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The rhetoric of participation: Student voice initiatives in a
College of Further Education

A case study

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Abstract

The growth of the participation agenda is multifaceted and inter-disciplinary stretching across a range of institutions within the public sector. Within the field of education the rise of the student-led discourse has grown through a range of academic institutions from primary education to undergraduate study. The purpose of this research is to consider how student voice practice operates within a college of Further Education, which is predominantly, although not exclusively, populated by 16 – 18 year olds.

The significance of participation is central to international and national policy across a range of organisations including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and those introduced by successive British Governments, such as the UK Every Child Matters guidelines which enshrine in law the rights of the child to express their views and be heard. The issue of student participation should therefore be at the forefront of Further Education Colleges' agenda. Research into Further Education policy and practice has historically been difficult due to the lack of parity that the sector has for scholarly activity, in comparison to other areas of the UK's education system, for example Higher Education.

There has been a development over the last fifteen years of a changing culture of participation, inclusive learning and student-centred learning within Further Education Colleges in the United Kingdom (UK). As part of this change, within Further Education Colleges, student voice initiatives have become wide ranging and can manifest themselves in many ways, for example: surveys, councils, governors, representative groups, committees, alongside well established student bodies, such as the National Union of Students. This research project explores how 'voice' is discursively framed, operationalised and the extent to which it is inclusive and how the various initiatives meet the needs of the students. The research will examine this through gauging the impact of student voice initiatives, predominately from a student's perspective, and the ways in which students are listened to in a Further Education College in Central England.

This research project has used a single case study approach involving two groups of media students, along with student enrichment staff who work within the college to understand how student voice

practice is operationalised at this Further Education College. The case study drew upon traditional research methods, such as interviews and focus groups to better understand how the discourse of 'voice' works at the college, but also an art based method called auto-driven photo elicitation. To understand the inclusivity of the student voice practice a mixed method research design sought to draw out an understanding of the students' feelings and opinions about the college where they studied. The students were given the opportunity to share how these initiatives met their needs through the use of auto-driven photo elicitation, whereby students take images of their own choosing, which allowed for possibilities of a richer data set than using solely more traditional means, such as interviews or focus groups with students.

This research project will investigate notions of social capital, learner agency and empowerment which are all affected by possible institutionalised domination which could impinge on the ability of the students to 'find their voice' and enact real change. The objectives of this research project will be to note if governance and hierarchal structures can ever allow a purposeful student voice to be heard, and listened to, in any meaningful sense.

The research project is underpinned by reviewing the vast body of work already existing around the changing culture of participation and the student voice, in its differing forms, and considers whether or not it is making any quantifiable difference to young people, and ultimately whether the participatory nature of contemporary education has any long term function.

This research project has found that there needs to be a move from student consultation to an active culture of engagement. The students that took part in this research highlighted the need for supportive staff who showed that they cared about the students' opinions and the students wishes which were that they should be treated like the young adults they perceived themselves to be. The outcomes of this research also demonstrated that students value a 'feedback loop' where they are told what is happening after they have spoken and that college staff take both the positive and negative feedback seriously. Furthermore, if students are to be asked for their opinions and views then colleges need to be able to respond to those requests, student voice initiatives should not just be about pastoral concerns. Students have invaluable views on their own education and should be treated as experts in their own lives.

The recommendations based on the findings of this research project argue that there is value in using photo-elicitation as a research method with Further Education students, and that this method can elicit a greater understanding than traditional research methods alone. Moreover, Further Education Colleges should review the purpose of some of the long standing student voice initiatives currently used as many of the plethora of activity has been happening for over a decade. Also that consideration should be given to conducting whole class student voice research, rather than focusing on the more articulate students who more readily want to contribute. Lastly, that research in Further Education should be explored in more depth as it is a diverse and wide ranging sector which is underrepresented in terms of scholarly activity.

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Chapter one: Introduction

1.1 Research subject and rationale

The central theme of this research, and thesis, is student voice in Further Education (FE) within the UK. Listening to what young people think about their education, and the underlying principles of democracy and participation within education institutions, has become a major part of many public services. This includes health, children and young people in care and disability groups. The Labour Government (1997-2010) put forward a series of policies which encouraged institutions to involve the students in schools, colleges and universities across the country. This included Learning to Listen: *Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People* (2001); Working together: *Giving children and young people a say* (2003); Every Child Matters (2003); Further Education: *Raising skills, improving life chances* (2006); The Children's Plan: *Building brighter futures* (2007) and Working Together: *listening to the voices of children and young people* (2008). These policies were supported by laws such as The Children Act (2004), Education Act (2005) and Education and Inspections Act (2006).

Student voice initiatives, at their best, can empower the students 'to take control and explore alternative pathways of learning' (Mercer, 2015: 10), both on an individual basis, but also as part of a larger group. Student voice initiatives can give students the opportunity to let teachers and senior staff, within Further Education Colleges (FECs), have a clearer idea about what it is like to study at the institution, a perspective that can be invaluable in helping make things better for the student population.

Student voice initiatives, with their roots in democratic principles, can help young people to learn how contemporary democratic systems can work and function (Morrison, 2008). They can give young people the opportunity to build a range of skills such as self-confidence, debating, public speaking, listening to others and sharing ideas and concepts, which can 'actively shape their education as citizens' (Bahou, 2011: 3).

The central argument of this thesis is that there has been over 15 years of student voice practice in FECs, but with this expansion in practice has there any meaningful change to the experience of the young people who study at these institutions? The variety of student voice initiatives within FECs means that there are mechanisms to 'give' voice to the students who study there, but 'giving'

opportunities for students to have a voice is not necessarily the same as listening, and responding, to what the students have said. FE is at a point in its history where it is suffering from large cuts to its spending from central Government (Belfield, et al, 2018). The sector is undergoing yet another period of significant change. However, despite the funding issues student voice practices are still a central part of FECs.

The FE sector can be transformational in different ways. For example it can have a positive impact on the individual student, but also the wider community, and society as a whole, this makes the sector unique and distinctive (Duckworth & Smith, 2017). The FE sector serves a multitude of different 'types' of students, at differing points in their lives, and can provide 'a stream of social capital which enriches learners' personal lives, enabling the formation of supportive bonds with other learners' (7).

1.2 Chapter outline

The first chapter will demonstrate how the underlying policies surrounding student voice in FE have developed over the last 15 years. This will be informed by the argument that Incorporation of FECs in the early 1990's has seen a rise of neo-liberalism within the sector and turned colleges into businesses and the students into customers. It will show how these policies informed the practices that occurred, and how this is now reflected in what is happening in colleges today. The practice of student voice initiatives in FECs will be explored with highlighted examples of best practice within the sector.

Chapter Two will focus on the literature review that underlies the term 'student voice.' It will make links between historical practices in democratic education and how these practices can relate to contemporary initiatives. As has been highlighted, the Labour Government at the turn of the last century pushed forward the notion of participation and the rights of students to have opportunities to say what they feel about the institutions they study in. This period in the early part of 2000's has been described by Rudduck (2006: 133) as having a 'zeitgeist commitment to student voice', whereby student voice was at the forefront of the agenda in schools and colleges. Fielding (2004) described this era as the 'new wave'. As the practice of listening to students gathered pace and developed, alongside the need to satisfy inspectorate regimes such as Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), the fear that students were being asked to participate for less altruistic reasons occurred. Czerniawski et al (2009) echo the concerns of many

educational professionals who began to feel that the good intentions of listening to students and incorporating their views in any meaningful sense of true participation was just 'lip service'. There was a feeling that 'notions of tokenism' became evident within student voice practice, and that education institutions were meeting managerial aims, which continue to dilute the desires of many to genuinely listen to the students' voice.

The links in-between power relations and student voice will also form part of the focus for this chapter. We shall see that large institutions, such as colleges, are often hierarchical structures where meaningful discourse between students and those who are in power is problematic. This research project will draw upon the work of Bourdieu, and his concepts related to social capital; linguistic capital, pedagogical authority and habitus, in order to further explore how power relations work in FECs.

The final part of this chapter will argue that the concept of students' interests and desires to have a voice within their colleges is not as straightforward as it might appear. The notion that learner agency and social capital can improve students' life chances will be discussed. The extent to which offering students the opportunities to be involved will be explored, alongside the methods of involvement and the adult-led nature of many of the initiatives, which appear to be a barrier to students having any meaningful voice.

This thesis is supported by a research project which was undertaken at a large FEC in Central England. The third chapter will demonstrate the naturalistic enquiry that was undertaken and the constructivist theoretical framework which underpinned the design of the methodology.

The chapter will then explain the reasoning as to the selected methodology, which is a case study. Case studies within educational research are a key way of being able to highlight the practice of one institution and explore the subject, forming a comprehensive data collection in a real-life situation. The research project's foundation is based on an anti-positivist stance; it is borne out of a desire to draw out the thoughts, opinions, and viewpoints of students to gain a 'fragment' of understanding. A single case study, such as this research project, is described by Yin (2009) as 'typical', where the objective of the research is to 'capture circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation.' My methodology used semi-structured interviews, focus groups and an arts-based method

called auto-driven photo elicitation. The selection of auto-driven photo elicitation as a research method underlies the nature of this research project, which is to listen to the students' views, to give them an opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions. In total 57 students took part in the research project, the participants were between 16-20 years old; there were 22 females and 35 males.

Chapter Four will present the research findings and discussion of the data. There will be a focus on participants' self-generated meanings. The chapter will demonstrate how the students' views about student voice practice is shown not only in what they say, but also in the accompanying images and captions that they created. The focus will be on the words of the students and their interpretation of the images they took. To support the use of auto-driven photo elicitation in other research projects that may occur in the future, a conceptual framework has been used to also offer an insight and interpretation of the students' images, captions and words drawing on Bourdieu's notions of social capital, linguistic capital, pedagogical authority and habitus. This is not to impose 'absolute' meanings of the images the students took, but to offer a framework for analysis. This research project has also sought to develop the use of creative methodologies which are often 'marginalised in the pages of articles and in conference papers' (McDougall & Rega, 2019). As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 6) state the representation of image making of objects or entities 'is a complex one, arising out of cultural, social and psychological history of the sign maker, and focused by the specific context in which the sign maker produces the sign.'

Photographs were taken by the participants during the research phase. The analysis of the auditory data, will seek to support the themes and linkage between the 'voices' (recorded with audio) and the images the students took. Some participants took part in all of the research activities, others only in some. Some spoke very little, but used their images to convey how they were feeling. These differing stances and sometimes 'disjointed' thinking underlines the very nature of student voice, and empowering young people, their views and their reactions change and may at times appear to contradict each other at different points of the research project.

The final chapter will seek to offer a framework for change alongside the implementation of practical ways in which other FECs may involve their students in learning in an effective manner. Further to

this will be an outline of how the research has contributed to knowledge in the field, and built on existing structures within student voice work in the UK. Finally, it will summarise some of the hopes for the future within the FE sector and the next steps that are proposed for further, effective student voice practice.

1.3 Policy of 'student voice' in Further Education

The FE sector in the UK has had a long and changeable history. Its origins in the nineteenth century Mechanics Institutes, which led to the establishment of technical colleges later in the century, 'created divisions between vocational and academic studies that bedevil the system to this day' (Hyland and Merrill; 2003: 7)

Pratt (2000) describes further changes in the sector as the educational reforms between 1902 and 1944 led to a large growth in people participating in FE, from under 600,000 in 1910/11 to over 1.2 million in 1937/38. Much of this growth is attributable to the national system of examinations, the National Certificate Scheme.

The 1944 Education Act made it a legal duty for the Local Education Authority (LEA) to provide further education to the citizens in its areas. From the post war period until the 1990's when Incorporation made FECs independent of Local Authority control there were several attempts made by successive Governments to address vocational education, including 'advanced further education' in the form of polytechnics, and opportunities for 'second chances' for young people and adults to retake qualifications they had previously failed, such as General Certificate of Education (GCE) O Levels, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Advanced Level (A Levels). Bukodi (2017: 370) describes the sector:

Politicians and policy-makers also tend to believe that further education can have compensatory effects. In other words, further education can provide opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, in terms of social origin, initial education or employment, to upgrade their qualifications and can, in turn, contribute to increasing social mobility across the life-course and across generations.

Randle and Brady (1999) discuss the notion of the sector being a 'Cinderella' service; a service which has been largely ignored, but in which large swathes of the population have either studied at one of the institutions or worked within a college. The Incorporation of FECs in the 1990s ushered in a new

era of neo-liberalism into the sector, one in which the market economy and the idea of choice and competition would mean a better 'service' for the individuals who studied at these institutions.

Lucas and Crowther (2016) describe how neo-liberalism within education was embraced firstly by the Conservative Party in the 1980's and then by Tony Blair's Labour Government. Lucas (2004) cited in Lucas and Crowther (2016) states how 'Incorporation encouraged competition for students between Further Education Colleges themselves and other providers.' Students became 'customers' and colleges 'business-led', and teaching staff became de-skilled as the requirement to be a teacher trained in FE was removed, meaning that teachers did not have to have a formal teaching qualification.

McMahon and Portelli (2012: 2) discuss how neo-liberalism has its roots within liberalism, which arose because of 'a lack of workers' rights, racism, lack of women's rights, and a lack of children's rights, among others'. But the neo-liberal discourse, which engulfs FECs across the UK, is a concern when it comes to student voice practices. Fielding (2012:12) argues that:

Neoliberal, market-oriented notions of democracy offer an inadequate account of human flourishing and, as a consequence, encourage approaches to student voice and other forms of educational engagement that are less fulfilling and less inclusive than their supporters would wish.

Fielding states that in this discourse individuals are encouraged to see themselves as customers, and the organisation, school (or college), sees that it should listen to students to maximise its position in the league tables.

Relationships are important; the voices of students are elicited and acknowledged; community is valued, but all primarily for instrumental purposes within the context of the marketplace. (14)

The Labour Government, in power from 1997 to 2010, created various policies, most notably Every Child Matters (2004), which Cheminais (2006: 2) describes as requiring teachers to become 'facilitators, supporters and promoters of children's personalised learning...empowering and enabling pupils' voice...' The aims of the Every Child Matters agenda gave children and young people a chance to engage in decision-making and support the community and environment, but also to engage in FE, employment or training on leaving school. This agenda was underpinned by the Children Act (2004).

The Labour administration had successive attempts at defining student voice as a principle that should be followed within our schools and colleges by a series of White Papers, legislation and policy reforms which included; *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People* (2001); *Working together: Giving children and young people a say* (2003); *Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chances* (2006); *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures* (2007) and *Working Together: listening to the voices of children and young people* (2008).

These policies were supported by laws such as The Children Act (2004), Education Act (2002/2005) and Education and Inspections Act (2006). In addition to this Her Majesties Inspectorate, Ofsted, was also compelled to make judgments about how effectively young people were being listened to and involved in their education. As Summers (2009) suggests, Ofsted had a renewed focus on talking to students, particularly around Every Child Matters, citizenship and young people making a positive contribution. Ofsted (2014:8) promoted the value of 'listening' to students in FECs, and provided good practice examples on their Government publications website which recommended that institutions and leaders should: 'draw fully on learners' views about the teaching, learning and assessment that they receive to inform self-assessment and improvement actions.' The Department for Education (DfE, 2014: 1) has issued statutory guidance for schools and other educational settings which states that they should be 'considering how best to provide opportunities for pupils to be consulted on matters affecting them or contribute to decision-making in the school.'

Hall (2017) states how these policies were supported by the Foster Report (2005) which ensured that there was also legal obligation for colleges to 'have a Learner Involvement Strategy which needed to be reviewed on an annual basis, in collaboration with students and their representatives' (181). The notion of student voice was supported by a variety of quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation (quangos), such as the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), General Teaching Council for England, National College for School Leadership's (NCSL), Networked Learning Communities initiative and Learning and Skills Council (LSC). There was a variety of related organisations such School Councils UK, English Secondary Students' Association (ESSA) and the National Union of Students (NUS) which supported students in setting up ways in which they could become more involved in having a 'voice' in their institutions.

Against this backdrop of a plethora of policies, organisations and grassroots organisations was the (relative) generous funding of FE which increased 'sharply over the 2000s by more than 5% per year in real terms' (Belfield et al, 2017: 5). This was supported by initiatives such as the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) which helped thousands of socio-economically deprived students receive weekly funding to support their attendance at college.

This level of funding was not to last. As Lucas and Crowther (2016: 590) discuss the Coalition Government of 2010-2015 vowed to cut public expenditure across all sectors and have a 'bonfire of the quangos'. Since 2010 the overall budget reduction for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) will be an estimated 43%. Evans (2016) discusses the 'troubling decline in adult participation in further education as over 800,000 fewer adults were participating in FE, excluding apprenticeships, each year compared to five years ago'. 'Area reviews' of Post-16 provision have been taking place across the country since 2015 as the prospect of further mergers of FECs, into large county-wide 'multi-site colleges' becomes more common. However, the legacy of this growth in listening to students in FECs is still evident. The vast majority of colleges will have a range of systems in place to listen to, or be seen to listen to, the young people that attend these large organisations.

1.4 Practice of student voice initiatives in Further Education Colleges

FECs, similarly to schools and universities, use a range of initiatives to listen to their students. The initiatives which were first shared as good practice in the 'zeitgeist years' of student voice work in the early 21st century are still used today, to a lesser or greater extent.

The Learning and Skills Council (2007) published a handbook titled *Developing a Learner Involvement Strategy* which sought to bring together the types of practice that the FE sector should consider when developing their learner involvement strategy. The mechanisms for engaging students ranged from surveys, focus groups, course representatives, student governors, learner committees, student parliaments, learner forums, student associations or unions, student liaison officers, and student involvement in assessment, quality assurance, pastoral support and continuing professional development.

Pope and Joslin (2011) further explain how this range of strategies was supported by national bodies such as LSIS who were active in promoting learner voice work in FE, whilst also supporting practitioners and developing resources that the sector could use. There are also examples of the celebration of young people and staff involved with learner voice work in the UK through a national awards ceremony which sought to recognise examples of good practice. Formally this was led by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL), then LSIS and latterly by the Learner Voice Practitioner Network (LVP Network).

Walker and Logan (2008) highlight that FE students from across the country were previously encouraged to share their views directly with Government Ministers via the National Learner Panel (NLP). The purpose of this panel was that it would allow FE students to inform Government Ministers of learners' views 'by providing a learner's perspective on policies, proposals and initiatives' (47). However, this panel only lasted from 2006 to 2010 when it was dis-banded.

There are a variety of FE organisations across the country that have been identified as having good initiatives and practices in place that have benefitted their students. Between 2014 and 2015 Ofsted prepared case studies of 'best practice', which they had found in FECs during their inspections. Examples included Chichester College where it was noted that students conducted joint lesson observations with staff; elected a student executive committee; and included students in the college self-assessment processes. Another institution identified as having well established learner voice practices was New College, Pontefract. This college gave students opportunity to provide feedback on all aspects of college life, and their views incorporated into developing the curriculum and the appointments of staff.

Organisations which support student voice initiatives within the FE sector have continued to develop and support student voice practice in the FE sector. One of the most prominent of these is the National Union of Students (NUS). They also continue to champion the sector as a whole, but also encourage students to be actively involved within their institutions. For instance their recent feedback on the 'Area Reviews' of Post-16 provision they stated that:

There is a renewed focus on learner voice in the FE sector, evidenced through closer working between NUS and DfE, ETF support for student governor inductions, specific clauses on learner voice in the AoC Code of Governance and an increase in focus of Ofsted on the views of learners within the inspection regime. This focus now needs to extend into action to develop learner voice in FE locally and

nationally. (NUS- *Executive Summary, Written Evidence to Post-16 Area Reviews Inquiry, 2016*)

The NUS has also highlighted institutions which they perceive as having success in involving students and developing student voice initiatives. These include Greenwich Community College which uses different marketing techniques to involve students which includes not just the 16-19 year old cohort but also 'volunteers from adult and community learning centres' (NUS, *Success Story: Creating a Visible Learner Voice, 2013*). Other institutions that have been highlighted included Bournemouth and Poole College of Further Education Students' Union which has been awarded the 'Good Students' Union' grade by NUS and is the first FEC in the country to achieve this accreditation. The college has a student voice initiative run entirely by students with high numbers of face-to-face trained student reps being a particular highlight.

Consideration needs to be given to the 'drivers' for FECs involving their students in these initiatives. Bragg (2010) states institutions have 'various legal, political, academic, economic and social reasons behind this new interest in accessing and understanding children's perspectives on their own lives, each of which leads to differing frameworks for the approach to consultation. In practice, however, most people's motivations will involve a mix of many or all of them.' Cooke and Kothari (2001) argue that participatory orthodoxies should not be considered without ignoring their challenges. They describe participation models as a 'new tyranny' which could be considered as manipulating or harming 'those who were supposed to be empowered'. There needs to be careful consideration of why student voice practices exist, and their purpose. Student voice cannot be assumed to be emancipatory (Bragg and Manchester, 2012).

Further to this there are objections to certain levels of student participation activities in FECs. The University and College Union (UCU, *Student participation in quality assurance in the FE and HE sectors, 2010*) outline their view, stating that they 'do not support the direct student involvement in the assessment of the performance of individual lecturers through participation in inspection regimes or classroom observation or student questionnaires' (5). They do however acknowledge that they encourage student participation in other areas, for example representative bodies and student input on course design. Similarly, another trade union, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT, 2016), produced a guide: '*Student Voice - a guide to promoting and supporting good practice in schools*', which outlines their opposition to

students being involved in the 'direct recruitment of staff', concern about student representatives on governing bodies and student involvement in lessons observations of teaching staff.

So it is clear that over the several years attempts have been made at national policy level to encourage institutions to enable greater student voice, often justified as part of the neo-liberal agenda and some institutions have been recognised as developing good practice in this area. However, it is also clear that student voice practice is not consistent across the sector and questions still remain about the extent to which it is rolled out as a managerial imperative to satisfy policies and regulations rather than as a genuine attempt to empower students to be equal partners in FEC's.

1.5 Personal background

I am a passionate educator who has worked in the field of FE, across a number of institutions, for over 13 years. I have been employed as a teacher in FE classrooms teaching a range of students, but predominately 16 to 18 year olds. I have seen 'first hand' how a variety of students, many from disadvantaged backgrounds can improve their social mobility, agency and future life chances by taking part in a range of post-16 qualifications.

Although my subject matter has always been within creative disciplines, notably media studies and graphic design, as I progressed through my teaching career I have seen the development of FE teachers becoming more of an 'all-rounder'. In my personal experience, senior managers within the colleges would expect teachers to also have expertise in 'core subjects' such as Maths and English. Smith and O'Leary (2015) describe this situation in relation to FECs embedding Functional Skills Maths and English into vocational subjects. During their research they uncovered professionals who felt this was 'diluting and undermining their focus on vocational pedagogy in their subject specialist area' (182).

My own personal experiences of education, coupled with my extensive work experience, have formed my belief that FE is transformative and can improve young peoples' life chances by contributing to social change. FE as a transformative model of education is highlighted by recent work in the field by Duckworth and Smith (2016) in their project, *Transformational Further Education: Empowering People & Communities*. This project draws on the transformative life

experiences of students and teachers in FE across the country. FECs serve many different functions in the community, but can be a place where people are given ‘another chance’ to complete formal qualifications. However, Smith (2017) highlights ‘their journeys are often punctuated by unexpected life events, disruptions, false starts, wrong turns, volte-faces and may be informed throughout by resistance’ (868). This experience of teaching different students over many years underlines the desire of the research project to listen to students in a different way, rather than just through traditional research methods, which often favour the more articulate participants. The use of the auto-driven photo elicitation method, within this research project, is designed to support students to ‘open up’, and to seek more personal, reflective data than may have been obtained through interviews and focus group. The desire was for this research to demonstrate ‘new thinkables’ (McDougall, 2017: 81) within the field of student voice research in FE.

However, research in FECs is problematic for teaching staff who work within those institutions. Feather (2012) highlights the issues of finding time for scholarly activity alongside heavy teaching loads (up to 23 hours per week), coupled with micro-management of staff activity. Feather cites King and Widdowson’s (2009: 28) statement that: ‘FECs do not set out to be research-intensive institutions – their purpose is to meet the immediate higher skill needs of local employers and to widen student participation in HE by offering appropriate vocational courses.’

The focus of this research project is rooted in FE, a part of the education system in the UK that I feel strongly about. However, as outlined above, research for teachers and staff within these institutions is not easy to achieve, or to incorporate into busy work schedules. Bates et al (1997) share the concerns: ‘research in the field has, in the past, been fragmented and under-resourced, and has lacked any sense of strategy or priorities’ (313). My intention is to contribute to the field of student voice research within FE through the context of this research project and demonstrate how listening to students can help to change colleges for the better.

Miller (2004) analyses the theories of learning within democratic education and considers the current learning practices that are prevalent in many education institutions, with the most common mode of delivery described by Miller as the ‘transmission model’. As the term suggests the teacher is the transmitter who has ‘established, objective, authoritative body of facts outside the learner’s experiences or personal preferences’ and which requires the student to be a passive participant.

Drawing comparisons with Dewey's work on communication and transmission Berding (1997) states how educational institutions should provide learners with the means to develop their intelligence, and furthermore it should not be about 'transmission and control, but *participation* (authors emphasis)' (29).

My interest in student voice research stems from my personal experiences of how constructivist approaches in the classroom can, I believe, engage disaffected students. My personal consideration of what I believe learning to be, and how knowledge is formed, has influenced my approach to this research project. These experiences have been built upon my own political and ideological beliefs about how the education system works. My personal beliefs are drawn from the school of social liberalism: equality of opportunity to succeed; a state which supports its citizens when they need help; and, within an educational context, the right to study and learn in an egalitarian system. Put simply, my experiences of teaching in FECs convinced me that putting students at the heart of teaching, involving them in their learning and listening to 'their voice', works.

My teaching qualification, Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and completing my Master's degree helped shape my theoretical understanding, and arguably further developed my beliefs about student-centred learning. I learnt very quickly in the classroom that trying to engage disaffected young people by 'lecturing' them for long periods was not conducive, on many occasions, to retention of subject knowledge. Constructivism as a concept was shared with us during these post-graduate courses, in particular Atherton (2009) who 'suggests that the learner is much more actively involved in a joint enterprise with the teacher of creating ("constructing") new meanings.' This theory, by its very nature, demonstrated a student-centred approach with students and teachers working together as opposed to teachers imposing their beliefs and constructs upon students.

1.6 Research aims and questions

The aim of this research project is to explore students' views on how they are 'listened to' in one FEC within Central England. The purpose of the study is also to consider how student voice, and its various models and practices, operates within a college of Further Education.

This research project will address the following research questions:

1. How are student voice initiatives discursively framed and socially practiced within a Further Education College in Central England?
2. How are the impacts of 'giving voice' to students manifested in pedagogical practice and how are these impacts understood by the different stakeholders?
3. What kinds of empowerment are evident as a result of listening to student voice initiatives; on which terms are these expressed?

The first question aims to investigate, through analysis of the initiatives at the college, what the students feel about student voice practice, and whether or not they are able to articulate any meaningful views that they feel have benefitted them or their peers. At an institutional level, from discussions with those involved with the initiatives, for example student governors or student representatives, allows the research to explore how the underpinning of the system works from their perspective. The question is intended to elicit understanding about whether or not the methods employed by the institution are effective, from the student's perspective.

The second question will examine the impact of the practice of student voice initiatives at the college, and any changes made to the students' curriculum. This will be based on the students' experiences during the participatory activities that they may have been involved in. This may include both changes to the curriculum or to various practices that may have changed within the college. The question will seek to discover if the initiatives employed by the college are 'tokenistic'. Furthermore, are these initiatives merely paying 'lip service' to notions of young people's ability to possess any social capital in these hierarchal structures?

The final question will seek to explore how the students' individual experiences with participation initiatives have developed their ability to feel empowered, or indeed had any positive outcomes or changes in relationships with the staff who teach them. This question relates to the underpinning principles of student voice initiatives, and considers the concept that they are not just a way of students expressing their views once a term, perhaps via a survey or questionnaire, but rather they are a way of encouraging a genuine change in the participatory nature of education. Over the last 15 years there has been an extensive investigation from a large body of academics and educators, such as Fielding (2001), Stafford *et al.*, (2003), Flutter and Ruddock (2004) into moving from a non-dialogic pedagogy to a more student centred approach. Involving students and encouraging co-creation opportunities in the classroom, should be an underlying principle of student voice work, but is this happening in any meaningful sense?

