settings, and thus enables its penetration into inflexible power structures. Each team is supported by a PGCE student, or in some institutions, a teacher or a university ambassador (university students who undertake mentoring work in schools and colleges). The teams usually meet together for about an hour each week.

### ***Research briefs: who asks the questions?***

Crucially for Illuminate, whilst student researchers may be given a research brief, they should be supported to arrive at their own question. This feature is designed to ensure that the research projects are important or relevant to them, and is designed with Freire’s concern for working *with* rather than *on* students: that ‘(j)ust as the educator may not elaborate a program to present *to* the people, neither may the investigator elaborate “itineraries” for

researching the thematic universe, starting from points which *he* has predetermined' (1970, 89, original emphasis). It could be said that the research briefs are 'predetermined' starting points. Freire (1970) also had a predetermined starting point: to develop an emancipatory pedagogy. What was important for him was the method for drawing out the detail *with* students. With the imperative to borrow the technologies of power identified by Foucault (1975) in the design of Illuminate (and thus to ask head teachers to identify an area requiring 'impact'), it became necessary to balance these points of tension.

Once the research brief has been obtained from school or FE college management staff, and the questions have been established by the students, during the first half of the project, the student researchers are trained in a variety of research methods and skills. They can choose which of these will best fit their investigations. The choice of methods includes interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions, observations, journaling, and visual methods such as film and photography. Research skills learned include note-taking, making a focused observation, positioning and bias, asking open and developing interview questions, and the triangulation of data.

As explained above, the Illuminate model is developed within a conceptual framework involving Foucault's (1975) approach to the technologies of power. In his work Foucault (1975) identifies the internalisation of authoritarian control amongst subjects who know that they may or may not be under surveillance at any time. The research methods training is in some sense a way to make available to the subjects of institutional power – here, young people in schools and colleges – the tools of surveillance. Education institutions are now subject to a 'tyranny of transparency' (Strathern 2000), and as such surveillance and inspection have become embedded methods for the improvement and inspection of schools and colleges. It might be contested that the Illuminate model therefore only enhances the internalisation of surveillance and carries deeper the capillaries of power into the hands and minds of school and FE college students themselves. But the key difference here is that in facilitating a meaningful collaboration with students, Illuminate attempts to deliver what Freire defines as '(a)uthentic education ... not carried on by "A" for "B" or by "A" about "B" but rather by "A" with "B", mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties giving rise to views or opinions about it' (1970, 74, original emphasis). Decisions about school or FE college governance affect teachers and students, and both groups become interested in hearing each others' opinions.

In addition to training on research methods, student researchers are also trained in the coding and analysis of data – how to evidence the 'views' and 'opinions' of students and teachers identified as important by Freire (1970, 74). They are supported in the implementation of research ethics on the basis of the guidelines issued by the British Educational Research

Association Code of Practice. By the end of the first half of the project, student researchers will have developed their question and sub-questions, and made a weekly research plan.

Once research questions and plans have been established, and research methods have been learned and practised, during the second half of the project, the teams meet weekly for a dialogical (Freire 1970) research supervision session. In line with Hart's (1992) model, described above, the helpers act to brainstorm ideas; support access to materials, equipment, interviewees, and classrooms; and check on researchers' progress through their research plans. In the last two or three sessions, research teams gather their data together, code it and arrange it into a presentation format. This might be a film, PowerPoint, article, or notes. They present their research to the Research Supervisor (often myself), who writes up the findings into a research report with an Executive Summary, suitable for dissemination at senior management team or governors' meetings. The writing of an Executive Summary is itself a piece of critical bureaucracy: having 'studied up' (Nader 1972), I consciously made the decision to present findings to governors and head teachers in an accessible, time-saving format congruent with the style inherent in the technologies of power (Foucault 1975). The findings ideally become the basis of a set of continued professional development sessions for teachers in the school or FE college; or of a set of thoughtful systemic changes. The process is supported by a full set of teachers' notes and forms to guide the student teams through what they need to do, including for informed consent, taking observation and interview notes, arriving at a research question, and developing a research plan.