1.7 Summary

This research project is grounded in the FE sector, a part of the education system in the UK that I, along with many others who have worked in the sector, believe to be transformative for students. It allows students from a variety of differing backgrounds to be 'up-skilled', to be taught in a multitude of subject disciplines, regardless of their prior educational background, to help them improve their understanding of the world around them. The sector is one that is ever changing, in part due to successive UK Governments' apparent inability to grasp the importance of vocational education, but also due to the severe financial burdens placed upon it during the many years of austerity. Student voice practice within FE is visible: the presence of student-led organisations such as NUS and the plethora of student councils, student surveys, clubs and societies confirm this opinion. Research into student voice practice is needed so that the effectiveness of the systems, from a *student's perspective*, is given more prominence. The purpose of student voice initiatives is to listen to students, but we rarely ask the students what they think about the practice. This research project will seek to explore a FEC's student voice practice from the students' viewpoint.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This review will explore a range of themes around the term 'student voice' and will aim to summarise the historical context of 'democratic' education in the UK. The historical development of student voice and the increase in initiatives related to the 'voice' of students across the public sector will be examined. Student voice literature will be reviewed, in particular related to tokenism and 'lip service'. Notions of power relationships within educational institutions will be discussed and finally social capital and learner agency within educational institutions will be considered.

As the field I am discussing uses terms such as pupil voice, student voice and learner voice interchangeably and in differing contexts, I will continue to refer to them as their original authors described them. Similarly, although my research involved working with young people from the ages of 16 to 18 years old, which are the predominant group in FECs, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises that children are defined as being under 18 years of age. Similarly where original authors have used the term child, pupil, student or young person I will use them as originally described.

The boundaries of this literature review are largely formed from the setting where my research has taken place, namely the FE sector, but will seek to explore relationships with practices both in schools and sixth forms where appropriate. The review of the literature will be predominately from the UK and the British education system, but will also seek to draw comparisons, where relevant, from the important student voice work that takes place in other countries, for example the United States of America (USA), Canada and Australia. This review cannot claim to include all of the outstanding authors, researchers, schools and colleges in the UK who have pioneered in the field of student voice and democratic education over the last hundred years. My aim is to review the literature which is pertinent to my research questions. Lastly, my overarching conceptual framework relates to the work of Bourdieu, but this review will also seek to make appropriate links between other notable theorists in the field, for example Dewey, Freire and Foucault.

2.2 Context of democratic education

Fielding (2011: 9) argues that contemporary student voice practitioners should look back to previous democratic education models in the 20th century as inspiration for the future. Furthermore, he

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argues that previous alternative models of democratic education 'deny the dreary insistence of contemporary neo-liberalism that There Is No Alternative to an increasingly desperate status quo.'

Democratic educational models have been in evidence within the UK for over a hundred years. Shotton (1993) and Stewart and McCann (1968) demonstrated how both private and public sector schools were using 'alternative' means of engaging young people. The schools were often led by charismatic head teachers such as Alex Bloom (St. George-in-the-East School), Howard Case (Epping House School) and E. F. O'Neill (Prestolee School). Burke (2005: 263) describes how: 'For a time, O'Neill was a celebrated, if controversial, figure during a period that saw the rise of a new confidence in experimental pedagogy'. Burke further describes how 'active learning' as a concept was starting to interest educational theorists of the time, such as John Dewey, who was questioning the more traditional classroom environments of the 19th century.

Alternative practice began to be discussed as emerging theories of working class children 'being put in their place' within the school environment. The new ideas and concepts led to the setting up of different schools, with one of the most well-known of these being Summerhill, led by A. S. Neill. However, these schools provided education to a select group of children and for the vast majority of children and young people these types of learning environments were inaccessible; they were the exception not the norm. The majority of schools in the UK, at that time, still used corporal punishment and rote learning was a common pedagogical practice.

Carr and Hartnett (1996: 63) discuss early democratic models of education, within the framework of John Dewey. The move from systems of education in the early 19th and 20th century, where often education was for the 'elite few', Dewey sought to argue that historically 'liberal education has been restricted to the education of a particular privileged class'.

Ruddock and Fielding (2006: 221) argue that the historical context, and the literature which analyses it, allows more contemporary student voice literature to be seen in a clearer framework. The head teachers that ran these 'alternative' schools were 'passionately committed to democratic possibilities—to the idea of the school as a community where students shared in its governance, to student autonomy and, importantly, to making spaces where students could develop their own identities and interests'. It can therefore be argued that notions of student engagement, democratic

principles and negotiated learning are not newly founded, nor can they be considered as the latest educational 'fad'.

Ruddock and Flutter (2004) further demonstrate how academic researchers have been exploring 'learners' viewpoints' for many years and they highlight the 1970s as a key period when the children's rights movement '*in school*' (Authors' emphasis) came to the fore during a national conference for students (National Union of School Students). The 1972 document has been described by Wagg (1996: 14) 'as one of the most uncompromising and idealistic statements of liberation philosophy ever seen in British educational politics'. The policy stated (amongst 26 other items), that they 'seek student-teacher co-operation' and 'to promote greater democracy inside schools... (with) representation of students...' However this student policy was not well received by the Thatcher Government of the time. 'Progressive pedagogy' was seen by the Government as not preparing school leavers adequately for the workplace.

Osler (2000) argues that involving pupils in democratic decision making will develop skills of co-operation. Through her research it was found that when students were involved in a democratic way, in creating the rules, and consequences for disobeying them, it helped with the conduct of the pupils, and was an affective tool in improving behaviour management.

Yannuzzi & Martin (2014:710) discuss how democratic education models should be inclusive and 'for students to not absorb knowledge in a passive manner but to generate it by critical engagement with ideas through dialogue, teaching must focus on facilitating how students make sense of their shared interactive experience.' They go on to argue that teachers should become skilled at 'teaching through others', but 'to change traditional classroom relations, then, teachers must constantly manage the distribution of voice, including their own.'

Leat & Reid (2012: 190) describe how 'the advent of 'student voice', which ranges from school councils through to efforts to democratise schools, has opened up new possibilities'. The advancement of student voice initiatives, built on the principles of democratic education has opened up different ways of working with children and young people. Flutter (2007: 334) argues that 'pupil voice can be seen as nested within the broader principle of pupil participation, a term which embraces strategies that offer pupils opportunities for active involvement in decision-making within their schools.'

It is this decision making which moves students from being a passive participant in an educational institution to being able to help shape how the place functions, in wide ranging fields such as curriculum development. Rudduck & Flutter (2000) state that 'we should recognise pupils' social maturity and experience by giving them responsibilities and opportunities to share in decision making. They also cite Hodgkin (1998: 11):

The fact is that pupils themselves have a huge potential contribution to make, not as passive objects but as active players in the education system. Any (policy) concerning school standards will be seriously weakened if it fails to recognise the importance of that contribution.

Beane & Apple (1995: 5) discuss the 'illusion of democracy' where adults use predetermined decision making in education institutions, a type of 'engineering of consent'. They argue that democracy in education 'extends to all, including the young' and that democracy is not only the right of adults in these settings.

Suggesting more fundamental issues with democracy in education, McMahon (2012) argues that educational reforms are based on 'narrow visions of democracy' and that 'they see society as static and schools as sites to perpetuate compliance and prepare students to fit in to a world as it exists...schools prepare students for a deferred version of democracy where meaningful student voice is decidedly absent.'

2.3 The development of student voice within education

The precise date when concept of 'student voice' developed within the education system is arguable. Middlehurst (2014) points to the Robert Owen's school in 1816 as a possible starting point. This school sought to 'listen to student's views about their education' which was a relatively unique position at this stage of educational history. Other examples of 'radical early educators' include Dick's school in Whitechapel in the early 20th century in which adults and children learnt alongside each other. Rowen House School and Barrowfield Community School both built on the notion that children and young people should work together to and listen to one another rather than follow traditional modes of education whereby the teacher is in sole control in the classroom.

Cook-Sather (2006) discusses the 'early champions of student voice work' in the UK. Stenhouse (1976) argued that teachers can be a 'neutral chairman' where the groups' views (students) are taken into account and 'exploration of views within the group' were encouraged. Other leading pioneers of student voice research in the UK included the late Jean Ruddock. When discussing ways in which schools could be improved she stated:

...what pupils say about teaching, learning and schooling is not only worth listening to but provides an important – perhaps the most important – foundation for thinking about ways of improving schools. (Ruddock et al., 1996: 1)

Thomson (2011: 20) discusses 'voice' in a broader historical context and draws associations between different social movements in the 20th century. He argues that civil rights movements in the USA and women's movements in Europe 'championed rights of 'the people' to 'voice' their everyday experiences.' The right of children and young people to be heard also has historical context within the legislation related to Article 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was adopted by the UN in 1989 and by the UK in 1991. This states that:

The child who is capable of forming his or her own views [has] the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Also Article 13:

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Wisby (2011: 33) states that for some educators the Convention on the Rights of the Child lends a moral commitment to giving a voice to children and young people but that there is not a 'strong tradition of children's rights led provision in mainstream British schools'. Hart (1992: 5) also argues that although there is a clearly laid out Convention expressing the rights' of children and young people there is a 'strong tendency on the part of adults to underestimate the competence of children while at the same time using them in events to influence some cause; the effect is patronizing.'

When considering the Convention of the Rights of a Child, Lundy (2007: 929) categorises the concerns that adults may have with listening to children and young people in educational settings:

Adult concerns tend to fall into one of three groups: scepticism about children's capacity (or a belief that they lack capacity) to have a meaningful input into decision making; a worry that giving children more control will undermine authority and destabilise the school environment; and finally, concern that compliance will require too much effort which would be better spent on education itself.

Lundy (2007: 931) further argues that 'involving pupils in decision making should not be portrayed as an option which is in the gift of adults but a legal imperative which is the right of the child.' Quinn and Owen (2016: 193) argue that although society has accepted the rights of children and young people to be heard, these opinions can still be overlooked when it comes to decision making both within their 'educational pathways' but also the wider education community.

In other parts of the world student voice practice also has a long history. Fielding (2001) cites countries such as USA, Australia, Chile and Canada as examples. Shannon (1993) gives examples of the tradition of USA's 'teachers and students developing democratic voices'. Shannon describes how teachers and schools from the late 19th century have been involving students in their learning citing examples such as Marietta Johnson's School of Organic Education where 'the interests of children should be respected so that they could develop the power to think for themselves.' Other examples such as Bank Street School, Arthurdale School and Septima Clark's Citizenship Schools demonstrate pockets of practice where student voice was central to the ideals of the institutions.

What began historically as the ideals of a few educationalists and applied to a few institutions has developed into national and international policy and law, which should, in turn, impact on practice across all schools and colleges. However, as will be discussed in the next section, this compliance can often be variable and half-hearted, perhaps reflecting the concerns noted above by Lundy (2007).

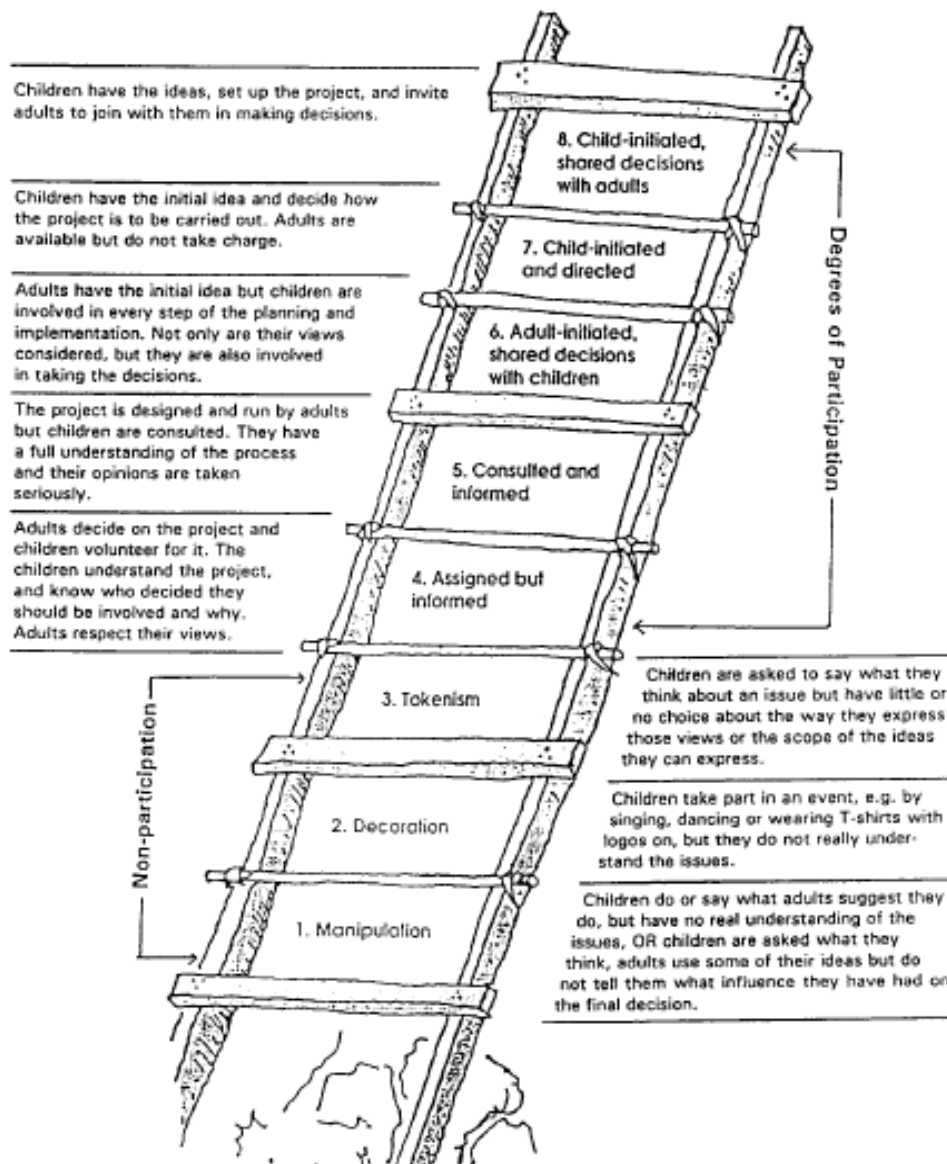
Mitra et al (2014) argue that although there was some levels of youth participation in 'bottom-up' policy contexts, the USA lags behind many other nations in developing nationwide student voice participation models due, in part, to the lack of ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the United States was one of only two countries not to ratify the Convention. Alongside other factors Mitra states that 'it can be challenging to locate spaces where robust opportunities for democratic participation and student voice exist' (292).

Within the last twenty years in the UK student voice practice and initiatives have been much more prevalent. Fielding (2004: 200) describes the 'new wave' of interest in democratic education which stemmed from the many Government policies introduced in the early part of the 21st century. This was certainly when there was real momentum being built into schools and colleges across the UK, supported through legislation, when the 'new wave' of student voice practice was arguably at its height. Policy drivers from the Labour Government of the time were arguably one of the factors why the rise in student voice initiatives occurred at this time period in history.

Student voice literature and research at the turn of the 21st century developed from its initial attempts to involve students by listening, to developing more inclusive models of participation. A key feature of the evolving of student voice practice came from the models such as the 'Ladder of Participation', based upon Arnstein's (1969) 'Ladder of Citizenship Participation'; Hart (1992) sought to underline how meaningful engagement with students could work. Hart's work (see Figure Two) offered a practical model in which the voices' of children and young people could be listened to and heard. It starts with the notion of non-participation, where children and young people are manipulated, seen as decoration or used in tokenistic way, before moving through the upper rungs of the ladder, where children and young people can initiate actions and make shared decisions with adults.

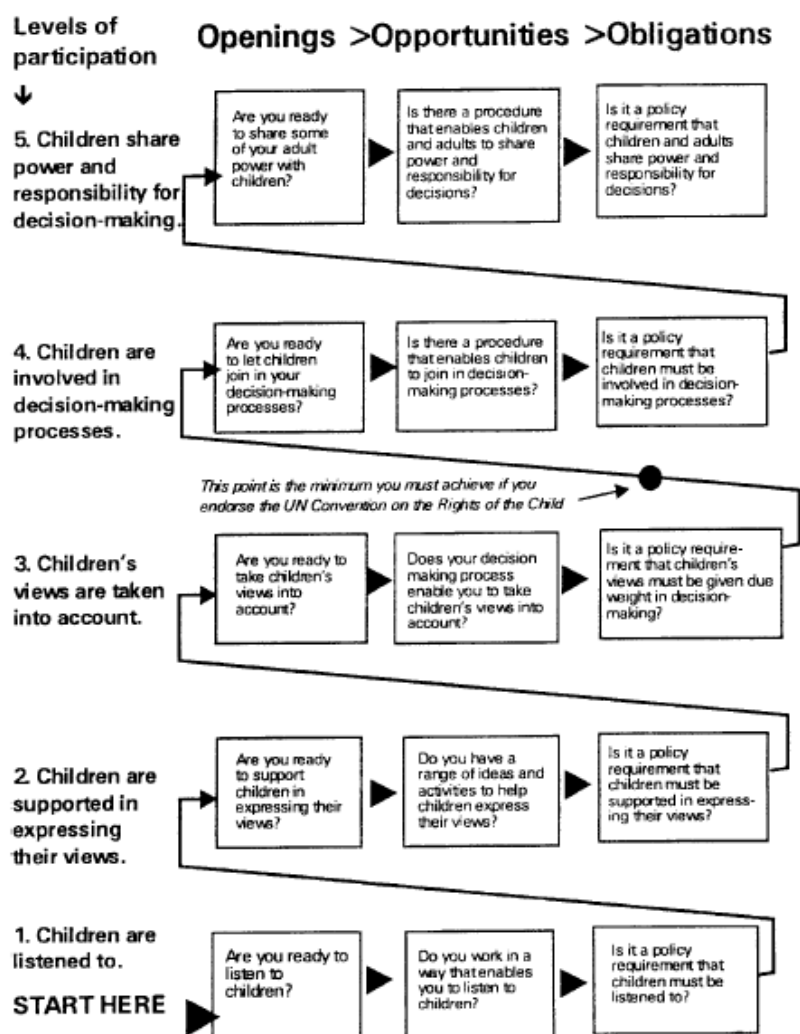
Bahou (2011: 5) discusses Hart's 'Ladder of Participation' and argues that young people are 'positioned' in relation to their interactions with adults and through the model they have 'evolving capabilities that are cultivated through collaboration'.

Figure One - Roger Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation



Shier's (2001: 110) model offered 'an alternative model for consideration by the field'. Shier recognises the use and strengths of Hart's model, which has been widely used in student voice practice over many years. Shier sought to build on Hart's model, and discusses the importance of Hart's framework as it exposed 'false types of participation', such as manipulation, decoration and tokenism.

Figure Two - Pathways to Participation (Shier, 2001)



Shier's model (see Figure Three) has five levels and each level has three stages of commitment from an organisation or individual. When applying the model, the three stages are: openings, opportunities and obligations. Sinclair (2004: 111) reflects on Shier's model by observing that applying the model 'may also force adults to check their own motivations and their preparedness to work in partnership.' Additionally, Sinclair states that the model is about adults being honest and realistic about any project or activity effecting any change.

Fielding (2001) argues that there are different, more radical student voice practices, in which students' voices can be heard. He discusses emancipatory models of practice such as 'students as researchers' where students and staff contribute equally and share responsibility for learning. Fielding (2001: 124) calls for more transformative approaches where those involved in student voice work in education institutions 'construct ways of working that are emancipatory in both process and

outcome.’ This moves towards models where children and young people progress from, as Bragg (2007) describes, students being used as a ‘data source’, to more meaningful dialogic methods whereby students are researchers, co-creators and co-researchers.

Prout (2002) discusses how children and young people cannot only be involved in researching but become ‘active participants’. The children and young people can move from a position as respondents or informers to being able to make ‘constructive contributions to the design and implementation projects’. This includes children and young people not only talking about their experiences, but also being involved with participative models such as drawing and photography. MacBeath & Mortimore (2001: 20) highlight that teachers are skilled at speaking on behalf of students, but need to become better at ‘helping students to speak for themselves and to work with them.’

Bragg & Buckingham (2008: 119) also offer insight into research in educational institutions which seek to ‘empower’ children and young people to share their voice through the use of alternative means. The ‘scrapbook project’ sought to gain an understanding of children and young people’s views on contemporary media by using a ‘mixture of found-image collage and personal annotation or comment.’ As stated by Bragg & Buckingham, ‘unsurprisingly, in some cases, the voices that emerged through the scrapbooks were very different to those in interview.’

Walker and Logan (2008) observe that although researchers (Fielding 2004, 2008; Ruddock 2006; Bragg 2001) share concerns about the reason behind the ‘popularity’ of the learner voice initiatives within education there is room for the debate to move forward positively. Walker and Logan argue that successful learner voice initiatives are about four strands:

- Learner voice is about self-esteem and personal development for both educator and learner. It fosters behaviour that causes educators to reform with and not for the learner.
- Learner voice is about listening as concerned partners, coherent contributors, and equal agents of change.
- Learner voice enables learners to practice the same levels of social responsibility and personal freedom that they are given in other aspects of their lives.
- Learner voice embraces the responsibility that learners have in shaping their own education, therefore promoting relevant skills for the future. (6)

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Pearce & Wood (2016: 1) discuss how, particularly in Western countries, there 'has been a rapid growth and proliferation of student voice initiatives in schools, as a diversity of educational stakeholders implement such initiatives in the hopes of improving educational quality.' However, this is against a backdrop of 'intense and direct pressure to improve students' results in standardised assessments.

Quaglia and Fox (2018: 14) describe how student voice is growing and developing across a range of educational organisations:

Today, there are daily tweets, webinars, blogs, and research articles related to student voice and student agency. International organisations and leading educational researchers extol the necessity of student voice in learning and life. Student voice is finally a priority in educational reform efforts. This long-overdue attention is both needed and deserved.

Within FE at present there are organisations that continue to promote and develop student voice work across the sector. The FE Learner Voice Practitioner Network (LVP) works across the country in conjunction with the NUS. The stated aims of the network are to: 'provide the expert voice of professionals supporting learner voice across FE; promote Learner Voice both within, and across the FE sector; support the development of Learner Voice practice and innovation; and facilitate and enable members cooperation' (LVP, 2013). This network holds annual conferences and awards to recognise the good practice that occurs within the sector.

The NUS has developed a 'Learner Voice Framework' that is designed to support Further Education Colleges to collate and reflect on their student voice practice through 'self-assessment' and a 'development plan'. Launched in November 2017 at the Association of Colleges (AoC) Conference it is underpinned by five principles 'Partnership; Empowered Learners; Inclusive; Embedded and Valued; and Being Invested, Strategic and Sustainable'. Although a relatively new online tool the idea is to 'guide and inform quality learner voice in the organisations who take part.' (NUS, *Learner Voice Framework*, 2017)

The AoC has a 'Code of Good Governance for English Colleges' (2015), and it notes, as with schools, FECs should have a Board of Governors (or perhaps an academy and subsidiary board) which oversees the institution and can hold the senior leader to account. Within this Code it is a key principle that colleges should 'ensure there are effective underpinning policies and systems, which

facilitate the student voice' (5). The Association provides guidance and case studies as to how this may best be facilitated.

2.4 Tokenism and lip service

Tokenism, in the field of student voice practice, can be defined as initiatives which seek to involve students in democratic decision making but offer no real or long lasting change. Students are involved because it is seen as the 'right thing to do', or perhaps even more worryingly, because it is a 'passing fad' or 'trend' within education. Non-tokenism is where students are actively participating in their education, they are researchers in their own right, and the egalitarian relationships in the institutions are reflective of students' right to question decision making from the bottom to the top of the institution. The engagement with students certainly needs to be much more embedded practice than was as described by one young person during Osler's (2010: 110) research, who found that student voice work was little more than a 'poxy little council which discusses how much the price of chips are'. Rudduck & Flutter (2000: 83) share the concerns about the school councils and other pupil participation models within education institutions, 'the agenda of schools councils often do not roam far outside the charmed circle of lockers, dinners and uniform.'

Holdsworth (2000) considers token participation and discusses how students within educational institutions can find themselves focusing on 'safe issues' to the exclusion of what is central tenet of the ethos of education, namely teaching and learning. Thomson (2011: 25) argues that 'Student representation is often tokenistic and seems more about students being seen to be involved...'. Wisby (2011: 32) highlights the concerns of many involved in the field of developing student voice in educational institutions, as generating a 'bandwagon effect', where tokenistic activities happen but have little long lasting effect.

Robinson & Taylor (2007: 10) highlight other concerning aspects of tokenistic elements of 'student voice' work such as the 'institutional exploitation of student involvement... and the prevalence of particular and more 'powerful' voices...'. The literature within the field of student voice is consistently concerned with these notions of misrepresentation, ensuring that inauthentic practice is challenged and that cynical attempts to engage young people are exposed (Macbeath, Myers & Demetriou, 2001; Fielding 2001; Thomson 2011).

Gunter & Thompson (2007: 269) build on the argument of inauthentic practice when discussing student councils and representative systems. They demonstrate that this type of system:

Fits neatly with the leader-centric nature of schools and society in general. Students are consulted, but do not determine agendas, because this would mean that they could raise questions and issues that are off the agenda of the elite adults inside and outside of school who control what is to be done in education.

Kidd and Czerniawski (2011) further reflect on Fielding's concept of 'lip service' and the discourse that often flows from this mode of inauthentic practice. They present Fielding's view that student voice initiatives could even be seen as a 'controlling agent'. The concern is that inauthentic practice can give students the appearance of being genuinely involved, but are really being positioned to demonstrate to external agencies that they are listening to young people's views. Furthermore they, and others (Ruddock & McIntyre, 2007; Fielding, 2004; Ball, 2001), underline this cynical attempt to involve young people in decision-making processes that often are for the construction of 'managerial discourses'. Using students as 'objects' can seek to satisfy Ofsted (2016: 40), who ask colleges to demonstrate that: 'Leaders, managers and governors have a deep, accurate understanding of the provider's effectiveness that is informed by the views of learners ... They use this to keep the provider improving by focusing their actions on important areas. They are unflinching in reviewing the impact of their actions.'

Leat & Reid (2012) reflect on the concerns surrounding the use of student councils, explaining how students can be 'deceived and exploited'. Although the use of councils is used widely to demonstrate that education institutions are engaging with student voice 'their sphere of influence is often marginal and their impact cosmetic.'

Mullis (2011) outlines the unease that can stem from an educational institution's lack of understanding surrounding the rights of children and young people to be able to express their views. Mullis argues that where these rights are not valued, or informing student voice activities, they can 'be tokenistic and viewed by some teachers as interrupting learning, rather than being central to it' (220).

In Davies et al (2006) review of pupil participation in schools and colleges they report a positive impact on the institutions, and also the wider community. However, this was tempered by some of the other issues and constraints. For example, where class rules had been set up by teachers not the students this was viewed as 'tokenistic'. Also where the pace of change and lack of momentum was not present this led, within the schools and colleges, to 'pupil disillusionment'. Davies et al also discuss how there can be 'conflicting motives' where student participation 'can sometimes be used as a ways to control pupils and make them more 'pro-school'.'

There is 'suspicion' and 'reservation' which stems from the compatibility of the Government policies and educational managers in the early 2000's, and a questioning of whether the 'real' agenda could be much more manipulative (Bragg, 2007). Roberts and Nash (2009: 175) discuss the difficulties of educational institutions 'simply to listen to students rather than empower them to act continues to ignore young people's potential and is in danger of incorporating their contributions towards essentially conservative ends.'

Research has also been conducted into what young people's views are about being consulted (Stafford et al, 2003). The young people involved in this particular research project were clear about the fact that they knew it was beneficial for adults to 'be seen' being involved in consulting and listening to them, but some had 'grown weary' of consultations as they had limited impact on their lives. The young people wanted action, results, and feedback from what they had said or suggested. Young people, as demonstrated by this research project, are clearly able to see when attempts are being made to simply validate the decisions already taken by adults and to trivialise what they think.

Lodge (2005: 133) explores how student participation in educational institutions can lead to adults manipulating the students' voices 'to carry their own message and deny or disguise their own involvement.' Lodge gives examples of educational institutions using 'images or quotations in brochures, where young people are being used to speak the adults' messages.' This type of participation is described by Lodge as 'tokenistic or decorative'. Cook-Sather (2002) argues that students have 'invaluable views' on their education and classroom. Cook-Sather states that if we exclude these perspectives we have an 'incomplete picture of life in classrooms and schools and how that life could be improved' (3).

Within student voice research there is a rich diversity of literature that celebrates the successes in the field, and although this review has focused upon areas of concern with tokenism, there is indeed so much to be positive about. Engaging in dialogic pedagogical activities with students, offers the possibilities to make a real difference. Empowering individuals and groups of young people within educational institutions to be active participants are just some of the ways in which 'authentic' student voice work can create learning communities in which students thrive. Groundwater-Smith & Mockler (2016: 162) summarise their viewpoint:

We believe that authentic student voice work involves the building of generative relationships and the joint engagement of adults and young people in the research enterprise.

However, it should also be recognised that students have a right not to participate in various initiatives and that the teachers voice should also be listened to and 'that their expertise is respected' (Wisby, 2011). Bragg (2007) discusses the wider issue of 'the suppression of teacher voice' as a national issue, and considers the role of teachers in professional and curriculum development over the past twenty-five years. Bragg notes that 'there are clearly contradictions in insisting on listening to pupil voice when teacher voice has been undermined.' The need to ensure that teaching staff are comfortable with student voice practice is important; teacher's right to have a voice should also be respected. Davies, Williams & Yamashita (2006) also note that some students may choose to be involved in only one aspect of participating in student voice activities and nothing else.