### ***Critical thinking to challenge stereotypes***

The Illuminate framework is designed to support the development of a critical and reflective thinking orientation by student researchers. As Freire (1970, 69) explains, 'To exist humanly is to *name* the world, to change it'. Learning about research methods helps students to gather evidence to facilitate the naming of their world and their participation in meaningful dialogue about it. Further, the research skills learned are the kinds of transferable skills which could potentially enhance other areas of students' lives, such as academic work or job seeking.

I will next describe three Illuminate projects. These projects were developed in very different sets of circumstances. At Tweed Academy, for example, the Principal gave the research brief and hand-picked high-achieving students, whereas at Brooke School, the head teacher was not involved with the project, and the assistant head teacher involved requested that the brief be developed by the students themselves. At Lewisham College, the brief was developed when widening participation university staff<sup>7</sup> approached the FE college's art department after looking at data which pointed to a narrowing range of

students from different social classes on prestigious Fine Art degree programmes. As such, the three projects cannot be compared as like with like. However, the circumstances of each of the projects test the Freirian and Foucauldian conceptual bases for the model in interesting ways.

### **Tweed Academy**

#### ***An Illuminate project under close control of an academy principal: 'The flexible use of time'***

The 'Flexible use of time' project was undertaken at Tweed Academy.<sup>8</sup> Located in a disadvantaged urban area, with very high rates of unemployment and crime, this school was improving under new leadership. The brief was very much directed by the Principal, who wanted to find out about the flexible use of time in the curriculum. It was difficult to persuade her to refrain from establishing the research questions themselves. I had to explain in detail about the need to draw in students' engagement and their valuable insight through their participation in the research design. The Principal attended most of the sessions and ensured that hand-picked high-achieving students (aged 14–17) were taken out of their regular lessons to attend the project. The Principal chose these students mainly because as a group they had already been rigorously trained to work on another project designed to establish a set of values and principles in order to guide the federation of academies of which her school was a part.

The Principal also provided three of what she felt were her best teachers as the supporting adults. The teams were supported by university ambassadors, including a post-doctoral sociology student, who I felt might be able to help with research methods, and a youth work student. Taking the brief on 'the flexible use of time', the student researchers developed the following investigations.

#### *1. Does metacognition require longer lessons?*

Group A wanted to find out about how much time was needed in a lesson if students were to benefit from thinking metacognitively about their work. 'Metacognition' was a word and a concept they were familiar with from 'Learning to Learn', a set of activities conducted in their tutor groups, known as 'Coaching Time'. At Tweed Academy, this involved being aware of personal learning styles, self-assessment of written work, and being able to explain how an answer had been arrived at. To investigate their question, the team used personal learning diaries, and recorded the opportunities for metacognitive work during lessons across a variety of subjects in Years 10 and 11 (for ages 14–17) over three weeks.

Coaching Time, held once each day for 20 minutes, in particular, was found to be too short to implement metacognitive learning. Guided (explicit)

metacognition, such as the careful use of questioning or discussion in an English class, was found to need careful planning regardless of the length of the lesson. However, discussion time, during which much metacognitive learning occurred, was found to require a longer lesson, or at least flexibility within the lesson to engage in a lively discussion. Self-guided metacognitive work, where students were given the opportunity to reflect quietly on their own learning strategies, appeared to definitively require longer lessons. In other words, in order to reflect metacognitively and in an effective way, students needed adequate time to think.

2. *If teachers commit to differentiate learning styles to match all learners, do lessons need to be longer?*

The student researchers who developed this question gave teachers ‘Differentiation Diaries’ to complete and carried out interviews and observations. The team found that longer lessons gave teachers more opportunities to switch between giving attention to the group and to individuals. More was achieved in a longer lesson, both in practical subjects and in terms of teaching theoretical content. Because some students found it difficult to focus throughout a longer lesson, they required careful planning into sections in order to offer students a variety of learning strategies and experiences within the lesson.

*Outcomes*

The student researchers at Tweed Academy benefited from the presence of the university ambassadors,<sup>9</sup> particularly the youth work student. Watching the groups interacting, it became clear that the student researchers working with the youth work student were more discursive and animated. This piece of work suggested that for an Illuminate project, a youth worker’s ability to communicate successfully with young people appeared to be a more effective strategy for engaging all student participants than the in-depth knowledge about research methods which the sociology ambassador brought to the project. It also raised a question about whether the student researchers needed the sort of in-depth input on research methods which a postgraduate sociology student could bring. Subsequent projects have been planned to include supporting adults who are more comfortable with being ‘partners of the students in their relations with them’ (Freire 1970, 56). In fact, in considering that a postgraduate sociology student’s knowledge of research methodologies might be useful, I had fallen back on the ‘banking’ education paradigm, where ‘the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing’ (Freire 1970, 54).

The young people working on the Tweed Academy project produced questions which were profound and complex. In line with Hart’s (1992)

theory of participation, which places work which is young people-led with adult support as the most desirable situation, it is apparent that the close involvement of a range of dedicated staff members by direction of the Principal helped to maintain a high level of focus on the project. With this level of support, they used a wide range of methods to produce a large amount of data in comparison with Brooke School (see below).

As a result of the 'Flexible Use of Time' project, the Tweed Academy timetable was changed. This does raise a question about whether the Principal began with an intention to change the timetable, planning to do so whether the Illuminate research suggested this was a good idea or not. However, it is clear from the conclusions reached by the students that the quality of the way in which the time was used was more important than whether lessons were longer or not. Given this, it matters not whether the timetable was changed – what mattered was the consideration to be given in future to the detail of the quality of teacher preparation for the new timetable. In any case, there were other, albeit unintended effects. All three of the teachers involved in this project remarked to me that they had learned about what students could achieve if they were given the opportunity to self-direct. As a result of this the Principal decided to involve 'improving' teachers in the next Illuminate project to test its ability to help them move from 'satisfactory' to 'good'.<sup>10</sup> This could be considered to be a more palatable alternative to the staged series of lesson observations and performance development reviews which tend to be the more performative norm for teacher improvement exercises. Asking teachers to collaborate on an Illuminate project and then seeing if the experience supports an improvement in their teaching might be a more holistic, experiential way to address teacher development, and could be considered as a focus for future research.

## **Brooke School**

### *An Illuminate project with a pupil-led brief: 'Safety in our lives'*

The second project was undertaken in Brooke School, a well-established comprehensive in a disadvantaged urban area close to Tweed Academy. At Brooke, I worked with an assistant head teacher who was particularly dedicated to enhancing the PGCE placement experience for school and university students, and who felt that Illuminate represented an opportunity for this.

In this project, the adult helpers were PGCE students and university ambassadors. The students were aged 13–14, and were chosen from a list of those who were identified for 'Aim Higher' activities (a country-wide government project designed to support young people who would not traditionally have considered applying to university to do so).<sup>11</sup> In the interests of inclusive practice, I had asked the assistant head teacher to ensure that some

of the students chosen were those who were also identified as at risk of not succeeding in their studies due to attendance and behaviour.

The assistant head teacher involved did not want to direct the focus of students' research, so we needed to develop a brief in a different way. Because it had been designed to draw in senior management team (SMT) interest through SMT-generated research briefs, this generated a key test of the theoretical underpinning of the model (see analysis below). I began with a discussion about issues of 'world importance', and then asked the students to formulate questions about the issues they had identified in relation to their school. All teams arrived at questions, two of which are described below, connected with aspects of safety in their daily lives.

*1. Do students' opinions of each other depend on the colour of people's skin? How does this compare with the larger community?*

This team looked at issues related to perceptions of ethnicity. They began with some secondary research, recording statistics about the make-up of the population in England in terms of recorded ethnicity, and then investigating the proportions of 'black', 'white', 'Asian', 'Chinese or other', and 'mixed race'<sup>12</sup> Premier League football<sup>13</sup> players. Using this contextual information to devise a series of questions, the team then surveyed 19 Brooke School students using a questionnaire, and analysed the answers to detect whether there was evidence of stereotyping related to perceived ethnicity.

Four of the 19 surveys showed some evidence of racist assumptions or ethnicity-based stereotyping. For example, there was a disparity in perceptions about football players' ability depending on perceived ethnicity. One ('black') respondent said, 'I think the blacks, whites, South American and European are the best at football. I think the Asians are worst at football'. There was evidence of positive and negative stereotyping on the basis of ethnicity, including in terms of individuals' reflections on their own perceived ethnicity. One ('white European') respondent's view was: 'I think white people can be racist sometimes and they think they're the best but they're not'. Another respondent (recorded as 'black') said that 'Asians are cool, smart, talented and rich'.