2.5 Power relations in educational institutions

When discussing power and student voice practice Mayes (2017:2) states that 'historically, student voice work has begun from a premise that educational institutions are saturated with inequitable power structures, processes, practices and relations.' In Freire's (1970) work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, it was proposed that there was a 'banking' approach to the education system in which there were two modes of people, the oppressed (students) and the oppressors (teachers/leaders). Freire makes comparison to the 'banking' concept of education as an instrument of oppression:

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as a process of inquiry (72).

Lichtenstein (1985: 42) discusses Freire's work and he states that 'individuals have no ability to exercise control over the education process and in their role become mere receptacles of pre-digested knowledge'. Lichtenstein goes on to state that Freire's theory culture of the oppressors class 'invades' the oppressed as they learn to emulate their oppressors.

Robinson & Taylor (2007) discuss Freire's (1992) latter work, *Pedagogy of Hope*, and its basis in liberatory education which encourages 'emancipation and democratic participation'. Taylor and Robinson draw parallels with Freire's concepts and with student voice initiatives within their research. These are based around notions of empowerment and participation, whereby children and young people are given choices about what they learn and supported to develop education policies, such as school charters.

Glassman & Erdem (2014: 209) describe how Freire (1970a) 'believed that education should lead to the recognition that individuals have the ability to choose their activities and transform their own life trajectories.' Kohn (2003) argues that the control that some teachers display in the classroom undermines academic motivation. Kohn states that holding onto power in the classroom can mean that students are 'substituting reluctant compliance for the excitement that comes from the experience of self-determination' (12). MacBeath et al (2003: 1) discuss how 'teachers may feel uneasy about talking with pupils in a way that changes the traditional power relationships. It can take time to build a climate of trust that allows teachers and pupils to review their work together openly and constructively.'

Bragg (2007: 344) states that 'for years many educators argued in favour of student voice as part of a larger emancipatory project, hoping it would be transformative not just of individuals, but of the oppressive hierarchies within educational institutions and even in society.' Buzzelli and Johnston (2001) discuss how a range of authors, such as Young (1971), Bernstein (1975) Apple (1982) 'depict the school as a societal institution which serves in the ongoing reproduction of existing power relations, and hence inequities, prejudices and so on. The aim of schooling is to produce "good" citizens: i.e., citizens who do what they are told and serve in their turn to replicate the state as it stands' (875).

Ball (2010) elucidated that Foucault positioned students as 'powerful subjects'. The impact of power in education is both a 'negative and positive'. Marshall (2010) when discussing Foucault's notion of

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work *Discipline and Punish* (1979) describes how disciplinary institutions, inclusive of organisations such as workplaces, hospitals, but also schools 'organize physical space and time with activities that have been developed over time to change people's behaviour along a number of parameters' (15).

Foucault (1980) discusses the complexity of power relations and exemplifies that power is not always repressive. However, he expands his thoughts to show that an individual uses their age, social position, or knowledge to make people behave in a certain way, without force, leaving them 'free', this is where power is exercised:

It's clear that power should not be defined as a constraining act of violence that represses individuals, forcing them to do something or preventing them from doing some other thing. But it takes place when there is a relation between two free subjects, and this relation is unbalanced, so that one can act upon the other, and the other is acted upon, or allows himself to be acted upon (2).

Bahou (2011) argues that Foucault's (1980) concept of power demonstrates that it is not always detrimental to individuals and groups but is in fact more complex than this. Bahou considers that 'power as neither an entity to be possessed or given away, nor as inherently negative and solely vertical.' Furthermore that power is 'relational, situated, circulated, endlessly negotiated and constructed' (7).

Carlile (2012) discusses Foucault's (1975) notion of the 'capillaries of power' within FE whilst undertaking student voice research. Carlile describes how these capillaries are 'ubiquitous and unseen', and that they lead us to 'govern ourselves through the regulation of our own behaviour'. This can be seen through the implementation of policies and protocols within FECs. Carlile argues that the research she undertook sought to challenge governance through a 'multiplicity of voices telling their own stories.' The unseen power within FE can be challenged by students being enabled to have an active role in their college and being empowered to challenge the 'status quo' of the policies and protocols.

O'Leary (2013) applies Foucauldian (1980) notions of the mechanisms of power within a FE context. He discusses Foucault's belief that knowledge 'was a social product created by a number of connected mechanisms.' The 'apparatuses of control' are ways to ensure that types of knowledge are established as 'more legitimate than others', which lead to the creation of 'regimes of truth.' O'Leary argues that these dominant discourses and regimes of truth are 'exemplified by agencies like Ofsted.'

Arnot & Reay (2007) discuss the power relationships within the field of student voice research and how researcher's relationships within the field recognise that there is 'not one authentic voice' and there can be concerns over the 'methods in framing particular voices, eliciting some and not others'. Arnot & Reay argue that student voices 'cannot change power relations, but that shifts in power relations can change "voices".'

Bernstein (2005) argues that there is a 'latent power' when children are in social situations in which rules are assigned by 'positional control'. This positional control can be seen within the context of educational institutions where these bodies 'implicitly and explicitly' transmit values which 'establish criteria for acceptable pupil and staff conduct.' Furthermore, Bernstein (2000: 5) states that power relations in education 'create boundaries, legitimise boundaries, reproduce boundaries, between different categories of groups, gender, class, race, different categories of discourse, different categories of agents. Thus, power always operates to produce dislocations, to produce punctuations in social space.'

Wong (2016) discusses how different elements of education can reproduce social control and power within educational institutions. Wong states that the curriculum 'can be seen as a means of exercising power to control students; teachers, as curriculum implementers who make instructional decisions, are actors in the interactive classroom teaching/learning process' (250).

Madan (2014) discusses Weber's (1978/1922) principles of power within educational institutions. Madan states that Weber's suggestions of legitimacy, 'which is a belief in the moral correctness of power' occurs in all situations where power is used. Moreover, it was Weber's proposition that both legitimacy and domination is intricately linked to the 'social structure within which the power is being exercised.' The issues of power, raised by Weber, are seen by Hill et al (2004) as essentially a negative occurrence. Hill et al argue that Weber's theory of 'sovereign power' manifests itself through hierarchical structures where 'one actor holds power over and subordinates another.' This can be through manipulation or other forms of understated 'structured inducements' which leads the 'subordinated to accept their situation as inevitable or acceptable.'

With regard to power relationships within student voice initiatives in educational institutions, Fielding (2004), states that there are difficulties because there are still 'anachronistic structures and cultures' within these settings. Fielding argues that there is not a level playing field, and the

student/teacher 'arenas' in schools 'are not of equal importance and one is immensely more powerful than the other.' Fielding goes on to argue:

But, so far as I am aware, there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together. Until and unless such spaces emerge transformation will remain rhetorical rather than real (309).

When discussing student voice in school settings Cook-Sather (2006) argues that 'having a voice—having presence, power, and agency—within democratic, or at least voting, contexts means having the opportunity to speak one's mind, be heard and counted by others, and, perhaps, to have an influence on outcomes.' Without the ability to share power with FE staff, student voice practice has the inherent danger of being tokenistic or merely for 'decoration', rather than transformative and giving students opportunity to 'drive forward' real change.

Mann (2008) argues that power and control of authority figures within educational institutions is ever present: 'activity is controlled through pre-planned timetabling and pre-booked space. In this way, responsiveness to the desires, needs and wants of individuals and groups is limited.'

FECs, similarly to other educational institutions, are often formed with hierarchical structures, with a principal and senior leadership team leading the college. The structure of the colleges can appear to be 'at odds' with concepts of the sharing of power between students and staff. Student voice practice at FECs, as explored during this research project, should work towards making the decision making processes more balanced and seek to ensure that student's opinions and thoughts are treated with respect.

2.6 Social capital

The concept of social capital is far reaching and is by no means solely linked with Bourdieu, indeed the history of the concept of social capital is also much debated by others in the field of academia. Fine (2010) demonstrates how the term social capital is linked to economic contexts, and thus in the western world at least, to neo-liberalism and capitalism. Hanifan (1916: 130) cited in Fine (2010) states that social capital was defined as 'those *tangible* substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people'. Tracy & Tracy (2000: 6) cite Dewey inferring that his work in the early part of the 20th century regarding social pragmatism has a 'strong social benefit and education programs are

necessary for both social capital and democracy.’ Smith (2009) discusses how, these early origins of the notion of social capital, have been built upon through the 21st century, most notably by Bourdieu, Coleman & Putnam. Moore (2008: 101) describes how Bourdieu extended the term capital to more than ‘mercantile exchange away from economics into a wider anthropology of cultural exchanges and valuations.’

Bourdieu (1986: 21) defines social capital as:

The aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.

There are three key Bourdieuan concepts directly related to social capital; linguistic capital, pedagogical authority and habitus. Vaara & Fay (2011) describe Bourdieu’s notions of habitus as the development of our socialisation, from childhood through to our education. These durable dispositions, (an internalised ‘way of being’), have been described by Lee & Kramer (2013) as ‘a critical component of the perpetuation of inequality’. Furthermore, Moore (2008) demonstrates how Bourdieu’s theory of habitus enabled him to show how different linguistics, values and lifestyles of social groups allow for others to have ‘social advantage’.

Czerniawski et al (2009) cite the unease of many student voice researchers, for example Ruddock & Fielding (2006), Silva (2001), Riley & Docking (2004), Macbeath (2004), and Slack (2003) who fear the articulate, ‘high flying’ students become leading members of student union bodies or class representative systems. These ‘elite minorities’ emerge and the unheard or inarticulate students are side-lined or, perhaps more worryingly, purposefully ignored because of their habitus. Thomson (2011: 24) summarises many of the concerns:

Student representation is often tokenistic ... Only some students are selected for representative activities, often those who are seen by staff as ‘good’ or as ‘gifted and talented’ or by their peers as ‘popular’. ‘Difficult’ students are often not asked what they think. What students can discuss is limited.

Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) argue that pedagogic communication within the field of education could lead to a social disadvantage for those who do not have such highly formed linguistic capabilities. In doing so they enabled the debate to consider how linguistic capital may restrict certain social classes (for example people from working class backgrounds) from being able to access certain careers or social groupings. The (perceived) linguistic capital of certain students to make their voice heard is a

central theme within my research, as it with this concept that I believe that the notion of ‘lip service’ and tokenism comes to the fore. Without building the proper structures in place for all students to develop their linguistic capital, to be given opportunities to interact with ‘leaders’ in colleges, then there will always be disparity in who gets ‘listened to’ within the field of student voice initiatives. As Breslin (2011: 68) argues:

Schools and colleges should evaluate their ‘voice’ policies and strategies frequently, monitoring who takes part, how often and how they are elected or selected, and intervening to strengthen participation skills in areas such as public speaking and negotiation.

Building on Bourdieuan notions of student’s cultural habitus, restricting ability to have student voices heard, and linguistic capital making certain voices easy to ignore, the proposition of power within Bourdieu’s theory of social capital can be seen with his notion of ‘pedagogical authority’ (PAu). Reed-Danahay (2004) argues that inculcation was a key factor of the education system that Bourdieu saw as exerting PAu on young people in the education system. The idea of students ‘self-excluding’ themselves, either through processes that mean they accept non-inclusion, or by their perceived own failures, is one that continues to be seen in classrooms settings today.

Grenfell (2004: 180) explains how Bourdieu was explicit in his language when he discussed ‘symbolic violence’, and how members of dominant groups can maintain the societal structure relatively simply by allowing the current rules of the system to carry on as they are, in other words to preserve the ‘status quo’. The theory of PAu could be applied to many educational institutions which are set up as hierarchical structures. Within FECs there are often layers of business support staff, technicians, teachers, lower and middle managers and senior leadership teams, and boards of governors. The disciplinary systems in educational institutions reinforce the belief of ‘who is in control’. Fielding (2009: 503) offers a viewpoint of how educational leaders could break down some of these barriers, he is advocating deep democracy and real world experiences of social justice:

While traditional spaces like schools’ councils and various modes of citizenship education are important, they tend to privilege the confident and the articulate and need to be underpinned by strategies which give all children the experience of exercising voice and agency. Deep democracy, Griffiths et al. argue, requires an education that enables young people to learn social justice by doing it.

Acar (2011) describes how social capital, within the context of education, allows individuals to improve their knowledge, perspectives and widen their awareness. Furthermore, Acar states that

the bonds and links that students make with others maintain 'certain character traits such as toleration, empathy, reciprocal respect and eagerness to engage in dialog (sic) with other members of society' (458). Conversely, those with 'less' social capital or 'connections' are not as 'able to test the accuracy of their own opinions', which can lead to them growing 'less tolerant, more cynical, and more likely to be swayed by negative or unhealthy impulses.'

Putnam (2002) discusses the issues that individuals may face if they do not belong to certain groups in attempting to explain the 'purposes and effects of social capital'. Putnam states that 'networks and norms might, for example, benefit those who belong— to the detriment of those who do not. Social capital might be most prevalent among groups of people who are already advantaged, thereby widening political and economic inequalities between those groups and others who are poor in social capital' (9).

Coleman's (1988) assertion is that social capital 'is not a single entity, but a variety of entities.' Coleman goes on to discuss how social capital may be 'less tangible' than other forms of capital, for example economic, physical or human, as 'it exists in the *relations* (author's emphasis) among persons.' Rogošić & Baranovic (2016) discuss how Coleman's theory of social capital, is centred on individual decision making and that 'social capital has a stronger influence on an individual's education and is more evenly distributed than other types of capital'. Basit (2013) develops the links made between social capital and social mobility. Drawing on Bourdieu (1999), Coleman (1994) and Putnam (2000) Basit considers the different facets of social capital, such as place of birth, residence, social class and how this can help us better understand how educational achievement can be linked to upward social mobility and improving life chances.

Pishghadam & Zabihi (2011) argue that there have been extensive bodies of research linking student academic success with social and cultural capital. Citing Sandefur, Meier & Hernandez's (1999) American study there were links made between social capital and family income. Students discussed school more with their parents when they were from 'stable intact families' and subsequently had greater access to higher education.

De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaykamp (2000: 93) also discuss how parental capital can enable children to succeed more easily within educational institutions:

Dominant status groups and social classes use their power to maintain and create structural conditions to protect their interests. Accordingly, schools are fashioned to guarantee the success of students from these privileged groups. Students who hold the dominant linguistic styles, aesthetic preferences, and styles of interaction (*habitus*) are positively sanctioned by their teachers.

Israel & Beaulieu (2004) discuss how 'school social capital' can impact on achievement among students. This can range from where a school is based within a socio-economic area but is also reflected in other aspects, such as the 'interest that teachers (and others in the school) demonstrate in the welfare of students, such as engaging students in school programs and activities that make effective use of their time and energy' (39). This coupled with an 'immersive' environment which involves students and lets them 'assume positions of responsibility' and allows for positive interactions with their teachers.

Allan and Duckworth (2018) apply Bourdieuan notions of social capital to student voice research with marginalised students in the UK. Allan and Duckworth argue that supporting disaffected students to '*speak out* (author's emphasis) can strengthen engagement through a validation of their narrative.' Moreover, they suggest that students are affected by the 'structural limitations of schooling (such as not being positioned as active contributors to the teaching and learning process), they can easily become disempowered' (45).

FECs have an opportunity to build students' social capital through a variety of means. FECs have the possibilities to engage students in a vibrant, contributory curriculum, which seeks to develop their understanding, not just of the subject(s) they are studying, but also to understand their position in society, in relation to 'others', and how they may gain different life experiences from their time at college. Differences between students from diverse backgrounds may be apparent at colleges, and other educational institutions, and whilst this is to be celebrated, it is important that students are given equal opportunity to engage in activities and situations which allow them to build skills which will help them in their future lives, and work careers.

2.7 Learner agency

Boyte & Finders (2016) link learner agency to democratic principles of education through a Deweyan perspective. Boyte & Finders argue that Dewey (1937) saw 'education as experiences that foster the agency of individuals and collectives.' Boyte & Finders draw on Emirbayer & Mische's (1998) definition of what the 'locus of agency' is, namely that it:

Lies in the *contextualization* of social experience ... [through which] in deliberation with others (or sometimes self-reflexively, with themselves) actors gain in the capacity to make considered decisions that may challenge received patterns of action (130).

Schoon (2018) suggests that learner agency is a challenging concept due to 'differences in terminology, level of analysis and approaches to measurement'. Schoon states that there is a range of factors that need to be taken into consideration when considering the issue of agency:

An integrated model of learner agency has to span across different disciplines and recognise that individual decision making and action depends on interactions with others, is embedded in a wider socio-historical context (ranging from immediate social settings in one's family and neighbourhood to macro-economic conditions), and is shaped by variations in access to socio-economic resources (4).

Whilst undertaking research with FE students in the UK, Rudd & Evans (1998: 51) assert that 'agency is those aspects of the decision-making process in school-to-work transitions which were predominantly individual, creative, proactive and involved resisting external pressures.' Students in FECs can be from a variety of different backgrounds and may have had 'educational failure elsewhere' (Nash et al, 2008). Their ability to 'develop' their agency is important if they are to access different social groupings as they progress into the workplace and seek to 'improve' their life chances through job roles which offer a greater degree of economic stability.

Fogle (2012) discusses the concepts of the development of language within the context of learner agency. Fogle notes that the arguments put forward by Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) which is that cultural reproduction reinforced from generation to generation by the privileged serves to 'preserve social inequities'. But Fogle argues that there is a reverse process where 'family ideologies conflict with value systems external to the family (such as those of the wider society or the education system), processes of cultural transformation occur.' FE can be transformative and develop the agency of the learner, but the familial context that the learner comes from, is of central importance,

learners may well need the support of their families as they study.

Watts (1995) discusses agency in relation to learners within educational institutions as 'about being listened to and treated with dignity, respect and mutuality, and it is about working and living in a non-authoritarian environment.' Watts argues that it is about choice and working in a collective manner with people who matter, and individuals 'enhancing their capacity and their right to control their own destinies.'

McLaughlin & Gray (2015) argue that 'a sense of agency' can be developed by schools that support young people in a variety of ways. For example, ensuring that young people can make a valued contribution, a sense of 'connectedness', and being part of a learning community both in the wider setting of the school, but also within the classroom. Conversely, McLaughlin & Gray further discuss that if young people do not have a sense of agency and voice this can lead to 'poor relationships with teachers and peers (and) are likely to have a higher risk of having an emotional difficulty and to engage in socially disruptive behaviour with long-term consequences' (3).

Mercer (2015) points out that learners need to feel 'willing and able to take action', but also importantly, that this action will actually make a difference to their learning. For a learner to develop their agency they need to have skills and strategies, these include the ability to manage and organise their learning. Mercer's (2012) other work concerning learner agency considers that there are two dimensions, which she argues, cannot be separated. The first is the 'learner's sense of agency' which concerns how an individual 'feels both generally and in respect to particular contexts', and secondly the 'learner's agentic behaviour'. This agentic behaviour is a choice 'to exercise their agency through participation and action, or indeed through deliberate non-participation or non-action.'

When relating agency to student voice research Charteris & Thomas (2017: 167) state that 'agency is something that cannot be registered through simplistic classroom observation and therefore a student voice approach can provide further information in the form of a learner lens for teachers to reflect on and take pedagogic action.' Rudduck & Flutter (2000) argue that pupils have an understanding of processes and events in educational institutions which are 'observant and rich', but also contrarily they can use this understanding to develop strategies which enable them to avoid learning which can, in turn, 'be destructive in their learning'. The fear that student voice initiatives are 'using' pupils, rather than enabling them is highlighted by Rudduck & Flutter: 'are we "using"

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pupils to serve the narrow ends of a grades-obsessed society rather than “empowering” them by offering them greater agency in their schools?’ (82).

McLeod (2011: 181) argues that listening to student’s voices is not just about speech:

It can mean identity and agency, or even power, and perhaps capacity or aspiration; it can be the site of authentic reflection and insight or a radical source for counter narratives. Voice can be a code word for representing difference, or connote a democratic politics of participation and inclusion, or be the expression of an essentialized group identity.

Building on McLeod’s argument, within the context of student voice work in FE, Hardiman (2014) states that voice is ‘not just an act of speaking but a sense of agency, respect and entitlement to participate.’ However, Hardiman considers that having a voice also has ‘metaphorical connotations of not having had a voice’. It also implies the development of learner agency by ‘speaking up for yourself, asserting a claim for recognition and a right to question and participate.’ This leads to students’ personal development, their social skills in speaking, interacting with others and an ability to ‘contribute to an enriched public sphere.’

Goodman & Eren (2013) discuss the complexities of student voice projects and developing student agency. They argue that although small-scale projects within schools, which may have limited impact, are more likely to be successful, the development of student agency would be minimal. Goodman and Eren’s perspective is that: ‘student agency is a psychological need and human right, essential to becoming an autonomous, principled, goal directed, and responsible person’ (125). They advocate student voice projects which challenge school priorities, outside of the ‘authorities’ comfortable silos’.

Rector-Aranda and Raider-Roth (2015) outline their view about how agency and voice can be demonstrated in the classroom. They state that this can be through a ‘student’s intentional and constructive involvement in the learning environment’, in which ‘purposeful actions...strengthen their own learning, as well as assert their needs and ideas’ (3).

Students within FECs can have 'significant barriers, including negative prior experiences of education' (Duckworth & Smith, 2017: 6). This may mean that they come with additional needs which staff need to be supportive of, particularly with issues such as a lack of confidence and low self-esteem, students often study at FECs for personal development, as well as the desire to attain qualifications (Gleeson et al, 2015). As has been argued previously in this thesis, FE can be transformative, and the development of learner agency is part of that transformation.

2.8 Conclusion

This literature review has focused on student voice practice which is relevant to this research project. The basis of student voice practice should be that it encourages 'democratic action' in schools, colleges and universities where the students are situated. Although student voice practice has a relatively short history in FE, the last 15 to 20 years have meant that many of the systems colleges employ to listen to students are now well established. The power of student voice practice, and FE, to transform the lives of individuals and groups through improving their social capital and agency, should not be undermined by practice which is inauthentic or pays 'lip service' to notions of genuine student engagement. For FE to continue to develop as a transformative sector, as positioned by Duckworth and Smith (2017), it is my view that research into the sector needs to pay greater attention to listening to students and finding more effective, meaningful ways of taking their views seriously. Student voice practice, and indeed FECs are nothing without the students that study within them; their opinions should be at the forefront.

The literature review, which forms part of this thesis, has informed the aims and research questions. It is clear from the broad depth of research into student voice practice that there is an understanding of how contrived practice can occur. The research questions, which are the foundations of this research project, have sought to discover what students feel about the practice at their college, from their viewpoint. This case study has allowed the participants involved to share their experiences of student voice practice and the impact 'on them', but also whether or not the systems designed to listen to them, and 'give' them a voice, have led to any meaningful change in their colleges lives.

2.8.1 Conceptual Framework

This research project has built on the literature review to develop further knowledge about student voice practice from the long line of previous authors in the field, both nationally and internationally. The literature review has drawn upon a range of relevant theorists in the field of student voice, social capital and learner agency. Although other authors (Groll et al, 2018; Gallagher & Smith, 2018) express concerns about the limitations of the 'transmission-oriented' and 'deterministic' of some aspects of Bourdieu's theories, overall it still offers the 'richest' framework for this subject matter. As Groll et al (2018: 31) explain Bourdieu and Passeron (2013) 'see education as asserting the legitimacy of the dominant culture on members of dominated groups, classes and individuals'.

This review of literature generates a conceptual framework for data collection that may elicit a deeper understanding of the artefacts by drawing on Bourdieu's notions of social capital, linguistic capital, pedagogical authority and habitus. As Miles & Huberman (1994) state a conceptual framework allows the researcher to specify who and what will be studied. The conceptual framework has connected 'theory with practice' (Leshem & Trafford, 2007) and the anticipation is that this could support any practitioners who may seek to develop auto-driven photo elicitation research in the future.

The conceptual framework has been mobilised to support the analysis of the photographs, captions and voice of the students in the Findings chapter and it has allowed me as the sole researcher 'to make meaning of subsequent findings' (Smyth, 2004). The use of a conceptual framework has 'set the stage' (McGaghie et al, 2001), enabled the data to be interpreted and supported the understanding of the artefacts and the words of the participants.

The use of visual methods such as photography, drawing and creating artefacts during research with young people allows an understanding of their world. The process of listening to the students through the lens of the written, verbal and arts based method within this research project will enable analysis and an ability to 'hear the noise' of the student participants (Pahl, 2014).

The conceptual framework for the analysis of the data is as follows:

Figure Three – Conceptual Framework

Approach to research	Approach to learning and education	Theoretical perspective	Methodology	Methods
Interpretivism	Constructivism	Bourdieu’s notions of: Social capital Linguistic capital Pedagogical authority Habitus	Case Study	Focus group/ semi-structured interview/auto-driven photo elicitation

This research project situates itself, and seeks to add a contribution, to the field of FE research, which as previously discussed, is a sector of the UK education system which is under-represented in terms of scholarly activity. Research into student voice practice within FE is apparent (if relatively limited), but this research project’s distinction from other bodies of work is that it seeks to explore listening, and voice, from a student’s perspective, using auto-driven photo elicitation as a means of enabling those who may not have previously been heard to ‘speak up’. Participatory visual research can be empowering for the participants and allow them to imagine solutions to issues that are present in their everyday lives (Theron et al, 2011).

The research will provide an insight into the complex relationship between voice, listening and how students articulate their experiences through the use of visual methods. As McDougall (2017: 85) argues, the use of these types of visual research methods enables ‘us to see and hear differences and contingencies, and to be more agentive, participative and expansive in our research, so that ultimately we can understand education better.’

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This research project is a single case study in a one large FEC in central England. The aim of this research project is to explore the ideas, thoughts and feelings of a group of young people on two media courses. This exploration will use mixed research methods within a case study methodology to draw out findings through different means, rather than just the spoken word, with the students taking photographs as a way of drawing out a deeper understanding. As Bartlett & Vavrus (2017: 30) state 'any good case study will present a multitude of data about some phenomenon of interest'. Within the college where this research was based there were frameworks designed to listen to students. The project examined the extent that these processes are meaningful and considers whether the institution listens to the views of all students who study at the college, rather than the vocal few.

3.2 Naturalistic inquiry

My personal consideration of what I believe learning to be, and how knowledge is formed, has influenced my approach to this project. My epistemological stance draws on extensive experience in teaching young people and adults over the last decade in FE institutions and is informed by the work of Hein (1991) and Crotty (1998).

The research project's foundation is based on an anti-positivist stance; it is a naturalistic inquiry. Cohen et al (2007: 19) states this stance rejects the belief that 'human behaviour is governed by general, universal laws and characterized by underlying regularities'. My research aims to show the viewpoints of a set of individuals in one college, I cannot claim to be a 'detached observer' having spent much of my working career teaching students in similar institutions. The researcher's position in naturalistic inquiry is explained by Walker (2012: 77):

The researcher does not stand apart from the data collection but is intimately involved in it and in many cases the questions they choose to pursue derive from personal experiences.

Beuving et al (2014: 22) describe naturalistic inquiry as an interpretivist methodology, which is 'seeking to understand the problems of society from within; i.e. in terms of the viewpoints of its members.' Beuving et al note that naturalistic inquiry is based on qualitative interviews using open or semi-structured interviews and 'collecting and studying available texts, images and things people produce' (17). Salkind (2010: 880) states naturalistic inquiry 'involves a single case', which allows the researcher to produce 'interpretations and local theories that afford deep insight'. Salkind describes how a naturalistic inquiry focuses on 'words, narratives, and discourse'; this method is designed to work from the 'ground up'. Some of the challenges of naturalistic inquiry are that the researcher must have a 'high tolerance for uncertainty and the ability to work independently for extended periods of time'.

Potter (2011) argues that naturalistic inquiry is able to be set apart from the hypothetico-deductive research, such as surveys and experiments. Given (2008: 547) states that this type of inquiry 'situates itself opposite the positivist paradigm'. Given also notes that naturalistic inquiry is bound by the view that 'no researcher is neutral', also 'that separating knowledge from its natural context is impossible.'

Lincoln & Guba (1985: 16) summarises how there is difficulty in researchers striving for the 'ultimate truth'. They make a strong case for post-positivism (anti-positivism):

Where positivism is concerned with surface events or appearances, the new paradigm takes a deeper look.... Where positivism sees its central purpose to be prediction, the new paradigm is concerned with understanding.

As this research project is formed from listening to the views of students, in their 'natural' college environment there will not be a single version of the 'truth' of the collective student experience. At times the students contradicted each other, and themselves, in regard to their shared experiences. Listening to the views of the students was central to gaining an understanding of their experiences of student voice practice at the college, from their perspective, but my role in the research process and the positioning of the tasks they were asked to complete, means that I am, in some ways, part of the research itself.