Views on football ability did follow to some extent the trend in Premier League football for relatively high proportions of 'black' and 'mixed race' footballers and lower proportions of 'Asian' footballers compared to the general population. For example, the team found that figures for the general population show 2.6% 'black' or 'mixed race' people and 24.1% in football, whereas in the general England population 'South Asian' and 'Chinese' people make up 4.8%, with 1.1% of Premier League football players falling within those categories.

A key finding here was that students' perceptions of each other were affected by their perceptions of ethnicity, and that these may have been influenced by the perceived ethnicities of sportspeople participating in public life.

## 2. *What do teachers at Brooke School do to target bullying in class?*

This team handed out questionnaires to several of their classmates. They found that teachers did ‘try hard’, but did not control bullying effectively. Twenty per cent of the cases discussed involved racism. Whilst most pupils knew how to get help, they were reluctant to involve teachers because they ‘wouldn’t understand’ or because it could result in further bullying due to ‘telling tales’.

### *Outcomes*

The issues raised by the students at Brooke School emerged from their own brief, and were not mandated as important areas for research by the head teacher. To some extent the findings revealed areas of weakness in the school’s work on racist bullying. Because of the lack of mandate coupled with this negative feedback, systemic change was unlikely to be taken up by the school’s management, and in fact no material change was made on the basis of the students’ findings.

However, training for teachers about using the Illuminate method followed the end of the project. Two of the PGCE students involved in the project developed schemes of learning for their own classes based on the findings of the Illuminate project, whilst another two undertook to describe the Illuminate project within their Masters-level assignment for the professional studies part of their PGCE programme. Whilst the findings did not therefore directly affect the student researchers’ current school governance, scope was opened up for more student voice work in the school, and four future teachers responded formatively to the project in their own developing practice.

## **Lewisham College**

### ***An Illuminate project with a brief partially imposed by university researchers: ‘Widening participation in the creative arts: choosing, applying for, and getting on to an art degree’***

The primary goal of this project was to conduct research into the barriers experienced by FE college students in terms of choosing, applying, and getting on to a prestigious art degree at university. The brief was brought by staff from the nearby university (at which I teach) but negotiated and agreed with the management team in the Lewisham College Art Department. The qualitative research gathered during this project also informed the development of a wider piece of ongoing research drawing on the experiences of students and tutors in a number of FE colleges across the city.

At Lewisham College, the Illuminate student researchers were six young Art and Design students. Each team was supported by a university ambassador from the university Art Department.

The research project was carried out during HE (Higher Education) Week at Lewisham College. As part of the programme of activities, the students visited workshops in university Art and Design Departments. During this time, qualitative participant-observational research and interviews were carried out with the Illuminate Student Researchers' peers. Based on a broad brief provided by the Widening Participation Research Group, research questions emerged from the Student Researchers themselves. Two of these are detailed below.

*1. What are the advantages and disadvantages, and worries, about going to university? And what are our educators going to do about it?*

Team A conducted a survey, interviewing Lewisham College students on their course.

Students wanted more practical, organised advice and information about the application process; thoughts on planning for finance; which universities to look at; and help passing the course.

From universities, most of the Lewisham College students interviewed wanted 'good lecturers', 'a good environment', and a wide variety of high-standard facilities. Some comments were concerned with the prospectus. Students asked for these to include an in-depth explanation with specific, accurate, clear and honest details about what a course entails and offers, with pictures of the facilities. They wanted a prospectus which provided enough details to understand whether the university provided 'the right course for you'. They did not like images of 'happy people sitting on the grass on a sunny day', feeling that this did not provide enough information about what was available to make an informed decision. Overwhelmingly, students wanted an honest and detailed representation of the course in open days and in course literature.

*2. Am I good enough? How will I know?*

Research Team B took photographs during HE Week, and interviewed both Lewisham College and university students.

When asked about their skill levels and areas for improvement, Lewisham College students focused on drawing or painting skills and 'technique'. University students were more concerned with knowledge and critical analysis. For example, one said that 'The best way for me is improving through listening to art talks, discussions, seeing exhibitions'. Another said that 'I think being open for experimentation in my art made me good enough to get into this university'; and that 'having an interest that you explore with your work' was important.

### *General conclusions*

Four themes emerged from this project as areas of importance. These were skills and confidence for critical analysis; fees and finance; time to develop a portfolio; and earlier, accurate information about courses and how to apply for them.

### *Outcomes*

The four themes identified above became the core of further ongoing research in several FE colleges across the city. The Widening Participation team funded a postdoctoral researcher to undertake this wider survey and focus group work, and the university Art Department collaborated with Lewisham College on activities designed to ameliorate some of the identified disadvantages around portfolios, critical analysis and interviews. As a result, four students – three from Lewisham College and another from an FE college close by and involved in the wider focus group work – applied and were awarded a place on the prestigious and highly oversubscribed university art degree.

### **Analysis**

#### ***Illuminate: ‘studying up’; challenging institutional prejudice with a multiplicity of voices***

Two of the Illuminate projects described above constitute an effort in ‘studying up’ (Nader 1972). So at Tweed Academy, investigating the mechanics of their educational institution, students were able to look at some of the more common pedagogical tools, such as differentiation and project-based learning – and offer ideas on how each of these approaches felt to the young people in the classroom. At Lewisham College, students looked at how university admissions processes functioned, interviewing both university and college students. Conversely, the Brooke School project opened up the field of questioning mainly to school students. Tentatively, it may be suggested that following Hart’s (1992) ‘Ladder of participation’ model – where the most advanced form of ‘youth voice’ requires that decisions and activities are young people-initiated, but shared with adults (as at Tweed Academy) – is a better way to initiate a studying-up activity. Importantly, however, Nader (1972) did not advocate rejecting research methodologies focused on ‘service-user opinion’ (as at Brooke School) in favour of ‘studying up’ on powerful institutions, but suggested that both (as at Lewisham College) were necessary.

Following Foucault’s (1975) ideas about governmentality, I have explained above that to challenge a form of governance through prejudice and normativity requires a multiplicity of voices telling their own stories. In

all three projects, students were able to give their opinions on issues of material importance.

### ***Critical bureaucracy***

In terms of ‘critical bureaucracy’ – related in approach to Freire’s (1970) ‘critical pedagogy’ – the Tweed Academy Illuminate project appealed to senior management whilst crucially maintaining students’ ability to ask the actual research questions for themselves. This ‘critical bureaucracy’ approach supplements and could potentially replace elements of more formal, staff-led programme-monitoring activities. At Tweed Academy, the senior management team’s involvement in designing the brief ensured that they were invested in the findings, and therefore more likely to take them seriously: one of the outcomes was the use of Illuminate as an alternative to formulaic and performative performance and development review (PDR) processes in developing teachers.

Lewisham College staff collaborated on developing a brief with university researchers and agreed to pass it on to students to develop questions. The college staff welcomed the approach, but were used to finding their students unable to get an interview at prestigious university art courses and so were unsure about whether material outcomes would result.

In contrast, the Brooke School project did not offer the students a research brief mandated by the management team. Whilst they were able to find out some important information around issues such as racist bullying, their findings were not considered with regard to school and programme development and governance activities. However, the Tweed Academy student researchers could be understood to have merely mandated the Principal’s existing plans without having the detail of their findings considered. On the other hand, the Brooke students were able to ask each other the kinds of questions that, due to the constraints of validated discourses, I, as a white, adult researcher, might not have been able to ask. For example, Brooke School students were through the Illuminate project able to have a discussion about whether students thought about each other in terms based on ‘the colour of their skin’. In terms of Hart’s (1992) analysis of ‘youth participation’, above, which highly rates adult collaborative support, the fact that the Brooke School research questions emerged solely from the young people themselves without a brief meant that the outcome pointed to less of a material change in comparison with the Tweed Academy project. But from a Freirian (1970) point of view, young people at Brooke School researched and talked through issues around racist bullying and stereotyping which were of real and immediate importance to them. The Lewisham College Illuminate project appears to have caught the interest of senior management; and to have benefited from student voice backed up by staff action and a dialogic, collaborative valuing of student voice. The attempt to combine the

theories of Foucault (1977), Hart (1992) and Freire (1970) in the delivery of an Illuminate project could therefore be said to have been achieved at Lewisham College.