3.3 Theoretical perspective

The epistemological position I took also reflects my own personal belief in the way that people learn, which can be summarised by Hein (1991), who describes constructivism within the context of learning as, ‘the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves, each learner individually (and socially) constructs meaning, as he or she learns.’ Crotty (1998) also suggests that no meaning is discovered, but that it is constructed, and that we generate meaning together as we go through different ‘phenomenon’.

Crotty (1998: 7) suggests that identifying the theoretical perspective, leads a researcher to ‘explain how it provides a context for the process and grounds its logic and criteria. Constructivism is seen by Jones and Brader-Araje (2002: 3) as moving the focus of ‘knowledge as a product to knowing as a process’. Paiget’s (1967) ‘cognitive constructivism’, Vygotsky’s (1978) ‘social constructivism’ and von Glaserfeld’s ‘radical constructivism’ (1995) are all cited as developing a stance on what constructivism means in education. Jones and Brader-Araje argue that constructivism’s influence on education stems from the frustration of educators ‘with behaviourist educational practices’.

A behaviourist’s framework of education, as suggested by Fosnot and Perry (2005: 9), defines learning by making assumptions of curriculum as a ‘finite body of predetermined knowledge’, in which learners are seen as passive and affected by reinforcing skills and knowledge. Conversely, Fosnot and Perry (10) maintain that constructivism is ‘in direct opposition’ to behaviourism, where ‘cognitive development and deep understanding’ are the focus.

Piagetian notions of constructivism, in relation to children, are described by Benevento (2004: vi) as:

Different levels of cognitive structures underlie the strategies used for problem solving. The systems are open and accessible to structural change. Children are actively involved in organizing their motor, affective, and cognitive experiences into patterns of behavior that are meaningful to them. They accomplish this organization through a child-environment interaction in which they actively explore and discover the natures of their surrounding worlds.

From a constructivist’s perspective, Von Glasersfeld (1995: 9) argues that knowledge is an ‘adaptive activity’, and problem solving in learning is not achieved by rote-learning, rather it should be for

teachers to make sure students are able to use their motivation and desire to ensure that 'learning can be fostered only by leading students to experience the pleasure that is inherent in solving a problem seen and chosen as one's own'.

Schreiber & Valle (2013: 397) summarise that Vygotsky's (Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1989) view of constructivism, is that learning should be experienced, and the emphasis put on an environment whereby students were 'active participants in the creation of their own knowledge.' To foster learning, constructivists provide meaningful experiences by facilitating, advising and stimulating ownership of the process of learning.

Opie (2004: 19) states that a constructivist viewpoint would suggest that one could see the 'world' in which the researcher conducts their study (in this instance a FEC in central England) as a 'socially constructed, subjectively experienced and the result of human thought as expressed through language.'

Cook-Sather (2002: 3) builds on the notion of constructivists' approaches to research by arguing that students 'actively construct their own understandings.' Cook-Sather go on to state that this mode of understanding from constructivists places students as 'active creators' of developing their knowledge rather than merely a receiver of others (for example teachers) knowledge. Brown et al (1993: 201) argue that students should not be seen as 'passive recipients', but be 'given space' to allow them to become 'learning experts' where they take on roles as researchers, instigate self-monitoring and take shared responsibility for their own learning. The position argued by Rodgers (2006) is that constructivist practice, in relation to student voice, is a broad field. As Rodgers states students can be 'both the sources and gatherers of data'. However, this is not to suggest that teachers in a 'constructivist classroom' cannot teach, or that they should not offer guidance or support students as they learn. As Bransford et al (2000: 69) outlines, 'teachers need to pay attention' to how students perceive and interpret knowledge. They cite evidence of an enhancement in learning when the teachers 'pay attention to the knowledge and beliefs that learners bring'.

This research project is concerned with the drawing out of thoughts, opinions, and viewpoints to gain a 'fragment' of understanding, as to whether the students have been able to be active in

expressing their voice. This project speaks to a range of young people who are not necessarily part of the framework for 'listening' to students (for example student representatives, student governors), the research methods within this project will capture the 'voice' of the unheard, those that are not naturally inclined to 'speak up'. Lincoln (1995) cites LeCompte's (1993: 10) observation that 'researchers seek out the silenced because their perspectives often are counter-hegemonic'. The cross section of students who took part in this project (which the research methods sought to target) were not, in the main, those that had chosen to take part in the college's 'formal' student voice initiatives.

Cohen et al (2007: 22-23) discuss the interpretive paradigm as being concerned with the need to 'understand the subjective world of human experience'. Further to this viewpoint, Leitch et al (2010: 69) describe interpretivism as 'based on a life-world ontology which argues that all observation is theory and value-laden and that investigation of the social world is not, and cannot be, the pursuit of detached objective truth'.

Positivist quantitative researchers question the validity of the interpretivist qualitative methodologies as concerns are raised over the validity of the research findings, but it has been argued that interpretivists should not bow to the authority of positivism (Angen, 2000). Cohen et al (2007) state how an interpretive perspective is not concerned with a 'universal theory', but perhaps a more multi-faceted, varied image of human behaviour. Walliman (2006: 24) analyses the differing schools of thought in regard to interpretivism and summarised that: 'They all rejected that human behaviour can be codified...and that society can be studied from a detached, objective and impartial viewpoint by the researcher'.

As with other parts of the education system in the UK, FE is judged and measured by statistics, by codifying the behaviours' of students. The FE system of control, enforced by a succession of British Governments, uses measurement, comparison and quantification of the 'learning' of individuals or groups. As Burnell (2017) states, post-compulsory education changed in 2002 when there was a new system introduced (Ofsted and Adult Learning Inspectorate merged), this led to colleges standards being 'observed, measured and improved.' This positivist approach can be seen still be seen today in FECs in a myriad of ways, from league tables to inspection regimes. However, this research project takes a different stance which, arguably, goes against this system, which is to generate

understanding (albeit only in one part of the UK) of what a small cross section of young people think, or believe, in regard to how they are empowered by student voice initiatives.

3.4 Case study methodology in education

This research project uses a single case as the basis of its analysis of how student voice initiatives 'work' in a FEC. Gerring (2004: 342) describes a case study as an 'intensive study of a single unit... a spatially bounded phenomenon...observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time'. Gillham (2000) states that case studies can be individual and should ensure that its research methods allow for different kinds of evidence to be collated. Gillham argues that it is unlikely that one type of source would be sufficient, but that multiple sources would enable greater validity. Qualitative research, within the case study method, allows the researcher to 'get under the skin of a group or organisation to find out what really happens' (11). Hamel et al (1993: 45) describe the case study method as an 'in-depth investigation' which should use different materials and methods to make observations.

Creswell and Poth (2013: 97) discuss cases studies as being able to explore 'a real life, contemporary bounded system...through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information.' Building on the argument for case studies in educational research Corbett (2010: 669) states that:

Case studies are also used widely to evaluate particular programs and policies as well as pragmatic interventions in classrooms and schools. The case study has proven a valuable and rich way to investigate particular educational contexts and improve professional practice.

Within England there are 312 colleges, these are a mix of General Further Education Colleges, sixth form colleges, and private providers. General Further Education colleges in England make up 179 of those institutions (AoC, 2018). The students who took part in the research project were all on vocational media courses across Level 2 and 3. In 2016 there were over 36,000 certificates issued for students on these types of courses in the UK (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation - Ofqual, 2016). There are large numbers of young people taking vocational courses and this case study was reflective of this 'typical' group.

This project was not intended as a one-off critique of an institution whose systems and initiatives for utilising student voice was either deemed to be failing or, conversely, working. The overriding purpose was to offer a positive framework for future improvements and identify how institutions 'listen', and then build on the work that they already do. There is future scope for identification of how education institutions can 'listen' to research findings and the incorporate elements of the positive outcomes.

The strength of using a case study methodology is that the use of a variety of sources allows for differing perspectives to be gained and, it is hoped, a richer set of data gathered, which whilst at times appeared somewhat contradictory, allowed students to share their views in ways which may be more accessible to them. Case studies have been used in Further Education College research projects previously (Little, 2015; Bhatt, 2012; Shaw 2012; Simmons 2008) and specifically in student voice research projects (Brown & Kellsey Millar, 2018; Charteris & Thomas 2017).

3.5 Positionality of the researcher

Råheim et al (2016: 1) discuss the long held concerns of researchers and academics regarding the relationship between the researcher and the researched. They argue that there is a privileged position and a power imbalance between the two parties. Coghlan & Brydon-Miller (2014: 627) argue that the 'position adopted by a researcher affects every phase of the research process'. I began to 'get to know' the students from initial meetings with them as I explained the research project and sought their consent, and that of their parents, to take part in the study. Goglan & Brydon-Miller, citing Herr & Anderson (2005) call this the 'outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)'. When considering my 'status' within the groups of students I worked with, I would argue, that I had a 'shared status'.

This research project took place within a FEC where I knew several members of the teaching staff at the college before the research project process began; they knew my background as for many years I was teacher in FE. I have also taught on similar courses, albeit in a different college, and knew the opportunities, but also the difficulties, that both the staff and the students faced during their studies. Dwyer & Buckle (2009) discuss the 'space between' outsider and insider positionality within qualitative research. They argue that the 'intimacy of qualitative research' means that the researcher cannot become a true insider or outsider, but that one occupies the space between.

My own positionality within this research project was influenced by my identity, for example: social; political; cultural and educational (St. Louis & Calabrese-Barton, 2002). Banks (1998: 4) argues that 'the biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct.' My understanding and experience of teaching many students from similar educational backgrounds, ethnicities and socio-economic groupings gave me empathy with their status and life experiences.

However, it must be recognised that although my research project had participatory elements, my relationship with the students from the college still stemmed from a relative position of power status as a teacher. McGarry (2015) explores this relationship, in the context of youth research, and notes that researchers can be placed in more powerful positions in the field due to other factors such as their age or knowledge. Grover (2004) details some of the concerns around research with children and argues for vigilance by researchers involved in listening to the 'voice' of children and young people. Grover notes that researchers should 'be vigilant lest their research reflect more about themselves and the establishment than it does represent authentically those whom they study', also that there is a 'risk of having research independence co-opted by establishment perspectives and social agendas is lessened to the extent that social scientists allow their vulnerable subjects to have their own voice' (89).

Gallagher (2008: 138) suggests that participatory research approaches have become more widespread when working with young people and that there is value in children producing data through practical activities. This is reflective of my research project, particularly the visual research methods, which empowered the students to take any images they chose, and to then discuss them in a context which allowed them free expression (semi-structured interview) – see Chapter Four, below.

Kohl & McCutcheon (2015: 747) discuss the importance of reflexivity in relation to positionality when thinking about insider and outsider research. They argue that reflexivity 'plays an essential role in the research process'. Glass (2015: 554) describes how 'reflexivity is a post-positivist research practice', which enables the researcher to critique their own practice but also to 'engage in critical introspection of their positionality and influence over the research field.' During my research project I had to consistently consider both my position within the institution as an outsider, but also the

relationships I had with the staff at the college who taught the students, the structures within the institution and most importantly my relationship with the participants themselves.

Adopting self-reflection during each phase of the research was central to the next phase. I strove to be as neutral and objective as possible during the research process and was mindful of how my research may impact on the students themselves, but also the staff that worked at the college. As Pillow (2003) argues:

Reflexivity thus is often understood as involving an ongoing self-awareness during the research process which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research.

But as Pillow argues, reflexivity allows one to draw attention to one's own researcher subjectivity. How am I, as the researcher, influencing the research methods? To what extent have my experiences within FECs impacted on my preconceived notions about student voice initiatives? Also, as Pillow suggests: 'Whose story is it – the researcher or the researched?' As part of the reflexivity process, I took notes during the research phase and revisited my research questions prior to, and after each intervention with students. I spent time considering my own role and how this may or could impact on student participation and what I could do to ensure that I remained as impartial as possible. This was alongside dialogue with my doctoral supervisors, who were able to challenge my thinking during the months I was 'in the field'.

My intention was to represent the voices of students that were involved in the research, to conduct the research 'with them' rather than 'on them'. The variety of research methods was intended to use 'multi-vocal' approaches to illicit an understanding of the student's position.

3.6 Research methods – interview, focus group and photo-elicitation

This section sets out the research methods use, which are summarised in Figure Five below.

Figure Four - Research Design

Research Design	
Approach to research	Interpretivism
Approach to learning and education	Constructivism
Theoretical perspective	Bourdieu’s notions of: Social capital, Linguistic capital, Pedagogical authority, Habitus
Methodology	Case Study
Data collection methods	Focus groups Auto-driven photo elicitation Semi-structured interviews
Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Seek ethical clearance from the university – Gain approval from college management for project – Meet teaching staff – the gatekeepers to the student participants – Introductory meeting with students – Semi-structured interviews with Student Enrichment staff member, Student Voice staff member and the Student Governor – Focus groups with students - Level Two and Level Three – Auto-driven photo elicitation exercise and caption writing with students – Semi-structured interviews with students
Data collection period	Spring term 2016
Participants	57 students aged 16-20 years old, one Student Governor, two staff members
Equipment used	Digital audio recording device
Interviewers	Same researcher (DH)
Sampling strategy	Purposive sampling strategy
Data analysis	Thematic analysis

The case study methodology for this project sought to use three research methods as outlined in the table above (Figure Five): focus groups; auto-driven photo elicitation; and semi-structured interviews. The mixed method research design allowed triangulation of the data from the students. Triangulation in case studies, as described by Gillham (2000: 29) can be complex:

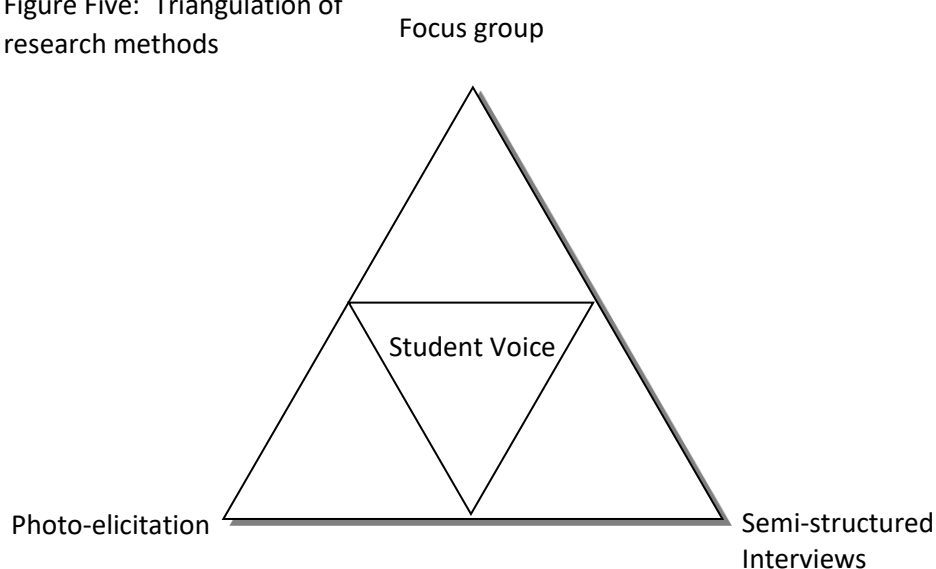
Different kinds of data (or different sources) bearing on the same issue commonly yield contradictory or 'discrepant' results. It doesn't mean that one set of data is 'untrue', rather that the presumed relationship with the triangulation point either doesn't exist or has to be understood differently.

The data gathered from the three different sources for the purposes of this research project, was intended to be able to demonstrate the thoughts and feelings of the students. Comparisons or generalisations which compare this qualitative study with other similar studies is likely to be misleading to the reader. Coe (2012:52) supports this rejection of generalisations:

It follows that the selection of cases and contexts for study in qualitative research is guided not by their representativeness of some wider group, but for their potential to contribute information in their own right.

Whilst conducting research with pupils, Hajar (2018: 519), also maintains that the triangulation of participatory methods gives research findings ‘validity, together with empowering the pupils to exercise their agency by articulating and sharing their own experiences and feelings verbally and non-verbally towards the phenomenon under study.’ My research design, and use of methods, allowed me to first of all gather data verbally, in a group setting, then for the students to use a creative method to non-verbally express their experiences and feelings, and finally to articulate in a semi-structured interview, individually, or in pairs, what their image was about, or what they felt it represented.

Figure Five: Triangulation of research methods



The triangulation of my research methods allowed me to ‘gain a more complete picture of the participant perspective’ (Rothbauer, 2012). I was able explore the images they had taken with them, which in turn will helped me to enrich the interpretations of the data.

The purposive sampling (see Chapter 5) of the data underlines the nature of the research project, which is to demonstrate that this case is individual to the FEC where the research was undertaken. Any comparisons to wider institutional student voice practice nationwide and the inference to other contexts and situations are for the reader to make. Purposive sampling is described by Taylor (2016) as a common sampling strategy when conducting qualitative research. The sample of participants

was formed in three parts: from preliminary discussions with the college staff; students who agreed to take part; and the consent of the parents/carers for their son or daughter to take part in the study.

As Morse (2004) notes, purposive sampling suggests a deliberate search for participants. For the research project to be effective I needed a FEC that was willing to engage in the project. I was fortunate to find a FEC in Central England that was willing to be involved. I also sought to engage students who were on Level Two and Level Three programmes, which are the most common levels of study within FECs. The characteristics that I sought for my sample of participants were that they were on a vocational course; that they were able to commit to the project for several months, and that they were happy to be interviewed and take images which would then be used in the research.

I would argue that the selection of my sample was representative of students to be found in similar institutions, on similar vocational courses across England, but the sample itself was distinct to the research setting. As outlined previously, 36,000 students took these qualifications in 2016. Over 400,000 vocational courses are available from examination bodies, such as Pearson (who offer BTEC Media courses, such as the courses that the participants in this research project studied on) are passed each year (Mian, Richards & Broughton, 2016). The majority of these are studied in FECs, rather than other Key Stage Five institutions, such as sixth forms.

The first of the methods used were focus groups. The use of focus groups to draw out understanding from the students was so that they could build on each other's shared experiences of the same systems and initiatives as they discussed them. Punch (2006) discusses focus groups as being a form of group interview, which has previously been used in political research and marketing. Punch goes on to describe how a 'group situation can stimulate people in making explicit their views, perceptions, motives and reasons.' Advocates of focus groups being part of a larger group of research methods within a study include Parker and Tritter (2006). They argue that focus groups can be used to triangulate data from various sources 'to provide a balanced and holistic picture of the research setting'.

The focus groups were designed to elicit the students' understanding about how student voice initiatives worked in their college, and to build on that understanding, I tried to gain a sense of whether or not they did get involved, and if not, what were the factors inhibiting their involvement. This group exploration within a focus group is described by Mason (2004: 5) as being able to provide the collective participants opportunity 'to articulate those normally unarticulated normative assumptions. The group is a socially legitimated occasion for participants to engage in 'retrospective introspection', to attempt collectively to tease out previously taken for granted assumptions.' The students involved in this research project were all studying together, sharing common experiences, curriculum and involvement (or not) with student voice initiatives at the college.

Hyden & Bulow (2003) discuss the role of the researcher within the focus group, namely that they can be considered as a facilitator. They argue that the group discussion that occurs in the focus group should be between the participants and the researcher should take a peripheral stance. Hyden & Bulow also suggest that there needs to be consideration of the level of interaction and participation of people in focus groups. Within the focus groups conducted for my research project some students talked less than others, but the use of mixed methods allowed them to 'open up' in different ways. Consideration should also be given to whether or not the students' perspectives shifted during the focus groups themselves, according to what their peers were saying, or if they were speaking from their own individual standpoint. The students were given different opportunities to share their views at alternative points during the research phase - they spoke about their experiences in focus groups, took images and wrote captions, as well as being able to speak individually or in pairs during the semi-structured interviews.

Within focus group research Stewart et al (2011) discuss group cohesiveness and the notion that although participants in these groups should not consist of individuals who agree with each other absolutely, it can be difficult to manage focus groups when participants hold widely opposing opinions. The students had a 'shared compatibility', although, at times, their experiences were very different from each other.

The second research method used during this project was an arts-based method called auto-driven photo elicitation. This type of research method is rooted in forms of the long established tradition of visual anthropology (Hockings, 1995). Its inception is widely thought to stem from the work of

Collier (1957: 59), who argues that: 'The camera is an automative device which can permanently engrave the visual impression of an instant and can also compensate in various ways for the shortcomings attributed to human impression.'

Other authors have named the uses of photographic research in many different ways, for example: photo novella (Wang & Burris, 1994); participatory photography (Clover, 2006); reflexive photography (Harrington & Schibik, 2003); photo-diary (Mizen, 2005); and photo evaluation (Schratz & Löffler-Anzböc, 2004).

Hegarty (2016: 75) states that these types of photographic research methods can be purposeful:

For those who have unmet literacy needs and experience a lack of confidence around the written and spoken word, arts based methodologies, like photo-voice, have been found to offer empowering, inclusive ways to access individual and collective stories.

Auto-driven photo elicitation differs from photo-elicitation. Photo-elicitation is considered to be a method of using photographs, not necessarily taken by the participant, to generate a response in interviews (O'Brien, 2013). Auto-driven photo elicitation, or 'auto driving', is considered to be when the participant, uses the camera themselves, to take images relevant to their experiences (Clark, 1999; Epstein et al, 2006). Other terms used for the similar research processes have also been called 'participant-led photography' (Van Auken et al, 2010).

The use of photo-elicitation is described by Clark-Ibáñez (2004) as an 'inductive research approach' when combined with other methods, such as interviews. The motivation for using auto-driven photo elicitation for this research project was based around the notion that students would be able to, independently from my position as the researcher, take images which they felt represented their thoughts and views. Harper (2002) positions photo elicitation as a method of combining both the participations' images with the 'words people say' in interviews. Harper argues that this allows the interview process to draw out, not only more information from the participant, but elicits different kinds of data.

Using photo-elicitation as a research method for working with children and young people is seen as a way of combining traditional methods with participatory tools (Clark and Moss, 2001). The approach taken in this study was to use a variety of arts-based methods to 'treat children as experts and agents' and to be reflexive with the participants when consideration was given to the meanings of their cultural artefacts.

Access to technology to take, record and store imagery has significantly changed photographic research (Rowe & Margolis, 2016). The images taken as part of my research project were all taken by the students individually or in pairs. Where students did not have access to a 'smartphone' an alternative digital camera was offered.

Student voice research, within educational institutions, has historically used photographic methods to discover children's thoughts to think about their learning (Schratz & Löffler-Anzböc, 2004). Empowering students to 'tell the story of their own reality' through these means is appropriate and can be powerful. Mizen (2005), who used photographic research with children, also sought to make a division between researchers who make images of children's cultures, to that of charging children to gather images of their cultures.

This research project was designed to listen to all the voices of the participants; this includes those who have previously articulated their voices, for example student representatives, but perhaps more importantly, those students who had not previously been empowered to speak up. The auto-driven photo elicitation method was a way of trying to harness the voice of those who may not have the linguistic ability or confidence to be articulate. Literat (2013: 12) also argues that arts-based methods can produce a different 'kind' of data:

Participatory visual communications, such as drawing, photography, and video, hold the inherent potential of painting a more nuanced depiction of lived realities, while simultaneously empowering the research participants and placing the agency literally in their own hands. Furthermore, because of its playful nature and its lack of dependence on linguistic proficiency, this research method is especially suitable for work with children and youth across a variety of backgrounds and cultural contexts.

The third research method used during this research project was semi-structured interviews. Matthews & Ross (2010) describe semi-structured interviewing as being on a continuum between

both structured and un-structured interviews. With semi-structured interviews there can be an element of researchers and participants 'constructing' a narrative together. Matthews & Ross argue that participants in semi-structured interviews can 'discuss the topic in their own way, using their own words.'

Galletta (2012) frames semi-structured interviews within the context of qualitative research and interpretative paradigms. Galletta notes that the effectiveness when conducting interviews in this manner is to judge the narrative direction the participant is taking, as the conversation unfolds. It is at this juncture that there is a possibility that a deeper understanding may be uncovered. The semi-structured interviews in this research project were conducted after the students had taken their images so that we could reflect on what they had taken, and why, giving them opportunities to give voice to their experiences.

Within the context of student voice research de Leeuw et al (2018) explain how semi-structured interviews allowed them to explore and listen to the voices of the participants. Using semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to have flexibility, and also to enable follow up questions where participant's responses were of further interest. The interviews for my research project were all conducted in the college environment, which hopefully enabled the students to feel more comfortable in their familiar surroundings.

Within my research design I had to consider the questions I was to ask in the three scenarios, focus groups, semi-structured interviews with students and semi-structured interviews with the student enrichment staff members. As outlined previously (see Figure Five) these tasks were conducted at different points during the research project. However, the recurring premise was that I was able to use my experience of working with these 'types' of students over the last decade. I have many hours of teaching practice with FE students of this age, gender and socio-economic standing. I feel that because I have this teaching experience, I am able to better understand the participants 'discursive language', their verbal and non-verbal actions, during the research project this allowed me to gain a deeper understanding (Ortega, 2008).

The selection of interviewees for this research project was based on a number of factors. Most importantly was whether or not they want to be involved, and that their parents were happy for them to be included in the research project as many of the participants were between the ages of 16 to 18.

Secondly, the support, and cooperation, from the management team at the college and the staff that taught the students on both the Level Two and Level Three Media courses was sought. The research was dependent on the goodwill of the participants. However, the semi-structured interviews with the student enrichment staff members and those directly involved with the student voice initiatives at the college could be deemed as more problematic as they may understand what was 'at stake' and would have a cited interest in 'promoting' the strengths of the institution (Diefenbach, 2009).

Within the field of qualitative research payments can be seen as problematic and can raise issues of participant's motivation and authenticity for being involved (Head, 2009). The students and staff members who participated in my research project interviews were not offered any inducement or payment.

The importance of this research project is three-fold. Firstly, that it seeks to examine the nature of *how* students are listened within a FEC, but secondly the chosen mixed methods, i.e. the focus groups, auto-driven photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews offered the students different ways of expressing their views, rather than relying solely on more traditional research methods.

Secondly, the originality of my research stems from both the location where it was conducted, and with the group of individuals whom took part, both of which had not previously taken part in a body of research such as this.

Thirdly, research projects within the FE sector are not as prolific as those from other parts of the educational world. Hillier & Gregson (2015) describe a sector where 'the primary activity of research which has such status and importance to the HE workforce has not been replicated in the FE system.' Whilst research projects do occur within the FE sector there are issues to overcome. Child (2009)

argues that teachers within FE are measured by their ability to retain students until the end of their courses, and on the exam outcomes of their classes, rather than their ability to instigate research projects to influence an institution's Research Excellence Framework (REF) ranking through scholarly activity. This research project is a chance for the sector to build on its understanding in an area that affects most FE institutions, that is, how colleges listen to their students.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Morrow (2009) outlines the principles of working ethically with children and young people in research projects. As stated previously, the participants in this research project were between the ages of 16 to 20 years old. Research ethics are a primary consideration to ensure that no adverse harm occurs to the participants. The importance of consent when working with children and young people cannot be overstated. Ensuring that I dealt with any ethical concerns regarding the design and structure of my research was, in the first instance, formed by clearance from Bournemouth University's 'Research Ethics Panel'. Part of this process was to submit my research proposal to the University to ensure that my project was seen by two academics that had expertise in the appropriate areas, and they were able to offer advice and guidance before any research took place and prior to formal approval by the wider Panel.

Consent was secured from the institution to undertake the research. This involved working with the managers within the college to obtain the necessary permissions. The research involved working within the college and classrooms, but also having access to spend time with the students during the college day. Therefore the support of key teaching staff was also needed. They would have to facilitate the contact with the students; they were the 'gatekeepers'. The teachers at the college, who were known to me informally, were able to support my research and I had access to three 'whole groups' of students. They consisted of one Level Two Media group and one Level Three Media group (which were split into two separate classes, due to size).

There are ethical challenges faced when working with 'gatekeepers' who provide access to researcher participants, but none of the students were coerced into taking part and many were pleased to be able to take part (Miller & Bell, 2014). I was given access to classrooms, given time to meet with the students and I was able to conduct my research over several months.

I met with the students and staff to discuss any issues that arose during the research project. This was to ensure the smooth running of the project, but in part, to ensure that I was not overly-complicating what I was asking them to do, but also to ensure I wasn't 'infantilising' them and reinforcing my preconceived notions of what they understood (Alderson, 2005). Following the *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA, 2011) I established with the students the basis for the research project and my aspirations for their involvement. Some of participants included in this project were between the ages of 16-18; under the Children and Families Act (2014) this classifies them as children (until they are 18 years old). It was made clear to the students that as some were under 18 that they would need to get permission from their parents/carers as they were still classed as children under UK law (Masson, 2005). This was to ensure that I had 'informed consent' from those parents/carers and that they were happy for their son/daughter to be involved (Brooks et al, 2014).