### *Measures of success*

Because the Lewisham College project drew on student voice and resulted in substantial material changes which succeeded in changing the social-class balance on a prestigious university art degree, it could be said to be successful in terms of the stated Illuminate goals of ‘studying up’ (Nader 1972) and drawing on student voice to inform material change for social justice. In terms of the other two projects, it could be said that the Tweed Academy project was notable in its breadth of methods and data. This may have been partially due to the high level of staffing and senior management team mandate as well as the high-achieving nature of the pupils selected. But perhaps the Brooke School project was more effective as an exercise in Freirian (1970) dialogue. None of the three projects can be said to contribute to an academic discourse (as it is currently understood) on the subjects of their investigations – timetabling, youth safety, and widening participation – as Illuminate does not include literature reviews and theoretical analysis. But maybe the goals of Illuminate should be restated here.

Firstly, in terms of exploring the efficacy of ‘youth voice’, this research has on a meta-level (that is, from my point of view as a post-modern pupil voice and educational governance researcher) revealed something about what makes a genuine representation of young people’s views difficult. Attempting to draw Freire (1970) and Foucault (1975) together has revealed the tension inherent in a post-modern reading of emancipatory pedagogy. The insidious nature of power identified by Foucault (1975) is difficult to shake even where a pedagogue is trying hard to operate with ‘*conscientização*’ (Freire 1970, 85).<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, the Brooke School project drew in a whole cohort of 10 PGCE students. Alongside the young people, they attended the research methods and supervision sessions every week for 12 weeks, and were able to experience and practise a form of dialogic pedagogy which foregrounded independent, learner-led approaches. Their resultant lesson plans and their professional studies research projects evidenced the impact this work had on them. The Illuminate project could be said here to have delivered an experience of Freirian dialogic pedagogy to a range of PGCE students.

Finally, Illuminate was designed to facilitate the telling of stories – the revealing of a multiplicity of experiences as an antidote to institutional prejudice based in stereotyping. The students who participated in the projects engaged in a research skills and supervision programme in collaboration with a university, and as a result, details of their many experiences are evidenced here in this paper.

The Tweed Academy and Brooke School projects each evidence elements of the Illuminate approach which really needed to be implemented and tested within one project. The Lewisham College project arguably demonstrates the potential for Illuminate where each element is present. Approaches which may be called ‘critical bureaucracy’ involve making multiple incremental decisions in the delivery of policy, derived, not cynically, but pragmatically, from tactics unearthed as a result of ‘studying up’ (Nader 1972) on the techniques and ‘mobilising metaphors’ (Shore and Wright 1997, 4) of those in power. As a model for critical bureaucracy, Illuminate projects present some interesting possibilities. Their criticality is embedded within the requirement that students must develop their own research questions. Their effectiveness in an institutionally prejudiced bureaucracy is derived from the borrowed power procured through means and language motivating to senior managers. The inclusion of an executive summary in a research report; the way a research brief is given to students to elicit their own questions; the ‘branding’ of the approach as ‘Illuminate’; and the conscious use of the word ‘impact’ in inviting head teachers to participate are all the actions of a critical bureaucrat.

## Notes

1. ‘Permanent exclusion’ in England is the term for ‘expulsion’.
2. ‘Critical bureaucracy’ is discussed in more detail below in relation to Freire (1996) and ‘critical pedagogy’.
3. An FE college offers education to students beyond the compulsory schooling age of 16 in England and Wales. FE colleges often deliver a mixture of vocational and academic programmes to young people and mature students.
4. Post-graduate Certificate in Education, providing students with a qualification enabling them to take up positions as Newly Qualified Teachers in schools.
5. The European Economic and Social Research Council.
6. In England and Wales, there are three school terms in a year: September to December; January to April; and April to July.
7. Widening participation work in this context attempts to include a wider range of students in terms of class, ethnicity and gender in further and higher education.
8. This and all other names are pseudonyms for the sake of confidentiality, with the exception of Lewisham College, where participants were comfortable with the name being used.
9. University students employed from the range of disciplines across the college.
10. Here she was referring to an Ofsted rating scale for teachers.
11. At the time of writing, funding for Aim Higher has just been cut by the recently established Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government.
12. ‘Dual heritage’. A student researcher who identified as ‘Black African British’ identified his own terms for ethnic descriptions around the language he and his peers used.
13. The senior English soccer league.
14. Critical consciousness.

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