The students, and their parents/carers, were all informed that they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the process, and that their involvement was entirely voluntary, they could decline to be involved if they wished. The students were each given a 'Participant's Information Sheet' (see Appendix 2) and a 'Consent Form' (see Appendix 3) for their parents/carers. The use of these documents allowed me to allay any fears that parents may have about why their son or daughter was involved in the research. Both of these measures ensured that I kept within ethical guidelines for working with children (SRA *Ethical Guidelines*, 2003).

As noted, none of the students were given incentives to take part in this research. There was no disadvantage to them academically if they did not take part, but also their responses, images and identities would be anonymous. This was an important aspect of the research design. During the research project the students may reveal aspects of college life which could be deemed as unpopular or controversial by college staff. During my initial meetings with the students we discussed the issue of total anonymity and they were subsequently more confident in speaking when the conditions of the protection of their identities was explained. Anonymisation when working within the field of qualitative research is often a pre-condition, particularly when working with children (Burles & Thomas, 2014; Mauthner, 2014)

During the photo-elicitation research period the students were asked to take images of what represented student voice to them. This could mean that they chose to take images which may render them, or their peers who were also participating, as identifiable. During the first meetings with the students and staff consideration was given as to what images they could take. Whilst they were given freedom to take images that they wanted to it was made clear, both from the staff at the college, and me, that facial images of other students, outside of the research participants, were not to be taken.

Allen (2015) discusses the dilemma of the anonymisation process whilst students gather images for research, as it can safeguard participants, and other children/young people, but can be seen to 'corrode foundations of participant agency'. Although this may appear restrictive, it was a matter of importance in both this research project, and others of a similar nature (Wang & Redwood Jones, 2001). The 57 students that took part in the auto-driven photo elicitation element of this research project were studying on BTEC Media courses so were aware of the nature of taking images of others without consent, as their course content includes advise in relation to this issue: '*releases and permits for filming in public/confidentiality, anonymity and privacy where appropriate*' (Pearson, *BTEC Specification*, 2016).

A decision was made to pixilate the students' faces when publishing the final thesis. This would assist the students in maintaining their confidentiality (Te Riele & Baker, 2014). The debate about whether or not making research public when it concerns students in educational institutions is an ethical one and is a wide ranging discussion. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2007) consider the appropriateness of the publishing of material which may negatively impact on the students who were part of any research. The 'messiness' of this issue cannot be ignored, but with suitable anonymisation of the data and the related images, I feel that the use of the students' images can be justified. The students in this research were talking from their perspective, about their experiences; they were not seeking to harm any other staff members, or the institution.

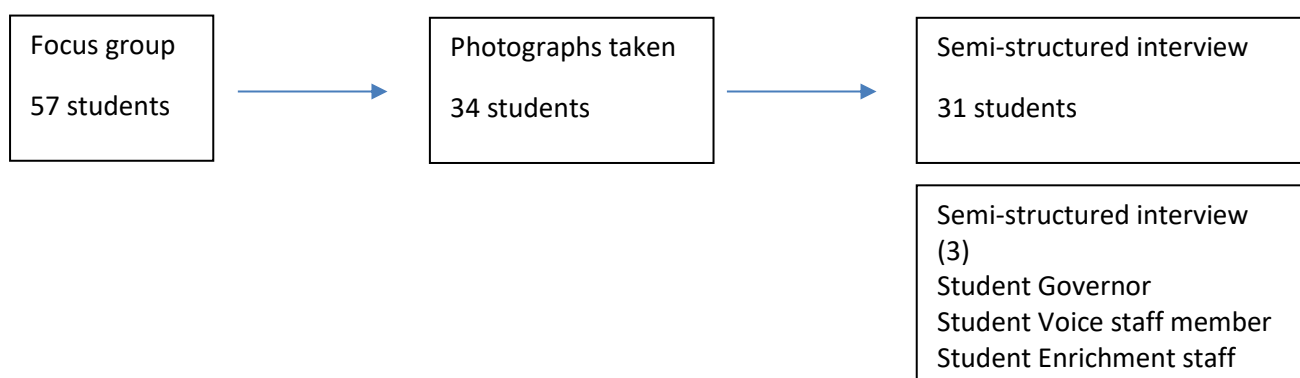
3.8 Data collection process

At the start of my research project all the participants (57 students, one Student Governor, one Student Voice staff member and one Student Enrichment staff member) were given the choice as to

whether or not they wanted to be involved, it was optional. Some of the participants took part in all of the activities; others chose to take part in only some. The 57 students Level Two and Level Three media students were able to take part in the focus groups, semi-structured interviews and auto-driven photo elicitation methods.

There were eleven focus groups held in the first phase of the research process, this was across all of the 57 students involved on the Level Two and Level Three media courses (see Figure Six below). In each of the eleven focus groups the participant numbers ranged from four to six students. The Student Governor, Student Voice staff member and Student Enrichment staff member took part in the semi-structured interviews only. The Student Voice staff member and Student Enrichment staff member were employed by the college, so were members of staff, the Governor role was voluntary.

Figure Six: Outline of student involvement in all research elements



The focus groups that were initially held involved all of the students that agreed to participate in the research process. As has been previously stated the student's involvement was voluntary and there was no compulsion for them to take part, however their contribution was extremely beneficial to the overall project. The focus groups were to 'stimulate discussion and thereby understand (through subsequent analysis) the meanings and norms which underlie those group answers' (Bloor et al, 2001: 42). As Bloor indicates focus groups allow for a multiplicity of views and voices. All students in the focus groups contributed towards the discussions and in that respect were distinctive voices.

However, although the students that formed the focus groups undoubtedly gave a valuable insight into the 'inner workings' of student voice practice at the college it was the students who took part in the subsequent elements of the research process who were perhaps more committed to the research project and those prepared to 'fully' share their voice. The thirty-one students who

completed all of the research tasks were able to provide a greater depth of understanding, and therefore data, which will support the findings of this research project.

Although this research project was designed to include all participants within the Level Two and Three media courses, and to seek their opinions and views in different ways, it cannot claim to speak for all of those who studied at the college. The research was conducted with a situated participant group.

The research methods were designed to put the participants at ease, but they also allowed the students to talk with 'greater candour' and it was a useful method for 'getting to' students who were harder to reach, or 'potentially recalcitrant' (Barbour, 2011). The fact that all of my participants studied together allowed them to feel some level of comfort with each other, and some level of confidence in being with a familiar cohort, and also not feeling 'singled-out' for the research.

Each of the focus group sessions were audio recorded. Consideration was given to differing methods of recording, such as video recording and taking handwritten notes. A key aim was to ensure that the participants felt as relaxed as possible, so that the conversation could flow, and using video would not have provided any additional benefits as it was their opinions that I wanted to hear. The advantage of audio recordings was that I was able to be detailed and accurate with the transcription process. Potter & Shaw (2018: 189) discuss the nature of data collection during naturalistic inquiry and the issues surrounding 'reactivity'. This is the possible effect of individuals and groups being recorded and the implications that this can have on the participants. Potter & Shaw highlight the issues that this can have on participant's behaviour and the possibility of them becoming 'less natural' and 'self-conscious.' They argue that the effects of reactivity can be minimised by using compact and silent recording devices. My research project used a small audio recording device which was unobtrusive, although the participants were aware that they were being recorded.

Whilst conducting research and collecting data with children and young people, there is a need to be sensitive to their needs (Punch, 2002). This means that there needs to be an awareness of the possible impact of their involvement within the research and also efforts have to be made to try and

allay any apprehension they may have about taking part in formal research. Liamputtong (2007) discusses the issues that arise when participants are placed in a position, before or during the research process, which may make them vulnerable, particularly those who are disenfranchised or subordinate. Due care needed to be taken with the participants during my research as, at times, they did question whether or not the teachers or managers at their college would be able to identify them. Reassurance about the anonymity and confidentiality was given, whenever necessary, and I reminded the students they only had to discuss the aspects of their college life with which they were comfortable sharing.

After I had conducted the focus groups I then returned to the college at a later pre-arranged date, to start the next phase, which was for the students to take an image/s related to the questions: *What is student voice? And what does it mean to me?* Felstead et al (2004) discuss the 'idiosyncratic interpretation' of photo-elicitation research when the participants are given 'open-ended' instructions. The questions for my research project were designed so that the students could approach the subject in a literal, symbolic or metaphorical manner.

The participants were able to work individually or in pairs on the photo-elicitation task. In the initial research meetings with staff and students (and subsequently reinforced during the research phase), the participants and I discussed how the technical aspect (framing, lighting, composition), was to be left for the participants to decide, as was the context of the images they had chosen to take. Issues of technical ability and the practicalities of what to photograph are considered by other researchers in the field of participatory visual methods (Packard, 2008), but the technical elements of their images was largely immaterial to this research project. My aim was for the students to take images of what they saw as appropriate, within the confines of the ethical guidelines already considered. There was little concern with the 'quality' of the image from a technical perspective, rather the meaning of the image to them.

Within photographic based research there have been several studies carried out within different community groups which may have limited access to, or experience of, working with cameras (Castleden et al, 2008; Nykiforuk et al, 2011; Mahmooda et al, 2012). The research participants in my research project were all on an image based course (media) and had experience of using both video and still cameras. The students were offered the use of a digital stills camera but all

participants chose to use their own 'smartphone'. Most of the participants completed the photographic element of the research within a week of the task being set. I then arranged an interview time and date with each participant to discuss their image/s. From the initial 57 students involved in the focus groups 34 students took images for the photographic part of the research process.

During the second part of the data collection, after the images were taken, the students were then tasked with writing a short caption which they felt summarised their image. This took place before the semi-structured interview. Combining images and text, or captions, within photographic research, can help to support understanding of the images, as Chaplin (1994: 270) argues:

The caption further enhances this credibility-package, for it directs our attention to an item in that object world, while appearing to be neutral information of a different order from the photograph itself. Yet the image is given meaning by the caption while the caption draws on what is 'evident from' the image—in a mutually sustaining process of cross-reference. Finally, the verbal text creates distance between itself and this package of linked textual elements, by appearing to consist of yet another adjacent textual source.

The use of captions accompanying images with photographic research is also discussed within the context of photo-diaries and ethnographic photographic research (Pink, 2007). Although the examples cited by Pink are largely author based captions (Schwartz, 1993; Goldfine & Goldfine 2003), it raises interesting questions about the juxtaposing of images and text. The captions for my research project were designed to support what the students thought about their image and more importantly, what it represented to them. As Pink (2007: 136) states, 'photographs and written text cannot be expected to represent the same information in the same way.'

Using the words either collated during the research interviews, or created by the research participants, the placement of text and images together raises issues of 'text modality' as 'researchers move research findings into another level of description' (Richard & Lahman, 2015: 15). Within the context of student voice research in the UK, Woolhouse (2017: 5) also presents images and text together, with the participants' comments about the images placed side by side to 'record their responses' to the images. Within the context of this research the participants handwrote their caption after taking the image, and I have scanned both the image and the caption together, placing the students written words below that of the image they have taken.

After the collection of the images and the captions, the students and I convened for a semi-structured interview. This discussion was conducted with either the individual who took the image or in a pair, if this is what the participants preferred. Thirty-one students discussed their images after they had taken them. During the interviews we discussed what their images meant to them, and what they were trying to convey about how they felt. Some participants spoke in-depth about their images, others were more hesitant but they were able to offer insights that perhaps would not have been possible without the triangulation of all of the research methods used in this project.

3.9 Data analysis

The recording of the focus groups and semi-structured interviews led to over four hours of audio recordings which were then transcribed, verbatim, into written text. This led to 123 pages of transcript. The coding of the students' words was based around emerging codes that were apparent both during the research process, the transcription process, and the use of data analysis software, Nvivo. Although it could be considered an overwhelming task to transcribe the audio data, it allowed me to become an analyst of the data (Hepburn and Bolden, 2017).

As I was present during all of the research processes, I felt I had an excellent understanding of the subtle nuances that occurred during the discussions with the students. The recording of the data by a digital audio recorder, rather than by taking field notes, allowed me to avoid the limitations of trying to memorise the events, or making preconceptions about what was said. I was also able to go through the audio recordings to double check what was said, and by whom, to ensure there were no difficulties with participants having text falsely attributed to them (Poland, 2011). The use of an audio recording device, and my presence in all of the research processes, allowed me to understand the way that students spoke, including silences, emotions and the interactions between the participants (Arthur et al, 2014).

3.9.1 Coding process

The coding process, as Coffey & Atkinson (1996) note is so that a researcher can 'link different segments or instances in the data'. Blair (2015: 18) discusses different methods of coding data and states that a researcher is 'likely to start any activity from a certain viewpoint; whether we call this

"individual perspective", "practitioner insight", "experience", "common sense", "institutional guidance" or even "theory".' Although I could not deny my prior preconceptions and potential bias I sought to be as objective as much as possible. However, there does need to be acknowledgement of the 'lens' by which I am analysing the imagery, the reading of these images can only be to some degree impartial as my own life experiences and knowledge mean that I will not be able to bring absolute objectivity (Phillips & Bellinger, 2010).

The 'tension of coding' data can be problematic, as Sipe & Ghiso (2004: 482) state, because all researchers have to make a 'judgement call' on which data to include and which to leave out. This potentially could obscure other routes to analysis. Within the data collected for this research project there were tensions from within the student body about their course. The students raised concerns about the level of practical work in comparison to the academic work they were being asked to complete, which they described as 'essays and briefs'. Whilst I have not sought to exclude this data, as in some respects it does suggest issues with how they were 'listened to', I have been conscious not to become overwrought by the internal structures of their media courses. Although this element of contention was somewhat problematic and difficult, I did not ignore their comments but tried to incorporate the more challenging views (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004).

After the transcription process had ended I began the coding processes. Although traditionally a task completed by hand, this coding was completed using the software, Nvivo (Qualitative Data Analysis software, QDA). This reduction in the amount of manual tasks meant that I was able to order my data in a systematic manner (Al Yahmady & Alabri, 2013).

However, I was mindful during the coding process that my initial ideas were 'not set in stone' and I used the process to work through my ideas rather than being beholden to my original thoughts. I was also conscious that different passages of the text could have more than one code applied to them, and that codes may overlap at different points (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Savage (2000: 1496) discusses how the process of coding can be seen as a way of reducing data to enable the researcher to form a 'conceptual schema'. However, Savage also states that coding can

reduce data but also complicate it, 'to develop new questions and interpretative ideas.' It is this interpretation of data which allows the researcher to move from one discovery to another, coding is exploratory and heuristic (Saldana, 2016).

Using Strauss & Corbin's (1990, 12-14) model of coding helped in working through the data systematically; a summary of their process is:

1. Open coding: The interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically. Its purpose is to give the analyst new insights by breaking through standard ways of thinking about or interpreting phenomena reflected in the data.
2. Axial coding: Categories are related to their subcategories, and the relationships tested against data. To be verified (that is, regarded as increasingly plausible) a hypothesis must be indicated by the data over and over again.
3. Selective Coding. Selective coding is the process by which all categories are unified around a "core" category.

By using open coding I was able to 'open up' the data 'in order to uncover ideas and meanings it holds' (Benaquisto, 2012: 581). This resulted in nineteen emerging codes which were then clustered into themes. By then revisiting the data I was able to test whether my original coding was sufficient and that the issues the participants raised were spoken about in enough depth, to justify the codes I had applied.

By then grouping the codes together I was able to move to a position where I had themes that were distinct from each other. Bernard & Ryan (2010) discuss how the forming of 'theme discoveries' can stem from 'looking for repetitions, similarities and differences'. As I moved from the coding process to identifying themes I referred back to my original codes to enable me to 'refine and tighten up' the data so I could 'move to a higher level of conceptualization' (Taylor et al, 2015: 179).

An example of the coding and themes, within the context of the data analysis process, is below:

Figure Seven: Themes and coding excerpt	
Themes: 1.1 - Democracy in action; Theme: 2.1 – Student voice and its impact; Theme: 3.1 – Empowerment; Theme: 4.1 – Disenfranchised students	
Interviewer: okay, so how does the work, how do you think a student rep system should work, do you think...?	
Participant Fifteen: Be more confident, that's what (Participant thirty-three – student rep) is.	Theme 2.1, code 2.1.4
Participant Eighteen: He asks us what our problems are and that.	Theme 1.1, code 1.1.2, Theme 3.1, 3.1.2
Participant Twenty-One: And then he'll take that to the head of....	Theme 1.1, code 1.1.1
Participant Eighteen: But nothing goes further than that, but it's always seems we can tell him all the stuff but....	Theme 4.1, code 4.1.2
Participant Twenty-One: Like we've had meetings about it but nothing has ever been done.	Theme 4.1, code 4.1.2
Interviewer: So would you have a meeting as a whole class? Or would it be just sort of things you would tell him as you went along?	Theme: 2.1, code 2.1.5
Participant Fifteen: That's what _____ (staff member) did, and it didn't really help did it, what if you wanted to say something about someone but....	Theme 1.1, code 1.1.4
Participant Eighteen: We've had like one big class meeting, and the rest are like little ones or single people or the reps gone up, apart from that, that's it.	
Interviewer: So, I'm getting the sense that sometimes you feel like you say stuff but then it stops somewhere? Does it?	Theme 4.1, code 4.1.2
Participant Eighteen: Yeah it basically stops.	

3.9.2 Links between images and text

The analysis of data was collated over several weeks, so I constantly re-referred to the images that were taken by the students so that my coding, themes and analysis were concurrent with the data from audio transcript. The analysis of the images was completed in conjunction with what the students said before, and after, they had taken the photographs. In this respect, it was the intention to look beyond the images themselves, at the 'lifeworlds' of the students, as Hodgetts et al (2007: 264) state when discussing photographic research:

It is our contention that to understand photographs provided by participants, we must contemplate the scenes, events, and relationships that lie beyond the frame, and even look to photographs that were never taken.

When seeking to marry the image and the other texts, it is important to state that the perceived 'quality' of the photos in an aesthetic sense, was not the primary aim. The students took photographs, in most instances, within the educational institution (i.e. the college). This was their daily life experience, in that environment. My aim when analysing the images was to look 'through', 'at' and 'behind' the image (Wright, 1999).

The interweaving of the text and the images is an important part of research in this field. Words and images contextualise each other (Pink, 2007). However, there is not one 'truth' that can be established by this analysis. There needs to be context given to who took the images (wide variety of students), the 'situatedness' of the environment and the thoughts and feelings of the students who took the images. The images themselves, and the interpretation of them, are not fixed solely to my analysis (Banks, 2001). My selection of particular images for the presentation of this thesis, within the context of the themes that have developed during the coding process, means that a subjective decision has had to be taken of what to omit and what to include.

The images selected as part of this research project were analysed in accordance with the accompanying points that the students raised, and also the captions that they provided. This will be within the framework of my thematic analysis, which will form part of the findings. As I have commented, particularly in relation to the purposive sampling that formed this research project, the images are not so supposed to represent a wider student group, or another set of young people from other parts of the country, they cannot be described as 'representative' of other students studying in other institutions. I would suggest there is not one true meaning within these images, as Rose (2001: 98) suggests: 'there is also a strong anti-reflexive strain in certain sorts of semiology, particularly those that claim to delve beneath surface appearances to reveal the true meaning of images.'

3.9.3 Development of themes

Moving from the coding of the data to forming themes from the codes is an important step in qualitative analysis (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). Themes (or categories) enable the researcher to focus on the 'salient features' of the data and the codes are 'clustered' together so that patterns can emerge (Saldana, 2016).

The development of themes for this research project has been from an inductive approach; that is, to let the data from the students 'build the themes' that were analysed. This will then more accurately reflect the voice of the students. However, it should be acknowledged that there is an element of deductive thematic development as I cannot help but be influenced by my prior experiences, relevant literature in the field and my knowledge of the FE sector. These issues have all 'played a part' in my ability to select what are the most pertinent issues the students have raised. The blending of these two approaches, O'Neill Green (2008: 71) argues, allows the researcher to better 'interrogate the data.'

The identified themes have been used to summarise the cluster of the coding process and are used to illustrate the students' experiences in a coherent manner. The themes seek to exemplify the thoughts, and words of the students (Yeh & Inman, 2007). They are also seeking to inform the research questions and promote a better understanding of what the college practices are. The themes that have been generated from the codes aim to capture the 'spirit' of what has been said by the participants. The final analysis and use of themes will seek to typify the most significant content of both the text and images (Gibbs, 2007).

The comparative nature of the coding process has led to the development of themes for this research project; the themes seek to highlight both the positive and negative experiences of the students (Charmaz, 2000). The analysis will seek to compare, and contrast, remarks the students made about the college and also include their own individual situations and experiences. Some of the themes overlap each other and complement each other; others are distinct from each other. The data generated for this project shows that although the students are all studying at the same FEC they have differing views about their experience in the college. This could be argued as

contradictory, but at the foreground of this research project is the voices of the students, which are multifaceted and complex.

The codes and themes for this research project are:

Figure Eight – List of themes and codes
Theme: 1.1 - Democracy in action
1.1.1 - Democratic awareness
1.1.2 - Experience or involvement in Student Voice practice
1.1.3 - Lack of experience or involvement Student Voice practice
1.1.4 - Ineffectiveness
Theme: 2.1 – Student voice and its impact
2.1.1 - Strength of the systems
2.1.2 - Positive action from staff and students
2.1.3 - Hope
2.1.4 - Support from staff
2.1.5 - Understanding of the systems
2.1.6 - Desire to be involved
Theme: 3.1 - Empowerment
3.1.1 - Changes to their college lives
3.1.2 - Communication
3.1.3 - Good feedback
3.1.4 - Optimism for the future
3.1.5 - Powerlessness
Theme: 4.1 – Disenfranchised students
4.1.2 - Apathy
4.1.2 - Being ignored
4.1.3 - Frustration
4.1.4 - Restraints

3.9.4 Thematic analysis

The distinction made between positivist approaches to qualitative research, and more anti-positivist approaches, which is the position of this research project, is outlined by Guest et al (2012: 10):

Thematic analyses move beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes.

Braun & Clarke (2006) discuss how thematic analysis within the field of qualitative approaches is a 'foundational model' of practice. They also argue that thematic analysis can be seen as a 'poorly branded method' in comparison to other methods of analysis such as narrative analysis or content analysis. Thematic analysis also has to give recognition of the position, and values, of the researcher in the development of themes. The decisions made when identifying the themes to analyse require reflexivity to ensure that the themes have not been unduly influenced by the researcher's bias (Charmaz, 2006).

The constructivist approach of this research project will support the thematic analysis to look into the sociocultural contexts of the students' lives, to see what their account, what their viewpoint is, and how the situation looks from their vantage-point (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The situational context of this research is based in the FE sector in the UK. Braun and Clarke (2014: 2) argue that this type of approach is suited to applied research 'practice arenas' which may sit outside of the world of traditional academia.

In this research project there were a large number of participants (sixty), and I concur with Joffe and Yardley (2004) that thematic analysis is beneficial when identifying recurring features of qualitative data which involves multiple participants. However, Joffe & Yardley, citing Boyatzis (1998: 14) caution that:

The challenge to the qualitative researcher is to use thematic analysis to draw the richness of the themes from the raw information without reducing the insights to a trivial level for the sake of consistency of judgement.

3.10 Conclusion

The selected methodology for this research project is one of the areas of strength and also supports the generation of potential new knowledge in the field of student voice research in FE. By seeking to explore the connections between voice, listening and how the students express these views through auto-driven photo elicitation, supported by more traditional forms such as interviews and focus groups, should yield deeper insights into their college lives.

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However, from the extensive data I collected it was not possible to include everything that was said and all the images taken by the students. I had to make a reflexive judgement to include the salient points, those vignettes that best demonstrated what the themes of the data were. But I have not sought to exclude the more difficult issues raised by the students, which were brought up by them during the research phase as genuine matters of concern.

Chapter Four - Findings and discussion

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed how the data for this study was collected and analysed. This chapter will present the findings in relation to the study's research aim and questions. The participants, as noted, were recruited from one college. The research was conducted with different 'types' of participants who were involved in student voice at the college. They were from a variety of backgrounds, ages, gender and ethnicities.

The participants that took part in this research project all studied, or worked, at the large general FEC in Central England, which is housed in a relatively modern building. Although the building had many 'traditional classrooms' it also had shared 'open spaces' where many of the student extra-curricular activities took place. It was a college which had 'glazed entrance hallways and featuring carefully designed social spaces' as described by Smith (2017: 857).

The college was situated in a part of Central England which, similarly to other FECs, had several thousand students studying across a wide breadth of qualifications from entry level to higher education. The students were from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and the college itself served students from areas of social and economic disadvantage.

As outlined previously, the participants comprised of students on Level Two and Three Media courses. Sixteen of the participants were on a Level Two vocational course at the college; this course is the equivalent of studying for five GCSEs. The majority of these students will have been those who have not obtained sufficient GCSEs at school to enable them to access A Level provision. They are traditionally students who have had an 'unsuccessful' school career (Edward et al, 2007). Forty-one of the participants were Level Three students who have obtained the entry criteria to get onto a three A Level equivalent programme. In FECs this generally means they have obtained four to five GCSEs at Grade C, or above (or under new GCSE programmes, Grade 4 or above). This should include Mathematics or English, but many college students have to sit Mathematic or English GCSEs again if they have not been successful at school, which they complete alongside their 'main' course (Anderson & Peart, 2016). The final group of participants were a student and two members of staff who were involved in the student voice initiatives at the college, they were respectively: Student

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Enrichment staff member, Student Voice staff member and the Student Governor. They were all part of the student voice 'team'.

Results from the research project are discussed below, but it must be recognised that there are limitations to the data that can be shared in this thesis. My own place in the research analysis process should also be recognised. I was the instigator of the research, the sole researcher, the person responsible for data collection, transcription and coding. However, I believe this is a strength of the project, not a weakness. My relationship with the students was formed over the several months I worked with them, this allowed me to gain a deeper knowledge of their views. It allowed me to have a depth of understanding that others, perhaps, could not.

As well as the participants talking about their thoughts and feelings regarding student voice at their institution they were also encouraged to take images which would help underline how they felt. Similarly to the analysis of the auditory data, it is not possible to include all of the images that the participants took, however a selection will be presented to support the themes and linkages between the words they spoke, and the images have taken. The context of the location where the images were taken is also of importance. The majority of the images were taken on the college site (although not all), this allowed the students to take images which reflected their 'typical and/or meaningful orbit' (Croghan et al, 2008). It was spaces that were known to them and they took the images in their own 'free time' away from adult observation and instruction.

When discussing visual analysis, particularly in relation to visual anthropology Collier (2004:35) argues that:

When we use the camera to make a visual record we make choices influenced by our identities and intentions, choices that are also affected by our relationship with the subject. People are rarely simply the passive subjects commonly assumed in much scholarly discussion; they too, participate directly, not infrequently manipulating it for their own ends.

It should also be recognised that the images were all taken by the students, independently of the researcher, but that the research process itself is not purely an authentic representation of the voice of the students. The students were tasked with taking the images based around a subject matter

that I 'set' for them. Similarly with other photo-elicitation projects that have involved students, the images are a product 'of the task set and how this was framed' (Cremin et al, 2011).

Within this analysis of the findings and the accompanying discussion, it should be acknowledged that the participants were volunteering to take part in this project. Their frustration at some of the institutional ineffectiveness is borne out in some of the images they took. Conversely some participants felt very positive about how they were 'listened' to at the institution, and took images which reflected these views. Other participants took more abstract images, which they were able to discuss; others were happy to participate and take images but did not want to talk about them any further. Some participants took part in all of the research activities, others only in some. Some spoke very little, but used their images to convey how they were feeling. These differing stances, and sometimes 'disjointed' responses, underlines the very nature of student voice, and empowering young people. Their views and their reactions change and may, at times, appear to contradict each other at different points of the research project.

As this research is based on the premise of listening to the views of students, there is extensive use of both the images they took and the words that they spoke. This is to put the students at the forefront of the research, it is their views that drive the research, or as Oerlemans and Vidovich (2005: 369) maintain, the aim is to 'give students direct and 'unadulterated' voice.'

In addition to the premise, and ethos, of this research which is to put the students' voices at the heart of the project, the use of the conceptual framework and the application of Bourdieu's theories (as outlined in Chapter Two, p51) will also extended through this chapter.

4.2 Research question 1: How are student voice initiatives discursively framed and socially practiced within a Further Education College in Central England?

Within the first part of the data collection the students were all asked a series of questions about their experiences at college. These questions were based around their participation with student voice initiatives and other activities, such as extra-curricular activities that the college provided for them. These types of initiatives and activities have links to informal learning opportunities and opportunities for students to develop their agency. Vadeboncoeur (2006) argues that this form of

learning opportunity can build relationships, assert identities and enable students to work in collaboration with others, in other words a chance to build their student agency. Jeffs and Smith (1990: 9) maintain that within these activities there is the opportunity for 'transforming perspectives', with a focus on collaborative working.

4.2.1 Democracy in action

From the interviews with the three members of the student enrichment 'team', it was clear that there were a significant amount of activities that the students could be involved in if they so wished. The institution had clearly put in structures, systems and 'ways' of involving students, as the Student Enrichment staff member stated:

Typically that involves activities that students can get involved in outside of the classroom, be that sporting activities, volunteering, student voice, awareness through cultural, religious, charitable, you know, anything that would raise students' awareness about life skills, being more involved in their community, being more involved in democracy.

The students were aware of the different activities that they could become involved in within the college. They discussed clubs such as the 'Pride Club' for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) students, enrichment activities such as an organised trip to Paris or the Harry Potter studio tour that had taken place. Students also mentioned other activities available to them, such as sports teams (the football team and basketball team), guitar club, (computer) gaming club, women's self-defence classes, and promotions from corporate organisations.

Participant Forty-Nine: My two friends they joined the women's self-defence something, they quite enjoyed it, so I think if there was more things like that not just for women but for like boys as well, I think that would be a good idea.

Participant Three: I know it [the college] has extra curriculum stuff to go to like the sports stuff, has the things to do in the area, like the canteen during lunch times, and stuff like that.

The overwhelming majority of the students did not get involved in any activities or initiatives that the college 'put on' for them. The discourse appeared to be one of indifference, or of not wanting to get involved:

Participant Thirty-Eight: I'm just not really interested to be honest, what's college is college; you know I'm just not really interested in doing more college stuff to be honest.

Participant Twenty-Five: Too lazy to be honest.

Participant One: I'm always too busy doing other things.

Participant Six: Yeah, it's either I'm too busy or I'll be honest, I don't really know about it.

There appeared to be an inclination to disassociate from the range of activities that the college provided and a desire not to be involved in something that was seen as 'led' by the institution. The opportunity to take part in informal learning and other opportunities, within the confines of the institution, was at best poorly attended, at worst almost entirely ignored by the majority of the participants in this research project. Many of the participating students did not appear to see extra-curricular activities as enjoyable or a means of enhancing their time at college. Rather they saw the events as set within the confines of the college and appeared to feel that, in general, they could take part in such activities outside of college, if they so wished.

Their argument was that informal learning opportunities were somehow 'over and above' their time spent in the college:

Participant Twenty-one: The course is like draining; I don't think anyone had got time to do it.

Participant Thirty-Eight: Why they don't [get involved]?: Probably cause not a lot of people want to go, and if someone really wants to do something they'll just do it themselves rather than go to a club. It's like there is a guitar club, but I'd rather not go, I'd rather just go home and play guitar.

Participant Thirty-Nine: College gives them so much [of a] headache they just want to get out of college; they don't want to stay.

Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) explore the notions of agency that young people feel when in education. Their research demonstrates how young people define their agency in an institutional setting as 'not in what you do but in the fact you choose to do it'. The well-meaning institutional

activities that were available for the students were largely ignored, as the students valued their own time, where they set the agenda, for activities they wished to pursue. This is in contrast to the 'adult managed spaces', as described by Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016: 33), institutional organised activities, where the agenda was set, and largely overseen, by agents (adults) of the very institution that they were, seemingly, trying to free themselves from.

Smith (2008) positions the field of informal learning as having less emphasis on prescribed curriculum or outcomes, and teachers leading the learning, than formal learning spaces. The offer from the college to 'get involved' was present, but the linkages and processes to make that work seemed to be failing. Some students spoke of why they did not partake in any of the informal learning opportunities:

Participant Thirty-Seven: Yeah I don't think the college promotes it very well, like if someone came round, may be to the classes and said oh, we have this club and that club and it's at this time then maybe people would actually go to them.

Participant Fifty-Seven: I think, we were sort of told about the clubs when we first started and one of the things and if you're interested I suppose you'd be, oh that sounds good I'll go seek that, but if you're not it's easy for you to just ignore it so...

Participant Twenty-one: I don't think teachers come around enough to express what they're clubs are like; I don't think anyone's came round and talked about it apart from our own tutors.

Participant Twenty-Eight: I don't see passion.

Participant Eighteen: At the start of the year they'd go over it briefly but after that you don't really hear of it.

Jeffs and Smith (2011) suggest that opportunities for informal education can enrich a student's life experiences. They also make links between these types of experiences and Dewey's notions of emancipation and democracy. There is clearly value in the students undertaking extra-curricular activities, but the participants that were part of this research project did not see the importance. The opportunity for students to engage with informal learning opportunities can be seen as a chance to build cultural capital and extend life experiences. It may be that the students who were disengaged from this type of activity at the college did not have the understanding of how these

informal opportunities may develop their cultural capital, as they were 'incongruent with the culture' (Clauseen et al, 2013: 59) of additional educational opportunities.

The students were, mostly, aware of the opportunities available to them at the college to be part of the wider college community, outside of their course work. Aside from the informal learning opportunities outlined above, the college had various systems designed to listen to the voice of the students. These were: online surveys; student voice conference; student representative training; a student representative system; Pro-Portal (student record system); student governors as members of the college governors group; the student voice executive committee; and some students were also given opportunity to sit on the interview panels for senior leadership roles.

These systems are often replicated across similar educational institutions across the country. One of the most common is the student representative system (often referred to as a 'student rep' group, or student council). This is often seen as one of the central elements of harnessing student voice in large organisations (Hall, 2017). Student representative groups can be formed in many different ways; Bragg (2010: 44) discusses how these types of systems can replicate democratic processes in our larger society. Bragg states that these: 'traditional forms of representation echo adult forms of election, nomination and representation.' In many respects they can be seen, at least by well-intended college leaders and management, as models of democratic practice. The student representative process at the college was relatively straight-forward.

In the FEC in which the research project was undertaken the student representative process began during the induction period, in September. Students would receive a visit from a member of staff, perhaps during a tutorial, who talked to them about the student representative system and what was involved. The teacher or tutor for each group asks for volunteers, or students would be nominated after an 'election'. Some students interested in the role would deliver a presentation, in a bid to be elected. Once elected this student would then become the 'rep' for the group. There should be two students per class who would feedback the comments from their peers, to then contribute to whole college meetings:

Student Enrichment staff member: We have maximum engagement with students in our student voice, because there is a representative structure here at the college

whereby each nominates a rep and therefore it's a process where many students are involved in to the extent that we have 300 reps in the college each year, and they then engage in discussions in their class.

The students that became elected as 'student reps' then receive formal training in how they may best engage with their peers, how they can organise themselves and how the college is structured. One of the participants was a former class representative; he described the student representative training:

Participant Thirty-One: Yeah it was alright, I just chatted to others, and we missed a day at college for, like, a whole day thing, and they just told us about different things to like tell everyone else and like any problems anyone had and all the changes going on in the college so we can then tell other people in our class what was going on.

The student representatives are responsible for 'gathering' the voice of their peers and collecting information or feedback that is pertinent to the students they represent. The student representatives attend larger meetings, which involve students from across all the different departments within the college. The student representative's feedback the views of their groups to the managers, which would, in theory, enable the young people's voices to be heard, and their issues/requests to be acted on.

Some students spoke of how this democratic method was working, and how they felt about the student representative system:

Participant Fifty-Seven: I did IT [Information Technology] last year and they did the same thing, they do it in each subject where you elect someone, they go to meetings, talk about things they want to change or keep the same, things they are concerned about and last year they actually changed part of the timetable cause it was such a big problem and talking to the teachers they actually got it changed which was quite a good thing.

Participant Twenty-Six: But it's nice to know someone is there to listen, whether they do something about it or not, it would be better if they did, but the fact that they're like, if you want to say anything then we've got student rep, you've got other people to speak to.

Conversely, other students' response to the validity, and strength of the system, was mixed. For many students who took part in the focus groups they had little, or no opinion, of the student representative system at all:

Participant Thirty-Eight: I'd completely forgotten about it until you mentioned it earlier.

Participant Three: Kinda forgot it existed if I'm honest.

Participant Forty-Nine: To be honest I've heard that there are things but obviously, it's not like, you don't see things around or you don't know what's going on so, they need to advertise it. I mean I'm in the council, what do you call it? Whatever you call it and we have spoke about it before but they haven't done nothing so...

Some students took images of the way in which they felt about the student representative system. The image below was taken by a participant, who was a student representative for their group:

Figure Nine - Participant Thirty Four Image and caption



Shows how student rep can elevate you but also make one feel closed in due to restrictions on authority and actions

This student held some conflicting views about their role. They clearly knew the student representative system and were working with their peers to try and gather feedback:

Participant Thirty Four: Mainly my job is collecting complaints and then going to talk to [member of staff] and [member of staff] on how to address them, we attend an annual or bi-monthly meeting with like the different head of colleges, heads of like catering, heads of cleaning, different people who have got different responsibilities and I tell them about complaints or concerns that my classmates have had.

This student had done as the college had asked and held meetings with their peers, but then was frustrated with what occurred afterwards:

Participant Thirty Four: The first week of me being student rep I collected data from the class, it was like changes to the price of food in the canteen, changes to some staff, changing to like lesson plans, and I put them towards the actual heads of lesson planning, the cafeteria staffing et cetera., it was actually like the board of directors or something. All the student reps from different courses, met them all, and even then when it was said in front of the direct people there was no response, no concrete evidence, nothing really back. It was, yeah cool, move on.

It is of crucial importance that if the student voice system is to have any real meaning, and students can see democracy in action, the requests from the student representatives need to be acted upon. Roberts and Nash (2009) maintain that simply asking students to comment on their educational experiences, and then making them 'passive recipients', leads students to feel marginalised and ignored. The issues that are important to the students should be as important to the college staff. It has been established in previous studies (Stafford et al, 2003) that if young people are to be consulted, then the adults need to be ready to respond. Groll et al (2018: 31) summarise Bourdieu and Passeron's (2013) notion stating that 'education is instrumental in perpetuating a stratification of individuals in a way that helps to replicate social inequality'. It could be argued that the (students' perceived) lack of action by the staff at the college is an example of how the students are 'put in their' place and this reflects the true power relations at the college.

The students held some contradictory viewpoints; some felt the system was working well, but a larger majority felt that, in their view, there were structural problems with the system. The main area of contention was around how the information was fed to the student representatives. Students felt that they were not consulted, at times, and wondered, for example, how the college staff hear the 'voice' of the groups they represented if they did not meet to discuss issues. Secondly, concerns were raised about how the 'reps' then fed back anything they had heard from the larger

departmental meetings, with a general feeling that they did not do this well. Some students also felt that their comments and suggestions were ignored, or there was a lack of change after they had given their feedback to their student representative:

Participant Three: There just needs to be a time to have a sit down with the class and the rep, as [Participant Eleven] said the only time to catch them is during the lesson, and that's interrupting them in a lesson and us. There is not a cut set time for....

Participant Twenty-Six: Should be [in] tutorial or something.

Participant Forty: Like the whole of the class doesn't really get involved its more just he attends the meetings and that's it.

Participant Twenty-Three: He doesn't really tell us about it anymore.

The lack of coherent feedback for the students was often source of great frustration. Trowler (2010: 50) discusses the issue in student voice initiatives where there is 'the perennial problem of 'closing the feedback loop'.' The majority of students saw that there were systems in place but the lack of feedback meant that some had given up trying to share their opinions as they felt that nothing ever changed:

Participant Fifty-Three: Like everybody said, it's not really... we don't really get feedback of what's going on with it, we don't know if anything, I don't know if they've had meetings, I know there was a sign on the door a couple of days ago but I don't know of anything that happens in these meetings.

Participant Two: There were some issues raised that we gave to the student rep but nothing was really done about it.

Participant Forty-Eight: In tutorial we've been putting stuff like our feedback about class time, stuff like that, and lessons, but then when you submit it you don't hear any feedback whatsoever about it so it just feels like you've done it for no reason.

If institutional initiatives to drive democratic decision-making from the students are to succeed then it needs to start from the frameworks that have been put in place by the college. The student voice leaders felt that:

Student Voice staff member: There is already a lot of systems put in place that students can take up and, you know, voice their concerns but not a lot of students know about them, because it's kind of like through induction and it's forgotten about but if we kind of like force it in their faces a bit more, if that makes sense, so we've had like hoodies done and gone to student council and presented ourselves and stuff, it's just been difficult this year because it is the first year it's ran. So I think, for me, it's about advertising what's available for students.

Student Governor: I personally think we need more interact[ion] towards the students themselves, cause as governors we have interaction with senior members of staff, and the governors and other people, but we're not very interactive, well we are interactive with the students because we obviously study here, but more with the student rep meetings because we're not invited to those.

As previously discussed other systems to engage students in democratic processes are in place in this college. One such system is the use of the college on-line surveys. These are used across a range of educational institutions and can be good opportunities for colleges to gather feedback from students (Rudd et al, 2006). Surveys, or questionnaires, are also used by inspectorate organisations, such as Ofsted, to harness the views of students, parents and staff (Ofsted, 2018).

This model of student feedback can be a valuable tool for colleges, it allows all students to contribute and 'voice' their opinions, about a range of issues, within one forum. It also allows for anonymous and confidential comments to be shared. The surveys at the college were described by the Student Enrichment staff member:

And with regards to student voice activities, all students will be offered surveys for which they can feed into as well. They are typically online surveys that take place twice a year as well.... it's an electronic offer so it may be emailed or it may be that they access it via the college's intranet system on Moodle, so their tutors may specifically discuss and get the class to do it.

During the discussions with the students they were quite indifferent to this opportunity to confidentially voice their opinions. Many students had completed the surveys but could not remember which questions they answered. Others said they had not completed any surveys at all, the survey system, which assumedly was a way of gathering a range of definitive views, seemed limited in its ability to engage the students:

Participant Thirty-Five: Yeah we have had one of those on the computer, on survey monkey, we got it sent to us via our phones and we just filled it in from there.

Interviewer: And what sort of thing did those questions ask you? Can you remember?

Participant Thirty-One: I don't remember, it was erm, I don't think we had to fill it out so I don't think many people did.

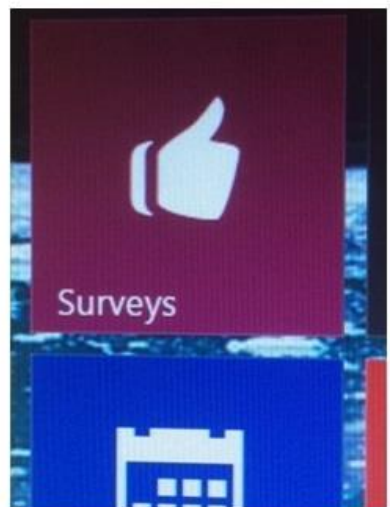
Participant Thirteen: Yeah I filled it in, I can't remember the questions.

Participant Thirty-Three: I wish they were more frequent, and actually acted on as well, I like a good survey.

Participant Four: Well obviously [if] we could we see if their actually listening to what impact, otherwise there would be not point filling it out and answering their questions.

One student took a photograph which they felt summarised their thoughts on the student survey.

Figure Ten - Participant Twenty-Two Image and caption



my voice being heard

The image above, and the caption, provided by the student initially seemed quite positive, however when we discussed the photograph in more detail and Participant Twenty-Two was asked about what their image represented, they stated:

Participant Twenty-Two: Well it comes from the college website Moodle and it's just a photo of a thumb up and like the bottom says surveys, it's like a link that you click on the website.

Interviewer: Okay and how does this photograph relate to how you feel about student voice at this college?

Participant Twenty-Two: Because, well regularly there is, in our tutorial, our tutor does tell us to do surveys and stuff on how we feel, and stuff, and that's just obviously like I said a link that we have to go on, however my opinion I think the total opposite is done because your voice ain't heard, on this course especially.

Blanket surveys across large organisations can be problematic, but within educational institutions, surveys or evaluations, about a wide range of issues can be seen as an economically viable way of gathering the students' voices. The response rates, as seen in this research project, can be variable, although these types of student evaluations of courses are used extensively in FECs. Surveys are also used and are prevalent in other levels of education, such as higher education (Martin et al, 2013). Consideration needs to be given to what the function is of these types of surveys, which it could be argued, allow for passive engagement from the students. Many of the judgements made are summative in nature and allow the educational institution to amass quantitative data. They can be demonstrable evidence that the institution has listened to its students, but to what ends? Blair and Noel (2014: 881) link these types of student feedback to notions of student voice:

In asking students to complete an evaluation, there is an implicit understanding that their opinions matter and that the system wants to hear their voice – the task here is for the system to show that student evaluations are important at the institutional level, and to give power to the student voice through addressing such feedback.

However, Blair and Noel argue that whilst this might be deemed to be a valuable way of harnessing the voice of many students, Fielding and McGregor (2005) note that these surveys or questionnaires are not without their issues. This was reflected by the students' concerns within this research project. Fielding and McGregor maintain that this type of student voice initiative can amount to: 'little more than the dreary sameness of management-inspired questionnaires about matters of little real consequence to the relatively small proportion of students who chose to return them' (9).

Concerns about the performative nature of many aspects of the contemporary FE sector is shared by Groll et al (2018: 33) who observe that inspectorate regimes, such as Ofsted (who often ask for evidence such as student surveys) has:

‘led to colleges recording and evaluating absolutely everything, a habit which takes time away from teaching and learning and certainly increases the pressures on teachers....Ofsted’s unquestioned legitimacy as an assessor of further education means that when it comes to the judgements made during inspections, less prescription provides greater room for the arbitrariness that is the hallmark of Bourdieusian symbolic violence.’

It seems that there is a disconnect between the systems and opportunities that are in place to allow students to express their opinions and thoughts and the reality with which such opportunities are embraced or engaged in by the students themselves. This is compounded by a lack of belief by many of the students that any comments, suggestions or complaints will be acknowledged, discussed or acted upon.

4.3 Research question 2: How are the impacts of ‘giving voice’ to students manifested in pedagogical practice and how are these impacts understood by the different stakeholders?

The discussions during the research process enabled the participants to share their views about student voice practices at the college, how they felt about the impact of various systems of student voice available to them, and their opinions were about how things could be improved. The participants were able to give positive examples of how things had changed when they had voiced their opinions.

4.3.1 Student voice and its impact

The students voiced concerns about different aspects of their courses, and the college, that had personally affected them. Some of these issues were related to the curriculum, structural changes made to their course timetable, the teaching on their course and how they interacted with the staff at the college. The students appreciated staff that listened to them, and appeared to care about what they said and thought. As Rudduck & Flutter (2004: 16) state: ‘young people are more likely to commit themselves to learning in organisations that recognise their capabilities’.

Although the college had a range of methods of harnessing student voice, some of the students stated that it was the personal, 'face to face' interaction with the teaching staff, which helped them the most:

Participant Forty-Nine: Yeah, I think our tutors are very kinda, like, we can just talk to them, so that's a good thing, we feel very comfortable so we feel we can go and talk to any of our teachers, so I think that's a good thing.

FE teachers are often vocational specialists who have moved into the teaching profession. The recognition that for many students FE is a 'second chance' at education, leads many teachers in colleges to put their students first (Robson, 2006). Looking after the needs of the students, as opposed to managerial discourses, are often at the forefront of FE teachers' values (Smith & O'Leary, 2015). There can be, due to an increasing culture of performative business management within FECs, an issue of spending less time supporting and listening to students because of the requirement to complete the many administrative tasks that are part of a contemporary teachers day-to-day responsibilities. However, within this FEC several students stated that they felt supported by staff:

Participant Thirty: We've got a main tutor, it's supposed to be [staff member] but she's not here anymore, so it's [staff member] now and he sorts everything out and it actually seems like he listens to you.

Participant Thirty-Four: He cares about the course.

Participant Thirty: Yeah

Participant Thirty-Four: Him and [staff member] are the only people who actually care about the course.

Participant Thirty: He's not even our actual tutor but it seems he cares way more.

Addo (2018: 24) shares the ethos that many teachers in FE hold, namely that of wanting students to develop in FE settings, arguing that FE teachers can build students cultural capital by supporting 'them in developing their personal potential, go against the status quo and be academically successful; in turn reducing the life-limiting effects on a student who begins in education with a lower cultural capital.'

The loyalty that FE teachers have for their students can conflict with the managerial requirements of FECs which are increasingly run as a business; FE managers increasingly need to ‘deliver the ‘three “Es” of economy, efficiency and effectiveness’ (Randle and Brady, 1997: 125). However, caring, having empathy and being sensitive to the needs of students are an integral part of being a FE teacher (Robson and Bailey, 2009). This support enables students to feel listened to and to feel more confident about sharing their opinions and having a voice, that will be heard. During this research project it appeared that the students felt most supported during tutorial lessons:

Participant Eighteen: I think during tutorial, like, yeah because everyone is in there, tutorials [are] not really a high intensity lesson and it’s more of a chilled out [time], so you can get your ideas across and you’re not stressed or whatever. I think then because like, its [staff member], [staff member] does it as well, so it can like spark ideas of each other and stuff, I think that’s probably the best.

Tutorials in FECs can be used for a range of different means, but it is recognised as a way in which students ‘get to talk’, and share their ‘voice’, with the teaching staff on an individual or group basis. With this knowledge of the students in their cohort, teachers can support students who have difficult personal circumstances and provide pastoral support to students (Davies, 2001). Student voice systems are often created by FE senior management teams but it appears that the most support that the students receive is during tutorials, when they are not in formal lessons. This can be a good opportunity for students to discuss what is concerning them and the students saw this as a key strength of their college:

Participant Fifty-Seven: I will say, our tutor is quite good at, like, if you’ve got an issue you can go to her and nine times out of ten she will make the time to talk to you about it.

Participant Twenty: I’m not dissing any of the other tutors but [staff member] will [listen], he’s our personal tutor so he has to kind of like take it into serious consideration, like what we’re saying.

There were differing views from the students about the systems the college had put into place for listening to them, but importantly several participants equated being ‘listened to’ and having a ‘voice’ to being content and happy at college. Noddings (2003) explores notions of student contention and argues that a student’s happiness within educational institutions can lead to them

flourishing in their future lives. An image taken by one the students depicted how they felt about being listened to at the college. When sharing their thoughts about the image they had taken, and the caption, the student (Participant Fifty) discussed their feelings about working hard to achieve their aims, and also added that they felt happy about the levels of support they had received at the college:

Figure Eleven -
Participant Fifty
Image and caption



"Work hard dream big."
show happiness and how i feel
about college ^{student} support ^{voice} /no

Other photographs taken by the students also underlined the contentedness they felt at the college, and how having a voice had led to them being happy with how they were listened to; this was also reflected in the image they took, and caption they wrote:

Figure Twelve -
Participant
Forty-Six Image
and caption



heard and happy
- happy about college and people
around me

Participant Forty-Six: Well it [the image] represents happiness and positiveness, yeah, that's how I feel about the college, like if I want to say something, I'm heard; heard and happy.

A student's well-being and feelings of empowerment from being given a voice can lead to an ability to build their personal agency and ability to build positive relationships (Rose et al, 2016). A student's agency can be built by interaction with other adults which enables them to engage in positive decision-making and by participating in their education community (McLaughlin, 2018). The students were able to analyse their thoughts, and drew parallels between feeling listened to and supported in the college, with having a 'voice', which in turn led to a feeling of happiness. Czerniawski et al (2009) argue that for productive student voice initiatives to work in educational institutions, a feeling of being valued is vital to a student's engagement. Engaging students with different educational opportunities, such as dialogical practices and informal learning opportunities can help students feel happier within their educational institutions (Smith, 2013).

The issues that are important to the students should draw the college staff's attention to the need for change. Thompson and Simmons (2013) note that there is a distinction between different types

of students studying in post-16 institutions, such as FECs and sixth forms. Students in sixth forms are commonly studying for A Level qualifications and generally come from more socially mobile, middle class family backgrounds. Students at FECs, similar to the students taking part in this research project, are generally studying for vocational qualifications, such as BTECs, which can attract working class students who may not have gained the necessary GCSE qualifications to study A Levels. Studying for these types of vocational qualifications may reproduce or reinforce social inequalities, as stated by Thompson and Simmons (2013). Also the students on these courses may have other issues to contend with, such as complex family backgrounds, part-time work commitments and the need to travel to college, and act independently of their families.

Groll et al (2018) point out that FE students can have had poor school experiences, leading them to think they are not academically able and that this 'can attach stigma to their home culture and backgrounds'. Some students attend FE colleges due to them being unable to 'get in' to sixth forms (perhaps due to their GCSE grades), which can create an 'us and them' cultural divide where students are aware of their '*sense of limits*, which inclines some people to maintain their rank and distance and others to know their place and be happy with what they are, to be what they have to be, thus depriving them of the very sense of deprivation.' (Bourdieu, 1991: 123, authors emphasis).

Many of the students in this research project were concerned about being able to attend lessons that ended later than the usual college day. Several of the students travelled some distance to attend the college from their home. Their timetable was an important part of their ability to effectively engage with the curriculum. The students had engaged with the departmental college staff about their timetable, as many felt it was difficult to attend the lessons at different times. They felt this was a good example of where they had raised concerns, and they had been addressed:

Participant Thirty-Eight: We did at the start of the year cause one of our lessons finished at six and loads of people couldn't get the bus home at six, so we had to complain and [staff member] sorted that out so we finished at five instead.

Participant Thirty-One: I have to work from 6.00pm till like 1.00am on a Wednesday and if we had the college time I wouldn't be able to do it, and, like, now how it is I have enough time to get home, get ready so it helps with stuff outside of college.

The students raised this issue with the staff at the college. The Level Three students collectively 'got together' and 'signed up' to ask for timetabling changes to their college day. The impact of this experience was positive for the students and an indication, to them, that change could occur if they expressed their concerns to their teachers. The students were not asking for extensive changes to the timetable, nor to run the college courses how they wanted, but this was evidence of recognising an underlying principle, that students are experts in their own lives (Walker and Logan, 2008).

The quality and consistency of the teaching practice on the course was also discussed by the students. As previously explored, the students were studying a vocational course, which is distinguished from A Level study, by having more practical elements to the components of the course content. This, coupled with study at a FEC, where the learning experience is differentiated from sixth forms, the learning takes the form of a more collaborative approach with industry experienced tutors (Fuller & McFadyen, 2012).

The students recounted how they had voiced concerns, and some disappointment, with certain elements of the course, and parts of the teaching within it. There was a strong feeling from the students that they should be completing practical work and less, theoretical, class based lessons:

Participant Twenty-Six: It's like getting dirty and stuff and like going out and having fun, cause that's how some people learn.....personally for me I prefer to see things, and go and do it, cause it's something to remember, but just sitting in a classroom writing when there is hardly and practical. It's kinda hard to, like, settle down.

Participant Eighteen: Pretty much the same, just practical, instead of just constant theory work, cause if we just constantly do theory work it feels like we're just doing all of this and then we are not getting actually experience, like, hands on, so lots of us made recommendations for more practical work.

For other students it was the nature of the curriculum that they wanted changed, the students had asked for changes, but it did not appear to have happened:

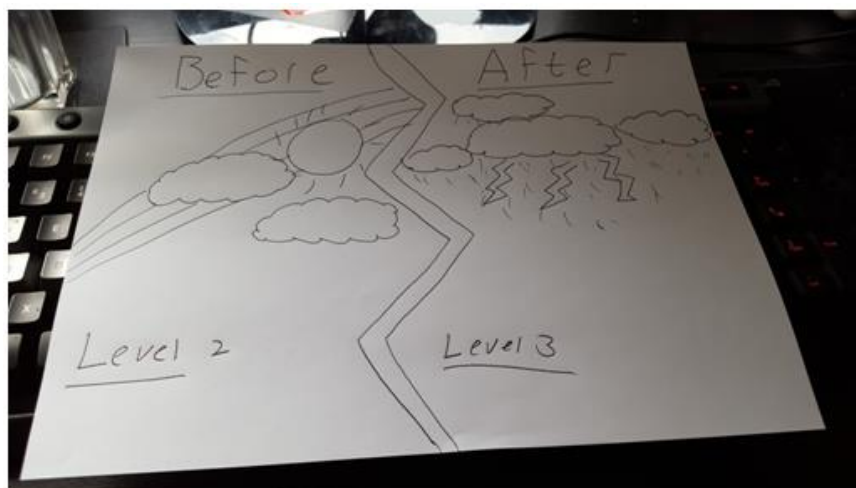
Participant Fifty-One: It was about more subjects, not subjects but like topics to be learnt as well, like media is for everyone, it could be for everyone. Like journalism we don't get much journalism options, even if it's just two lessons, three lessons just to learn the basics of it, we don't really get much, I don't know if that's because it's on the course itself.

Within FECs there is often the opportunity to progress from one course to the next, at a higher level. There have been concerns raised about progression on vocational courses, particularly in reference to moving onto higher education (Wolf, 2011). However students often progress from Level Two to Level Three vocational courses at FECs, such as the one that forms the part of this research project. This is often 'sold' to the students as a way of gaining A Level equivalent qualifications within the same institution. Some of students that had made the choice to move up to this next stage of qualification were dissatisfied. They had voiced concerns about the course content and academic level to the staff at the college:

Participant Fifty-Four: I'll always remember the first day [on the Level Two course], it was really black [good], introduce yourself and then get stuck into practical work. With this it was just like, they were banging out briefs, we got like five briefs in one day, it was just overwhelming so...

This student also drew an image, which he then photographed to summarise how he felt, this was coupled with a caption:

Figure Thirteen - Participant Fifty-Four Image and caption



(LS mins)
How good level 2
was compared
to level 3 now.

When discussing the image they took, Participant Fifty-Four, evaluated the how they distinguished between the two experiences in their college life when they shared their experiences on the Level

Two course, and then highlighted the difference for them now they have moved to the Level Three course:

Participant Fifty-Four: You've got on one side before, and on the other side, like, after. And on the before side its sunny, its positive, its meant to display like fun and how like good the course was, on the other side it's really depressing, it's raining its thundering, and that was Level Three. So you've got the really good side, the happy side which is Level Two and then you've got the Level Three side which is really, like, negative and bad.

Students experiences at college do change, and the step up from a GCSE level equivalent course, to an A Level equivalent course, can be daunting for students. Support for students, by staff, during this transition is vital to ensure they have the necessary skills to thrive at the next stage of study. Students that are unhappy on their courses can mean that they 'drop out', which has an adverse effect on the colleges funding, but most importantly on the student. There can be many reasons for students not to retain their place at college but concerns about the quality of the teaching on FE courses and student dissatisfaction about the levels of support they are receiving for progression are two key factors (Davies, 1999).

Some of the students recognised the inherent power structures that they perceived as being in place at the college, and that they best way to elicit change was to voice opinions to the management at the college:

Participant Eight: Well when it was me with the practical work I went to our head of department, I didn't see the tutors themselves being able to do much about it, more so the people that plan it out for our tutors. It's more so I tried to think of the person that was top of the hierarchy to go to.

The students were astute in recognising where they needed to go to gain responses to what they said, or concerns they had, but equally disappointed when what they said was not enacted upon. Fielding (2001: 101) describes some of the challenges facing students when trying to discuss what their concerns are with senior staff: 'who you talk to matters, and access to those who are able and willing to alter things in ways that step outside the tramlines of institutional hierarchy and habit too

often remains a matter of luck and particular circumstance.’ Within the context of student voice practice MacBeath et al (2010) discuss the conflicting issues of what the students desire to change, against what the appetite of the institution is to that change.

Within this research project it was found that the method that the students used to voice their concerns about the structure of the curriculum on their course was a form of frustration for some. The students had concerns about some of the teaching on their courses, which they had voiced to management at the college. The management at the college had then observed the teaching on the course, which was a positive step; however in spite of this the students felt this had not addressed their concerns:

Participant Fifteen: We spoke about what the teachers are teaching us, haven’t we, they didn’t really do anything they just watched the teachers do like a 30-minute presentation, that they, like, they had to be ready for, so they didn’t catch them off guard, they had to plan for it so it didn’t really work, like [staff member] said today, she thought everything was okay now, it’s not though.

Participant Six: They forget about it, our lessons didn’t make sense either, it was like the complaints that we made, it didn’t really, like, [make] sense for them to, like, show us the teachers teaching, it didn’t go with our complaints and what we were saying at all.

The management’s desire to change, or act on, the issues the students had raised may not have been palatable to them. Nelson (2014) states how traditionally students have been excluded from influencing decisions about teaching, this decision making power is with teachers and policy makers. In this instance, were the students’ voices given the appearance of being ‘acted on’ by management observations of teachers in class? Bragg & Manchester (2012: 5) discuss how learner-centred institutions can consult with students on pedagogical issues such as timings of classes and methods of learning which can form ‘meaningful learning, more egalitarian classroom relationships, and enhanced performance.’ However, as Bragg and Manchester illustrate, there is the inherent danger of student voice implementation moving from a position of authenticity to that of ‘vernacular ventriloquism’ (Clarke, 2010 cited in Bragg & Manchester, 2012), whereby the voice of the student affirms the managements pre-existing position.

Connolly & Healy (2004: 15) suggest that Bourdieu's notions of social class inequalities are maintained by people 'reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internationalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them.' The students' inability to affect any change could have been an 'ever decreasing circle', whereby students are able to voice concerns or make complaints, but arguably due to the power structures at the college, this was realistically not going to alter what happens in their day to day lives.

Other students' spoke of issues with elements of the curriculum, or aspects of the teaching which had made them feel frustrated. Brooker & Macdonald (1999) outline the issues with curriculum development in Governments and educational institutions, which are often linear, structured, and could be considered a 'top down' hierarchical approach. This linear structured approach is supposed to serve the students' interests, but generally the students' who study the curriculum are rarely consulted about their preferences; they remain marginalised and silent. The students who took part in this research project shared concerns about some of the teaching on their courses:

Participant Forty-Five: Yeah, you would enjoy it more if the teachers actually listened to what you were saying and if you needed help, for example my teacher when I ask her for help she tells me what to do but she doesn't help me so I have to ask for help off friends who are nearby, so I think teachers should listen, and the tutors, yeah, they should listen and help you if you need help and not just say ask someone else.

As can be seen, these students experience many ways of having a voice though interactions with staff. Some find this a more effective means of raising and discussing issues around teaching and learning, which leads to positive change. But, as with Research Question 1 above, there appears to be inconsistency and, although one-to-one interactions with key course staff seem to be recognised as beneficial communications channels by students, the consequences of such conversations seem to vary.

The quality of teaching in any educational institution should be of central importance, it is the reason for the existence of the school, college or university. Students' perceptions of different teachers, and the lessons they are taught, can fluctuate for a variety of reasons. The desire to seek 'good pedagogy' is complex and attempting to measure a teacher's effectiveness is fraught with issues of validity; quality teaching is multidimensional (Coe et al, 2014). The desire for quality

teaching should also be aligned with the effort that students put into their studies, and it should be recognised that student motivation, and participation, can be variable, and that learning is a 'two-way' process. However, student effort should be supported and 'scaffolded', particularly those with poor prior educational attainment. Motivation to learn, Hopland & Nyhus (2016) point out, comes not just from the individual student, but also from the interaction between students and teachers.

4.4 Research question 3: What kinds of empowerment are evident as a result of listening to student voice initiatives, on which terms are these expressed?

The students had strong views about how they might be able to change things at the college for the better. This may have been, in part at least, due to the nature of the research methods employed to actively 'listen' to them during this research project. Rose et al (2016: 121) state that the act of taking a photograph as part of a research project 'promotes empowerment among participants, as they are able to co-create meaning and knowledge about agency and wellbeing with the researchers through photography and discussion.' The students that took part in this research project had differing views about how they had been listened to, and to the reality of any real change taking place.

4.4.1 Empowerment

The communication between the students and the college staff was a key factor in how they felt about their college lives. When students felt communication was effective, and they felt listened to, many students felt positive, not only about the teaching staff but also the support staff at the college. Some of the students, earlier in the academic year, had expressed concerns about the teachers on their courses. The students felt they had not received a response to the concerns raised with the management of the college. As they had not received a response they sought out other college staff to speak to:

Participant Twenty-Five: Oh, yeah us three, we weren't getting listened to at all so we went to [staff member] and she just always like fobbed us off, just tells us, she'll sort it out it'll be fine and then we spoke to another teacher and then they said for us to go to student support, like enrichment, not enrichment, yeah, student services so we went down and spoke to some random woman and she just noted our main concerns and emailed back to [staff member] so....

Participant Sixteen: The only person who seemed to take notice was the woman we spoke to, the student support woman, she was really nice about it.

Non-teaching support staff at FECs form a large proportion of the workforce and are paid significantly less than teachers (Frontier Economics, 2018). Their roles can be multifaceted but they can be an essential link between academic staff and the students. Learner Support staff in FE can empower students, increase their independence and improve students' self-esteem (Warren, 2017). The students that spoke to support staff, felt listened to, and it appeared that these staff acted as a 'bridge' between students and the managers of the college. Tait (2000) discusses how support staff can provide an environment which supports students and helps enhance the students' self-esteem. In this instance the students felt the need to seek support from non-teaching staff, when their voices were not heard by those who were from their curriculum area.

Other students had also interacted with support staff in positive ways. The support staff were seen as separate from their 'day to day' college lives, but nevertheless they sought them out when they needed advice, guidance or support:

Participant Forty-Four: Small team of people [student support] who if you have trouble like, I think its financial or just troubles in general they'll just explain how it works, stuff like that.

Participant Forty-Five: I've spoke to a few people and the school nurse, they're nice, I mean college [nurse].

As the participants discussed their college lives, and the aspects which they felt worked well, and those that were more difficult for them, they shared examples of where, and how, they could be more empowered and have their views heard in different ways. As outlined previously in this chapter, there were many different ways in which the college sought to listen to the students. The college also provided an anonymous suggestion box, although some students were sceptical about its impact on listening to their voice:

Participant Fifty-Four: [There is] one downstairs, there is an actual box.

Interviewer: Oh okay, so if you had ideas you could put in that box?

Participant Fifty-Six: But again you don't know who is reading it, it's just in the same place, it's never been moved, there is nothing in there.

Participant Forty-Five: You don't know if anyone is doing anything about it, or just leaving it, or throwing it in the bin.

Participant Fifty-Six: Maybe they don't like the complaints that they get, cause it could be like a judging thing, they might think well that's not bad, if they think it's good, or we can't improve that, especially if you can't improve it at least the idea of trying to improve it rather than that can't happen.

The anonymity of the suggestion box appealed to another student as they felt it could provide feedback to teachers without the student being identified:

Participant Fifty-One: I think the tutors could have a box as well, you could put in any notes you want, what you didn't like about the lesson or what you did, but have them all mixed up so [staff member] can read, so, like, a dislike and a like, straight away, so it's not just a box full of angry stuff.

Participant Forty-Four: Even as [Participant Fifty-Three] says some people can be nervous in putting their point across so even if it's not one-to-one do it like an online forum or something, just like a drop box that you can just write your note down it can be anonymous as well just to improve [the college].

The use of anonymous feedback to teachers in regard to their teaching practice can have benefits. For example it can allow students who are not confident providing feedback in other forums to express themselves. The General Teaching Council for England (GTC, 2005) discuss the advantages of a 'post-box' system in classrooms as it does not privilege the more articulate students. This method, it is argued, is a way of receiving 'quick feedback' from students about their thoughts and experiences of their lessons.

Other students had different suggestions for improvements as to how the college might listen and interact with its students:

Participant Fifty-Three: Well my girlfriend's college they have a system where you, everyone has an online account, it's called Tiger, and it's good for communication with all parties, your teachers can communicate, but then you can communicate with the hierarchy of the college.

Participant Fifty-One: But the revision sessions that our English teacher does just the whole English department provide are really good, and I really thank them for that, I just think maths could do some as well, they have the learning zone drop ins, and maybe, like, media also do drop in coursework improvements et cetera, so that's really good.

Suggestions from students about their learning, and learning environment, are a key facet in students being able to work to improve their educational institution. Through her research on student participation, Raymond (2001), shares how profound changes can occur when staff value improvements suggested by students. However, as Pedder & McIntyre (2006) point out, it does not matter how good the students' ideas are, if the teaching staff are not responsive.

During the research project, an area much discussed by students was the communication between the students and the staff at the college. The students discussed communication with staff as a key way in which they could express their issues, 'face to face', often in informal settings, rather than using the formalised modes of student voice activities. When they felt supported and that staff were listening to them, they felt a sense of being involved, confident and that the staff at the college cared about them:

Participant Twenty-Nine: We've got a main tutor, it's supposed to be [staff member] but she's not here anymore, so it's [staff member] now and he sorts everything out and it actually seems like he listens to you.

Participant Thirty-Three: He cares about the course.

Participant Thirty: Yeah.

Participant Thirty-Three: Him and [staff member] are the only people who actually care about the course.

Participant Twenty-Nine: He's not even our actual tutor but it seems he cares way more.

Participant Twenty-Six: It's obvious, cause they show they care, they're always open to like, if you need to speak to anybody, if you want to have a chat, just tap our shoulder and we'll have a chat.

Participant Twenty-Four: I think it's just because he's on a more personal level with us as students, like he's very, I dunno, he can be strict when he needs to be, but you can also relate to him and talk to him like a person rather than a teacher.

Participant Eleven: He doesn't undermine us at all like, he treats us like adults.

An emotional connection with staff enables students to feel they are valued and their opinions count. Building strong positive relationships and treating students with respect is key to them being able to engage with teaching staff effectively (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). Students discussed communication and the feeling that staff cared about them many times during this research project. It was clear that there was a link between staff that appeared reliable and caring and the students feeling able to approach them and feel supported. Gay (2002: 109) argues that teachers need to adopt an approach where they are caring, stating that 'caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity'. It is by being cared for, and being listened to that students gain respect for their teachers. Gasser et al (2018) discuss the relationship between teacher-student and importance of the perception that students have about the care that they receive. Students respond better when they feel that they receive 'equal treatment' from teachers. During this research project it became clear that students were aware of which teachers, they felt, appeared to care more than others. Where students felt communication was not good, it led to feelings of frustration and of being ignored, or perhaps worse, becoming deflated when they shared their ideas and there was no further outcome.

Participant Thirty-Eight: I think communication would be more ideal as well, cause I feel like every time someone talks to someone about it then it just never gets passed on, or they say, oh talk to them about it later and they never do.

Participant Twenty-Two: There is a lack of communication on this course.

Participant Thirty Four: I don't think it's the lack of communication, I think it's the lack of listening, you can communicate all you want but the thing is they never take it on board, we're very fond of this course.

When there was poor communication between the teachers and the students, the students felt marginalised and isolated. However, many students spoke about how much they enjoyed college, and their time at the college, but how things could be better. Some students decide to go to a FEC because of the perceived nature of the learning environment; that there is a more equitable relationship between FE teachers and students. There is also a perception, shared by the students, that a FEC is more 'student-centred', as opposed to Sixth Form Colleges, which may have more of a didactic learning approach (Dziubinski, 2014).

Students and teachers often have different perceptions of how they communicate with each other. There can be a perception, as highlighted by Haggarty & Postlethwaite (2002) that students only communicate with teachers when they have something to complain about, something negative to say, or a problem to be solved. But what they say, in formal and informal settings is of paramount importance to their lives and ability to exert their agency. Czerniawski et al (2009) discuss Fielding's (2008) view of how there can be tension between an adult perception and that of a young person's perspectives, which can be seen as having limited legitimacy due to their youth and the perceived limits of their life experience. The students during this research project wanted to have voice, but at times felt that what they said was not taken seriously or enacted upon.

The students did discuss the importance, and validity, of communicating with staff at the college. Communication with students can happen both within the confines of the classroom but also at other times when students interact with teaching staff (Bainbridge Frymier, 2005). Whether students felt assertive enough to have a voice and to share their thoughts was varied within the research cohort, but many of the participants felt that it was important to speak up:

Participant Eighteen: Yeah, cause there is no point being on the course if you're, like, to sit idling by, uncomfortable, you got to speak up.

Participant Nine: Yeah cause it gets everyone involved then instead of people just sitting at the back and not doing anything.

Participant Forty-Four: Issues can't be heard if you've got it to yourself and you're not expressing it.

Bainbridge Frymier (2005) argues that students who are 'effective' in education institutions have a degree of assertiveness, so that they feel able to partake in activities such as classroom discussions and to ask questions. Some students, such as the participants above, felt it important to speak up rather than be 'passive'. However, consideration needs to be given to how students lacking in self-esteem can be encouraged to share their voice. Participants did speak of other ways in which they could communicate, which did not use direct face-to-face methods:

Participant Three: I think there is stuff on the college website, that you can go to and speak or tweet them on social media or stuff, they give you ways to contact them if you want to get in touch.

Clark (2004) discusses how verbal or linguistic modes of communication are habitually the methods in which adults feel most secure in using. This research project was designed for students, including several who had not previously spoken up, to share their views by taking photographs, as well as discussing their images. The visual methodology allowed them to 'make-meanings' which they controlled, and broke down any barriers which may become more apparent in more linguistic focused research (Malherbe et al, 2016). One of the participants took an image of a young person looking down, with a caption asking an open question.

Figure Fourteen -
Participant Thirty-
One Image and
caption



"Are we listened to?"

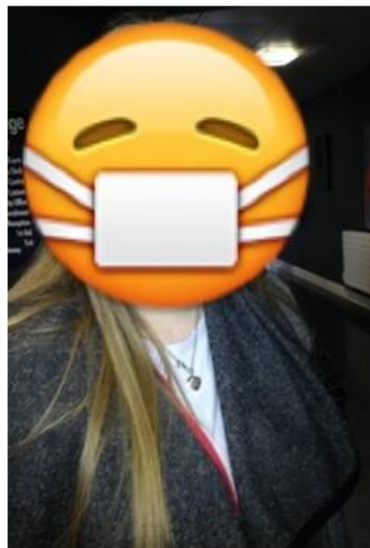
When he discussed the image in more depth he expanded on his idea and discussed the symbolism of what the ear meant to him, the participant also explained his thoughts on the caption he used:

Participant Thirty-One: I put a caption on it saying, are we even listened to? As an ear, you have, like, the representation of listened, and in some ways, cause like the ear is the exact thing of listen, hear, then the caption says are we listened to. That's the thing, I don't know, there is different [student voice] groups but if I've looked around not much has changed with, like, within the different years. That's the thing like, it begs the question I'm asking, because all the things that everyone has put forward, are they actually listening to us about, like, more, like, an open question, are we seeing any physical changes around us to what people say? But is what we're saying being communicated to their ears?

The invitation to take images, write about them and comment on them with a caption allows for self-expression and hopefully invites more marginalised groups to build a further complex picture of their perspectives than their more articulate peers (Woolhouse, 2017). This student was discussing communication within the college and expressing how he felt, which was that although he knew there were 'groups', or methods for listening to him, he wondered if there were any actual real or positive change to his college life.

Another participant, when discussing communication at the college, represented her thoughts and feelings in a different way. This participant used a photograph, plus an emoji, to outline what she thought about student voice communication at the college. Emoji's are considered to originate from Japan in the late 1990's and stem from the early mobile phone users expressing their emotions through text (Alshenqeeti, 2016).

Figure Fifteen -
Participant
Twenty-Nine
Image and
caption



The emoji represents the lack of voice student have on some subjects

Although I anonymised all the images in this research project to protect the identity of the students this participant chose an emoji to anonymise themselves. The participant discussed how they felt about their lack of voice at the college:

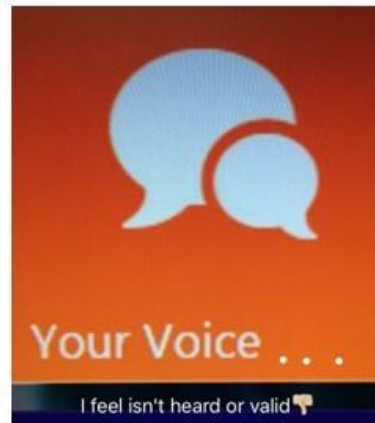
Participant Twenty-Nine: So I feel like, I dunno, it depends which scenario it's in, but I feel like as a whole we don't get much say, so basically, I just wrote like, at the beginning we says that we'd have more of a say, and we'd get to, like, you know, contribute with the teachers on what sort of stuff we do, but like now we're just kinda like told what to do, so we don't really have much of a say.

The above participant felt it had been suggested that they could have a voice and communicate with the staff at the college about how they felt but, at present, it had become more of a situation where they were 'told what to do' and their ability to affect any change was minimal. Bernstein (2000) posits that participation in education institutions, such as schools, should not just be discussion, it should also be based on outcomes, whereby the right to participate affects actual change. When students' views are sought, they are asked to contribute, and then it appears as if nothing is changed this can be disheartening, and leads to students not contributing in the future as they do not see the purpose.

Another participant used imagery in a different way, by taking an image of an icon which is used on the college software system to encourage the students to communicate with the institution. This was supported by the use an emoji (thumb pointing down), and a caption. This student explained their image by saying:

Participant Forty: My photograph is of a box from the website and it says your voice on it, and underneath I put caption, I feel it isn't heard or valid. It relates because I feel like I can speak but nothing will get done, so when I say it isn't heard or valued, even when it is heard, it's not.

Figure Sixteen –
Participant
Forty Image and
caption



My Photo Caption

"I've Spoken but falls on deaf ears"

The student talked about communicating and that their requests fell on 'deaf ears'. This emphasises what many other students felt, that there are various system whereby they could communicate, but they wondered what was the point was, as the validity of what they said was compromised.

Hemple-Jorgensen (2015) claim that validating student's knowledge is important, and central to the development of their agency. If the students are to build their confidence in speaking to adults in a variety of public or private forums, then they need to feel that what they say will be seen as valued. Pearce and Wood (2016) consider that too often student voice initiatives are coerced by institutions to reinforce the dominate ideology of what the adults already believe and fail to be transformative.

Another student used an image of a public figure to share how they felt about the communication at the college, in relation to student voice. Participant Thirty-Nine had taken a photograph of Donald Trump, President of the USA and wrote a caption:

Figure
Seventeen -
Participant
Thirty-Nine
Image and
caption



IGNORANT

When expanding on this image after they had taken it, the student said:

Participant Thirty-Nine: Well people see Donald Trump as an idiot, I'm not trying to say no one is an idiot at this college but, err, you know the stuff that he says, he doesn't think before he talks, and he doesn't want to listen other people, and that's how I basically feel, like, when I get listened to they just want to say one side of the story instead of listening to both sides. Ignorant, like I said not really getting heard much, it's like it's heard once and then you don't hear about it again, it's forgotten.

This student echoed many of the other participants' thoughts, and his analysis of his image raised several questions which he felt related to student voice. The student expressed his thoughts which were that there was 'only side of the story' heard. He felt that within the college initiatives were started but not continued. His other concern was that students rarely received feedback. As this participant acknowledged, there were ways in which they were listened to, however, where it is more problematic, is that some students felt that even though they had a voice and were able to communicate it was one-sided, that the decision-making and the ability to affect any change still lay with the adults in the relationship. Some students raised concerns and felt that they were not 'heard' and they felt disappointment with the lack of communication between the college staff and the students; however this view was not shared by all the participants.

There were positive voices uncovered during this research project, even if this was to affirm existing ideas (Cook-Sather, 2006). The students were given a forum(s) to propose change; some students felt they did have a voice and a presence within the college. For example, the image taken by Participant Seventeen was described by them as a positive image:

Figure Eighteen
- Participant
Seventeen
Image and
caption



picture represents myself being listened too alot

Participant Seventeen: I felt like I can speak loudly in college so I chose a speaker, it's used to represent that I'm being listened to loudly and a lot.

The student who took the image (Figure Seventeen) talked about his choice of picture and how he felt his voice was heard 'loudly'. Other students spoke about their positive feelings about the college and the systems the college used to listen to them:

Participant Twenty-One: I'm really happy with this college at the moment, I couldn't be happier with everything that's going on, media, I'm really enjoying [it].

Participant Twenty-Five: I think it works pretty well, basically if you have a complaint, we'll go to _____ (Participant Thirty-three – Student Representative) and he like take it.

A key strength of student voice is the development of a shared understanding and the building of authentic relationships with teachers, so that students feel able to communicate with them in different forms. Educational institutions can be seen as learning communities where students and staff can both have a voice and learning takes place in a collaborative way (Browne and Kellsey-Millar, 2018). Although there are substantial differences in age and life time experiences, when

students feel like they are listened to, and their voices are heard, in an effective democratic manner, there can be 'intergenerational reciprocity' (Fielding, 2007: 552). Educational institutions, such as colleges, 'can be socialising agents and can shape student dispositions in various ways' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: cited by Archer et al, 2018: 293). This socialisation and shaping of individuals can be positive and allow for students to build skills and empower them to have the belief they can have control of their lives and 'break free from one habitus and look to the future in a more positive way' Addo (2018: 23).

Participant Fifty-Three (below) spoke about his enjoyment of the learning environment and how he felt concerned about any changes which may occur through listening to too many voices:

Participant Fifty-Three: I don't know, I think, I like the way it is now, I feel like everyone, if everything everyone said changed, it would just cause havoc because just because you want to change something doesn't mean everyone else wants to change something. So having it like a dream college, like, everything you say actually comes across it would cause so much conflict, what we have now is actually pretty decent it's a good standard, it's just feedback could be enforced a bit more.

Although Participant Fifty-Three was enjoying their time at the college, they were perhaps fearful of change and the 'chaos' of differing viewpoints impacting on the college's wider functions. Kehoe's (2015) research study also found issues with students' anxieties and submissiveness when change is offered, or students are afforded an opportunity to discuss their lives with staff members. The issues that students raise can be uncomfortable for staff, difficult to deal with, or create tensions (Czerniawski et al, 2009). In a hierarchical system, such as in a FEC, changes to the dynamic that exists can be hard for students as it is seen as a possible risk and that they are challenging staff members. It could be possibly detrimental to their future, either academically or within their relationships with staff, if they are seen as 'trouble-makers'. Participation in educational change situations can be difficult for students, who may not always feel comfortable, or confident, with the changing roles that are required for meaningful student engagement (Shallcross et al, 2007).

4.4.2 Disenfranchised students

FECs are often seen as distinct from other forms of educational institutions, such as schools and universities, and they can at times be expected 'to be all things to all people' (Towler et al, 2011: 502). The students that study in these institutions, as outlined previously, can be from a range of backgrounds and with differing levels of previous educational attainment. Many of these students have had negative prior educational experiences which may have led to them being disenfranchised from learning. However, as Wishart (2009) argues, listening to disenfranchised students and building trust with them is crucial to meeting their needs.

Students who are marginalised, or disenfranchised, perhaps from previous educational or life experiences, also need to have their voices heard. However, the very systems that seek to listen to the students can also be those that are making them feel further disenfranchised and marginalised. Students are aware of when they are taken seriously, and when they are not, they are, after all, 'experts in their own lives' (Gardner & Crockwell, 2006: 11).

A common response from the students was the recurring issue of lack of action being taken after they had voiced their opinions about college life or course content. As with any group of people, students feel frustrated if they see inaction, particularly when they have been encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings with the institution:

Participant Twenty-Two: Like at the end of the day there should be like an outcome to what you said, so no outcome would suggest...

Participant Forty: Cause otherwise it's just a rambling session innit.

Participant Twenty-Two: Yeah, you are just wasting your time really.

Participant Thirty Four: It never changes, but we've tried every which way really.

The ability to be able to act on what the students have said ultimately resides with the leadership of the educational institution where children and young people learn. As Noyes (2005) states: 'voices are nothing without hearers'. If the students feel as if they are being 'listened to' without any further action being taken they will stop contributing. This can lead to a circle of 'self-limitation and self-censorship' where 'the dominated become consenting victims' (Mills, 2008: 102) to their

situation and the domination they are subjected to. As Bourdieu (1990, 130-131) states 'even the most disadvantaged, tend to perceive the world as natural and to find it much more acceptable than one might imagine, especially when one looks at the situation of the dominated through the social eyes of the dominant.'

Some students used abstract images to explain how they were feeling about being marginalised and to explain the frustrations with some of aspects of course:

Figure Nineteen
- Participant Six
Image and
caption



MESSY, THE COLLEGE HAS IT'S UPS AND
DOWNS, AND CAN BE ALL OVER THE
PLACE. THE WAY THIS COURSE IS RUN
AT THE MOMENT IS VERY DISORGANISED.
SOUNDS HARSH AND A LITTLE RIDICULOUS
BUT IT'S I FEEL IT'S TRUE.

When describing the meaning of his image, Participant Six, said:

Participant Six: It's exactly like [Participant One] is saying you have your ups and downs with the course, there are things that can go right, but there are a lot of things that are going wrong like, we get told certain things that are going to happen but it never gets fulfilled, never sees its end. I feel like there is a lot of stuff we've been let in the dark about and its same thing about it, it's our voice, you know sometimes we are heard and sometimes we are not, it depends on what the subject is and what the matter is. Things, like, we feel we need to know, aren't being told to us, and some things that aren't as important are getting told to us, and we don't see why things are being kept from us it doesn't really make much sense.

For students to not become disenfranchised with participating in their learning communities there needs to be a sense that they are not being 'taken for granted', or more worryingly that educational staff are using their voice for more covert, or organisational ends (Fielding, 2004). Participant Six felt that he was kept 'in the dark' or things were 'being kept from' the students. For student voice practice to be emancipatory, and develop student agency, it has to work across the entire organisational structure. As Allan et al (2018) discuss, there should be multi-faceted support across different levels to listen to marginalised voices, but that this can be inherently problematic, in part, due to the power structures that exist in most educational institutions.

Is change within the student's sphere of opportunity? Consideration needs to be given to whether students can realistically enact any change, or is it a system which is inherently problematic, and even the staff at the educational institution cannot effectively follow through change, due to the performative nature of education in the UK (Cremin et al, 2011). The fears of some of the students during this process was that they might be identified as having spoken 'out of turn' or get themselves, or their peers, or even teachers, into some form of difficulty or 'trouble'. Bragg & Manchester (2012) discuss rare cases where senior managers have sought to use student's remarks and comments in student voice initiatives as a way of 'shaming' staff to make change happen.

The difficulties that are faced with eliciting genuine student views in education institutions is widespread and is not helped by the fears, of some teachers, that they are also being marginalised by attempts to listen solely to the students' views. Teachers need to be able to feel they have opportunity to voice their concerns; that their views and expertise are respected and they can respond to any criticism or feedback about them from students (Wisby, 2011).

The concept of managerial rhetoric (as defined by Wisby, 2011) influencing student voice practice, is not just seen in the adult-led structure in which initiatives are set up within FECs, but also in how the students are positioned, what they are 'allowed' to talk about and what influence they can actually affect. Young people, as demonstrated by this research, are clearly able to see when attempts are being made to merely validate the decisions already made by adults and which appear to trivialise what they think. One of the students highlighted this issue when talking about student voice practices at the college:

Participant Twenty-Five: They just do it for like looks wise, see we do all this kinda stuff.

Most of the students had previous experience, in their school education, of various student voice systems, such as student councils. They were aware of the 'discourses of educational management' that surrounds student voice practice (Bragg, 2007: 513). Some of them were aware that their college had several student voice initiatives in place to listen to them, even if their involvement in those systems was limited. When discussing how things could be better some students used interesting terminology, they were observant and insightful in their analysis:

Participant Twenty-Four: It would make you feel like you'd want to be involved more and if you did say something people would listen, so it would look good on the college's behalf.

Participant Twenty-Six: I dunno, I like they said, it looks good on the college, [if] they actually listen to you, they actually care about students.

Whilst not directly stating that student voice activities were serving different purposes, for varying audiences, it could be inferred by the students' comments, of 'it would look good' in reference to outsiders' perspectives of the institution, which the students may have understood to be external agencies. Bourdieu's notion of doxa, which Nolan (2014: 7) describes as a 'set of core values and discourses of a social practice field that have come to be viewed as natural, normal, and inherently necessary' could be applied to this sense of the college 'having to' listen. The students can see that a discourse around student voice practice is long standing and the students' recognition of this is an 'unquestioned acceptance of what constitutes normal, natural, and necessary.' The students see that it is normal and necessary for them to be asked for their opinions, but this is always for the continuation of the 'socially arbitrary nature of power relations' Deer (2008) cited in Nolan (2014: 116).

The notion of 'tokenistic' student voice processes are common amongst student voice research (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Fielding, 2004; Ball, 2001). At its worst it can be a cynical attempt to involve students in student voice processes that are, often, for the construction of 'managerial discourses'. Token participation, as defined by Simovska (2007), is predetermined by 'experts',

whereas genuine participation is seen as a more democratic model where students have dialogue and there is support for students to contribute.

From the perspective of the college, there is a need, and requirement, to listen to the views of the students, (Ofsted, 2018; DfE, 2014). This necessity can be seen in both a positive and negative way. The compulsion to undertake student voice initiatives means that each FEC has to take the issue seriously. This can involve investment in additional staffing or diverting funds to support initiatives, such as whole college wide surveys or online systems. However, during a time of increasing austerity for FECs then there could be the temptation to work in a tokenistic way; that is, to appear to outsiders that the institution is genuinely involving students, but ignoring their views, or side-lining their calls for action and change.

Many of the participants felt strongly that they should have a viewpoint, that what they said mattered and they should have the right to participate:

Participant Thirty-Eight: Yeah cause it's our future, we're coming here so we can have a future, so if something's going wrong we should be able to talk about it, so we can have our say and get it right. We always just get what we're given and we have to do it.

Participant Twenty-Six: They need to know what we like cause that's what the whole point of a college is, we're students and they should know what students want.

The rights of children and young people to be involved in decision making have been highlighted previously in this thesis. Bragg (2007) highlights the issues of teacher's possible anxiety about student participation and discusses some teacher's scepticism about students' knowledge and intentions. In education institutions, such as FECs, particularly since Incorporation (as defined by Lucas & Crowther, 2016), the rise in bureaucracy, the performative nature of the curriculum and increasing managerialism has made many teaching staff disenfranchised in regard to further change. However, students' views should be seen as a positive way of improving college life, they are the

Damien Homer

ones who ultimately benefit, or suffer, if the college is not working for the good of the people it is set up to serve, the students.

The participants in this research project often spoke highly of their teachers and the effort they put into caring about them. However, this was not necessarily reflective of all of the college staff, for example:

Participant Twenty: Well I don't think anyone in here really knows who our [College Manager] is, so like the person right at the top. I have never spoken to him/her, so to actually be able to meet that person would be good, maybe they would come into our class and talk to us every couple of months or so, cause obviously their busy, so, maybe that would help with getting our point across and then it's not reliant on our tutors, which it shouldn't be fair on them to have to go on to sort this out for us, but if we could put our point across easily rather than having to track them down through the college, (it) would be better.

Participant Twenty-Four: Well, there has been some things that we've spoken to [member of staff] about, or our personal tutor, but when we've put it through to the [College Manager] they haven't really done anything, in the nicest way possible.

Participant Forty-Seven: We weren't told, she was like that's not my fault, it kinda of is your fault you should tell us, your [College Manager], title, [College Manager] you should inform us, so she just shoved the problems to one side and she only listened to the good bits.

Students had dissimilar views in the how they thought about the student voice practice at the college. This viewpoint of the college management and their oversight of the student voice initiatives at the college were also felt in different ways, by different students. Some used images to explain their frustration about the systems the college used to listen to them:

Figure Twenty -
Participant
Eighteen -
Image and
caption



"No obvious Direction"

Participant Eighteen: Like it doesn't really have a focus, student voice is very varied, there is no set arrow going in one direction, it's very split off, you could take that student voice hasn't got any direction at all and it's just a bit muffled up.

Participant Eighteen felt there were alleged incoherence and inconsistencies within student voice practice at the college: other students also shared these feelings. The systems used by the college to listen to them, it would appear, were leading to frustration and in some cases, a sense of apathy, which in turn, led to them wanting to be less involved:

Participant Forty: I just think there is no point saying our views if nothing is going to be done about it, that's my opinion.

Participant Fifty-Three: I don't know if it's just the fact that the student rep might be not very good, I think it might be the whole system itself.

Participant Forty-Seven: Or whether they're just making you do it, and then [College Manager] has a little glance and then they [viewpoints] don't go anywhere.

Previous research has been conducted into young people's views about being consulted. Stafford et al (2003) found that young people involved in their particular study were clear about the fact that they knew it was beneficial for adults to be 'seen' being involved in consulting and listening to them, but some had grown weary of consultations as they felt that the outcomes had limited impact on their lives. The young people involved in that particular research wanted action, results, feedback from what they had said or suggested. The FEC students involved in this research project mirrored these thoughts. Robinson & Taylor (2007) consider Bourdieu's notion of a 'linguistic code' in educational institutions and suggest that certain voices may be chosen to be listened to as they 'speak the same language'. This may mean that student's views that are favourable to those with power in colleges may well enact changes that are they can claim are 'from' the student body, but in fact are those views which they already held or responses that are aligned to the course of action they were already undertaking.

Several of the participants' images appeared to reflect this sense of a lack of engagement, and clarity, about how they might be involved, or what the actual purpose was if change was not going to happen:

Figure Twenty-One -
Participant
Twenty-Seven-
Image and
caption



Confused on how I have a voice in College

Figure Twenty-Two -
Participant Fifty-Six
Image and
caption



Taken in but also thrown away.

The student who took the picture (Figure Twenty-Two) further discussed their image and felt it was a visual example of his opinion about how he is listened to at the college, he went on to say:

Participant Fifty-Six: Because if you express your feelings and you give something to a person and they take it in but they don't really do nothing with it, so they just like chuck it away, chuck it in the bin.

This feeling of being disregarded after voicing your views can be extremely disheartening to students. Although there were systems to listen to the students at this FEC, and some staff were listening to the views of the students, there is also evidence that this was not always the case. As Hancock & Mansfield (2002) state students' views can be disregarded by staff during student voice activities. When a student has been asked their opinion, it is important to act upon what they have said otherwise a malaise can set in and students can quickly revert to not participating at all, because they do not see the point.

Disengagement with education can start from an early age if students feel left out, or that they are 'outsiders' (OCED, 2013). For students' views to count it has to be meaningful participation and engagement, this cannot happen if students become disengaged from the process due to their views, once shared, being put aside. Wierenga et al (2003) maintains that participation, for participations sake, is not helpful for staff or students. Using the term 'public puppetry' Wierenga et al (2003) outline the concerns that other student voice researchers have cited; that young people can be asked to participate, but their ability to affect any change on the decision making process is limited, or does not exist at all. It can feel to the students, as Participant Fifty-Six eloquently stated, that his ideas and his participation have been 'chucked in the bin.'

Some of the issues that were important to the participants related to matters which affected their everyday lives and were not necessarily about academic issues. The participants expressed concerns about how much things cost, for instance the price of food in the college cafeteria. Whilst these issues may seem relatively trivial from an external perspective, to the participants they were important and central to some of their frustrations. Participants again expressed disappointment in this area as they felt that they had 'spoken' and that the situation did not change:

Participant Forty-Nine: I think at the start of this year actually we had a meeting and I did, like, talk to them about food and stuff at college but they don't really change anything, everything is exactly the same.

Participant Fifty-Two: I remember there's one thing that comes up all the time, food in the cafeteria, the prices are so high and every time you say it to them they're like we're not the people to speak to, you're going to have to speak to the cooking staff and it doesn't really get heard to.

The participation age for young people to stay in education, or training, has now being raised to 18 years old; however the reality is that the law to support this does not prosecute parents for not doing so (Spielhofer et al, 2007). However, many students stay in some form of education or training until they are 18 years of age. Some students have jobs outside of college and their income is limited, in part due to the austerity cuts to FE; previously students have been supported through their post-16 studies with initiatives such as the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Therefore the students concerns about the costs of food at the college are not to be trivialised, and to many of the participants it was an important issue as it affected them each day, it underlined the fundamental issues that they felt about not being listened to effectively.

4.5 Analysis of data from a Bourdieuan perspective - social capital, linguistic capital, pedagogical authority and habitus

To support and illuminate the data that has been gathered for this research project the application of Bourdieuan theories, as outlined within the literature review chapter (page 51-52), will form the next part of this chapter. As previously discussed the conceptual framework has drawn upon Bourdieu's notions of social capital, linguistic capital, pedagogical authority and habitus. Whilst the data could be analysed within the context of a variety of different theorists and approaches as 'each analytical lens holds different significances in understanding a photograph' (Langmann & Pick, 2018: 103), here the data has been considered within the over-arching conceptual framework for this study, in dialogue with the participants' interpretations.

Other studies, such as Allatt & Dixon (2004), have applied Bourdieu's theories to generate a better understanding of artefacts created by FE students. Allatt & Dixon's (2004) study used mixed media including photographs, posters and video to gain an insight into young people's lives in the North East of England. Although this research was conducted over fifteen years ago the analysis for this thesis will seek to build on their work, particularly the belief that these artefacts are able to 'deepen

our sociological understanding of the world's we were investigating' (100). Further studies that have utilised participatory visual research, such as photo elicitation, combined with the application of Bourdieuan theoretical perspectives include Meo (2010: 164) who found that this approach opened up 'meanings in specific and productive ways to enhance our understanding of people's social worlds.'

The relationality of the students' images, captions and words, combined with the space where the research was undertaken is of vital importance, and building on Austin's (2016) work analysing media texts, the images, captions and words will be considered within the context of the FE college setting. As previously stated the students took the images for this research project within their 'lifeworld' whilst studying at the college.

Bourdieu (1990: 7) discussed photography as a medium that 'is considered accessible to everyone, from both the technical and the economic viewpoints'. As a researcher in the early part of his academic career Bourdieu took images of some of the places where he undertook sociological fieldwork and noted the 'importance of photography for his research' (Belot, 2016: 58). Using visual images as a source of data can be both a systematic record of evidence but also 'they may function as a reflective tool for developing theory; to create visual narratives of particular aspects of cultures, as data themselves or to set a context for other data collection' (Hamilton, 2000: 17).

The use of a conceptual framework and the application of Bourdieu's theories to the images, captions and words taken by the students means drawing an understanding not only from the data itself but also the meanings that maybe drawn from the person(s) taking the image, as Bourdieu (1990: 6-7) states:

Adequately understanding a photograph, whether it is taken by a Corsican peasant, a petit-bourgeois from Bologna or a Parisian professional, means not only recovering the meanings which it proclaims, that is, to a certain extent, the explicit intention of the photographer; it also means deciphering the surplus of meaning which it betrays by being part of the symbolism of an age, a class or an artistic group.

The data has been assessed through an interpretative approach making use of Bourdieu's theories as the basis for the conceptual framework, to allow for an 'understanding of aspects of everyday practice which would not otherwise easily be uncovered, articulated or understood' (Sweetman, 2009: 504).

Participant Thirty-One took an image (Figure Fourteen, Page 117) of a fellow student that is composed to show only the side of the student's face, with the emphasis on the ear. The image is of a student looking down and is framed so that we see little else in the shot other than the individual: the photograph is framed in a 'close up'. The image is of a male and their expression appears solemn, if partially hidden from view.

Participant Thirty-One also wrote a caption to accompany the image that stated: 'Are we being listened to?' The image, its framing and the caption all suggest a sense of powerlessness, which could stem from the student's habitus which 'shapes the parameters of people's sense of agency and possibility' (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014: 195). These learned dispositions may be reflected in the image that the student took, which suggests subjection and conditioning in how the student feels they are listened to, and the open question which complements the photograph. An image, such as the one taken by this participant, of a 'downcast' student whose gaze is drawn towards the floor could imply subordination and an overlooked individual whose opinion counts for very little. When the student spoke about the image they had taken they stated that they had 'put forward [suggestions]....but not much has changed...are they actually listening to us.' The terminology that Participant Thirty-One uses such as 'they' to refer to the staff at the college and how things have not changed despite their requests underlies the lack of agency that this student felt in the college. It could be interpreted that there is a 'them and us' hierarchy which disempowers the students and this is further manifested in the lack of action the staff took when students had made requests for change.

Another student took a more abstract image (Participant Six, Figure Nineteen, Page 125) of a disused plastic bag. The supporting caption used words such as 'messy' and 'disorganised' to perhaps signify a sense of confusion or disarray. They discussed this image in further depth by describing how they felt 'things are being kept from us it doesn't really make much sense.' The image appears to be taken in the college setting with a computer keyboard also within the frame, the photograph itself lends a feeling of 'messiness' as it is out of focus and appears to be a snap shot of a disordered scene. When applying the conceptual framework to this image, caption and the words of the student, there appears to be a sense of disorganisation and the participant's view of 'being kept at arms lengths', which reinforces Bourdieu's notion of social capital and its function to reproduce inequality and 'having unequal access to resources and the maintenance of power' (Field, 2016: 3).

The lack of social capital, and arguably the balance of power within the student-staff relationship, was articulated in the student's commentary of their image, where they 'get told certain things that are going to happen but it never gets fulfilled, never sees its end.' It could be argued that the maintenance of the existing social hierarchy and educational inequality (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014), allows the dominant members of the college (staff) to maintain the unequal power structure by simply allowing the students to be uninformed, consulted but not actually listened to.

When applying the conceptual framework to the reproduction of power and of students being marginalised, a further example can be seen in the image, caption and words of Participant Thirty-Four (Figure Nine, Page 94). The photograph is of a lift within the college, it appears to be bright silver, with various reflections of colour on the doors. The image is framed with no other features or people within the shot. When discussing this image the student shared their feelings of being 'given' responsibilities and being positioned within the college as a 'course rep'. This participant was allowed access to the 'student rep meetings' that excluded the vast majority of other students. The accompanying caption, with which the student supported their image, refers to an 'elevation' which occurs when a student takes part in these meetings with staff. This student may have been selected to be part of this 'inner circle' of student-staff meetings due to their ability to 'understand and use the dominant form of language' (Flynn, 2016: 156) within the college, their linguistic capital being the most acceptable for the teachers and managers to hear. As Watkins (2017) points out, Bourdieu (1994: 55) indicated how certain linguistic forms may 'bestow a certain legitimacy upon those who have the requisite competence whereas those without simply face exclusion.'

As previously discussed in this thesis (Chapter Two - Literature Review, Page 43), Bourdieu (1986) suggested that the development of social capital can occur when individuals or groups become part of a network of institutionalised relationships. Although this student was 'gifted' a position of relative authority within their peer group, they were still marginalised as their requests for change did not happen, as they stated in their interview: 'there was no response.' The image and the accompanying caption conveys a sense of being placed in a system where shared responsibility and power can appear to 'elevate' students but the reality is that they are still situated in a 'status quo' which reproduces the existing dominant social structure of the college.

Some of the students involved in this research study felt at times that they were listened to and that they did have a voice. One of these students was Participant Twenty-Nine, who stated in their interview, that they felt in the beginning of their time at college they were told they would 'have

more of a say', but now appeared to have discovered this was an illusion of democracy. Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) assert that domination can occur in specialised institutions, such as schools. As Calhoun (2002: 31) posits Bourdieu's concerns were that these institutions 'present themselves as working for the common good, but in fact reproduce social inequalities. They present themselves as agents of freedom, but in fact are organizations of power.'

Participant Twenty-Nine took a photograph (Figure Fifteen, Page 118) of a female student and then covered the face with an emoji which appears to be covering the mouth, suggesting that they had been silenced or quietened, the caption supported this view with reference made to a 'lack of student voice on some subjects'. This image may imply that the students are not able to speak on matters of importance, or perhaps 'purposefully ignored'. Bourdieu's notion of pedagogical authority, in which there are 'embedded traditions and political and cultural contexts as well as unwritten and written rules' may well mean that these students see 'dominance is experienced unconsciously, and people develop an affirmative attitude, seeing oppressive social conditions as natural' (Kupfer, 2015: 27). In this way the disadvantage the students face in seeking to have a voice at the college is being consistently reinforced, and perhaps without them noticing, perpetuated on a day-to-day basis.

When viewing the photograph, caption and words spoken by Participant Forty, through the conceptual framework of Bourdieu, it could be argued that this student felt the validity of what they said when asked to contribute to student voice practice was undermined. As Claussen & Osborne (2013: 59) describe 'Bourdieu argued that ultimately certain groups within society legitimize the meanings that they seek to impose on others through the structure and agencies of the formal education system. In education, what is imposed on students then "contributes towards reproducing the power relations".' In this instance Participant Forty (Figure Sixteen – Page 120) took a photograph of one of the college's structures of harnessing student voice (online survey) and then subverted this seemingly positive image with a caption saying 'isn't heard or valid'. A reading of the image, caption and interview comments from this student could suggest that the college had imposed a system of feedback but had limited its purpose or usefulness to ensure that there was a perception of students being listened to but in fact, the college was reproducing the existing power that they controlled by ignoring or not acting on the student feedback.

The notion that students are often 'asked for' their opinions within colleges has been well documented in this thesis, but as Participant Forty explains 'I feel like I can speak but nothing will get

done'. When discussing Bourdieuan concepts of reinforcement and disparity of the education system, English & Bolton (2015: 23) ask 'whose voice is being heard and whose voice is silent or absent from any discussion of change?' The suppression of student voice once the college had put structures in place to listen to it leads to frustration and arguably a future in which there is a lack of engagement and apathy from the students.

As outlined previously (pages 85, 107) many of the participants who took part in this research project were on a Level Two course. In academic terms this meant they had not met the threshold to study for the most common type of post-16 education, Level Three (A Level equivalent). One of these students, Participant Fifty-Six, had previously come from a Level One course (often where there is no formal entry criteria). This student was reticent to speak during the research process and their contribution to the group discussions was limited. This student's habitus, their 'way of being.....predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination' (Bourdieu, 1984: 2) manifested itself in both the image and caption, but also in the way that they spoke and their body language. For example this student spoke very quietly, as if unsure of them self, made minimal eye contact and did not seek to contribute to wider discussion. Whilst I was unaware of this student's individual socio-economic background, familial or cultural context, certainly in the educational setting they came across as shy, quiet and lacking confidence. This could also be inferred through the image they took (Figure Twenty-Two, Page 131) which looks down on a rubbish bin in a neglected, overlooked corner of the college campus. Participant Fifty-Six made links between their image and what they felt, commenting 'you give something to a person and they take it in but they don't really do nothing with it, so they just like chuck it away, chuck it in the bin.' It is argued that habitus is 'operating unconsciously and consciously, habitus is multifaceted' (Stahl, 2013). In this example the participant has manifested their feelings about student voice at the college, their thoughts about their positioning within this institution, and perhaps on a unconscious level, something about their tendency to feel and act as if their experiences of participation at the college have 'let them down'.

Applying the conceptual framework to Participant Thirty-Nine's images, caption and words (Figure Seventeen, Page 121), it can be argued that this student has made a correlation between power and authority at their college to that of another authoritative body, the United States Government. Noble (2016) cites Bourdieu's views of pedagogic authority as being the 'power of symbolic violence, exerted within a relation of pedagogic communication' (ibid.: 11). Harris (1990) argues that 'pedagogic authority is really about the right to exert symbolic violence and claim legitimacy, so it reinforces arbitrary power.' This view of 'constraint and subordination' (Connolly & Healy, 2004) is

shown in the words that Participant Thirty-Nine said when they discussed their image of the United States President, Donald Trump: 'Well people see Donald Trump as an idiot, I'm not trying to say no one is an idiot at this college.... he doesn't want to listen other people....when I get listened to they just want to say one side of the story instead of listening to both sides.' The image that the student took was of Donald Trump, stood in front of lectern appearing to deliver a speech, which they took to symbolise someone who did not listen and imposed their views onto others. It could be argued that this student has seen this one way communication method as representative of the student voice practice at their college, where the people with authority (staff) are constraining the views of the students and only listening to what they wish to hear, they could be seen as being 'ignorant' (as the student's caption states) to the views of the student body.

As can be seen from application of Bourdieu's theories of social capital, linguistic capital, habitus and pedagogical authority to the photographs, captions and words of the students involved in this research project, a conceptual framework has allowed reference points for the discussion of literature and the analysis of data (Smyth, 2004). However, there could be multiple interpretations of the imagery, but when photographs are accompanied by the voice of the participants themselves this 'simultaneous use of words and photographs have greater depth of analysis' (Martin & Martin, 2004: 12) which may lead to a more vivid understanding of the world that the participants inhabit. Pink (2007: 120) states that 'images and words contextualize each other, forming not a complete record of the research but a set of different representations and strands of it.'

The analysis of the data acknowledges that there may be 'other' meanings to discover, or interpret, and ways at looking at the data from multiple vantage points. This is summarised by Morphy and Banks (1997: 16) who state that when images are 'separated from the world of action in which they were meaningful and placed in a world in which they will be interrogated and interpreted from a multiplicity of different perspectives'. I believe the application of Bourdieu's theory to the data has demonstrated that 'different meanings may be invested....that may not obviously or directly form part of the visible content of the image.' (Pink, 2007). By using Bourdieu's theories in analysing the data, coupled with the space and time where the research has taken place, has allowed me to illuminate an understanding of some of the less obvious, visible aspects of the artefacts the students produced.

4.6 Conclusion

The time, space and mixed method nature of this research project makes it unique, and whilst it has to be acknowledged that the research only speaks for the young people at the time the research project was conducted, the issues they raised share commonalities across other research studies in the field of student voice. I believe the students have demonstrated how 'well meaning' institutions can use systems and processes to elicit their voice, which superficially appear beneficial, but to many young people are often a source of frustration.

The best conclusion comes from the students themselves, and their images and words. Participant Fifty-Seven discussed their view of how student voice was currently working at the college; this was supported by the image that they took:

Figure Twenty-Three - Participant Fifty-Seven Image and caption



We ~~is~~ are currently in the dark about things but
With a little work we can get into the light

When discussing this image the student used the metaphor of moving from darkness to light to highlight the changes that he felt needed to occur to develop better student voice practice at the college:

Participant Fifty-Seven: First of all you start from where the camera is, it's in the dark, so it almost is we are in the dark about things that happen in the student

voice and because the person is walking towards the light, with a bit of work we could make it better

The students that took part in this study repeatedly talked about the positive aspects of their college lives, their education and the enjoyment they got from being at the college. They were hopeful that their voice could be heard in the future, in greater depth and with more involvement in decision making. Participant Fifty-Seven powerfully summarised the feelings of many of the students, which is that there is hope for future practice, the students do want to engage and they do want to have a voice.

Another student outlined their frustrations at how they were treated at the college and that, although they may be young people, with limited life experiences, their opinion counts:

Participant Thirty-Seven: We understand we are the students, but like they keep on stressing that we're the young adults so they should treat us like young adults and keep us in the loop of what's going on, when it's our course, our education.

As this student articulates so well, FECs are set up for the good of the students, not the members of staff that work within them. Students are not 'passive'; they want their educational lives to be improved and they have the best vantage-point as they are the ones who are directly affected by the decisions made about them. For student voice to be truly transformational it needs to genuinely listen to students' viewpoints and there needs to be changes made when members of staff have asked for their opinions.

Chapter Five - Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The conclusion of this thesis will be presented in four parts: a summary of the responses to the research questions; a framework for change in future practice; contribution to knowledge in the field of student voice research in FE; and recommendations for future student voice research in FE in the UK.

The findings of this research project were based around an arts based method, coupled with more traditional research methods, to elicit an understanding of how young people felt about student voice initiatives in a FEC in the UK. The use of photo-elicitation within research projects allows the participants to create images which can 'mine deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews' (Harper, 2002: 23). Research within FECs does occur including published research journals related to the sector, for example: the Journal of Research in Post-Compulsory Education; Journal of Further and Higher Education; Journal of Adult and Continuing Education; and Journal of Vocational Education and Training. However, much research in FECs is completed in teachers' own time and there are significant barriers, such as teachers' heavy workload, that impede the ability to engage in scholarly activity. The lack of time and resources for teachers to complete scholarly activity is compounded by research that is done *on* the sector, rather than *with* (Solvason & Elliott, 2013).

The paradox of the FE sector being relatively under researched belies the depth of change that is happening within the sector, which is consistently under change and influence 'according to the direction of the prevailing political wind' (Thompson & Wolsetencroft, 2012: 16). The paradox is intensified by the numbers of students, from all aspects of the UK's diverse communities, being taught in the sector, and the thousands of staff employed in the post-16 education field; it is a sector that could be explored in much greater depth. The power of FECs to education generations of students, who then move onto studying higher level of qualifications, or into wide ranges of employment and industries, is well-known. It has a pivotal role in developing national prosperity even though, in some quarters, it is said to be the 'neglected middle child' of the education system (Brown et al, 2008).

It has been argued that the lack of a research culture in FE is related to funding, access to facilities and staff development, alongside the lack of commitment from senior staff (Elliott, 1996). As Elliott (105) highlights: 'research carried out by [Further Education] lecturers or support staff is more likely to be regarded as incidental, rather than central, to the work of the institution.'

This research project was designed to listen to the students, but also to offer a possible framework for future change. The research project has sought to add to the body of student voice practice which is now embedded into the vast majority of FECs across the UK. The research neither seeks to undermine the published work that has been completed in the field before, nor to disparage the efforts of the staff who currently work in the sector. The research has been completed with the best intentions, to try and support students to have a voice.

The research conducted during this project has sought to extend understanding of how students are listened to in today's FECs. Student voice research in the FE sector was arguably at its peak during the early part of this century with papers published supporting the drive to listen to students (LSC, 2007; Walker & Logan, 2008; and Foster, 2005), but also the Labour Government's Department for Education and Skills Policies (DfES 2003, 2005, 2006a, 2006b) which was aimed at providing a legal framework around student voice initiatives. This research project was created to look into whether the initial drive to give students a voice in FE has now become a process to be 'gone through' rather than an effective model of listening to students.

This conclusion will seek to discuss the experiences of the students whilst recognising and acknowledging the limitations of the research. I will reflect on how this research could be applied in other FECs and what the future of student voice practice may look like if it is to have real impact on the lives of students.

5.2 Response to the research questions

5.2.1 Research question 1: How are student voice initiatives discursively framed and socially practiced within a Further Education College in Central England?

This case study has shown that there are several strands to student voice practice at the college. There were eight different systems used by staff at the college in order to encourage students to share their views. The relatively wide variety of systems was designed to ensure that students were able to articulate their voice. Given the extent of the voice systems evidenced with the college it highlights that there was some 'underpinning' and planning had gone into the process of listening to students. The support of the student voice initiatives were subsidised by the college in different ways. The subsidies took the form of: financial investment in terms of student enrichment and student voice staff and the investment in activities such as training for course representatives and a yearly conference; specific staff and students identified to support student voice; cross college student support staff; and extra curriculum activities and clubs. Practical financial support for student voice activities has to exist, even within colleges' ever decreasing budgets, if student voice is to be effective. It is an investment that should be considered as vital and be seen as a way of improving the college for all staff and students. Where effective student voice practice occurs it should be financially supported (Mitra, 2006; DENI, 2015), I concur and feel there is an argument to be made for funding to be ring-fenced for student voice practice.

This research study found that the students appreciated the support given to them, to share their views with some of the teaching staff and student support staff. Many students felt that staff, who they perceived as caring about them and who appeared to take an interest in their 'everyday lives', were those that listened to them the most. This was one of the key factors of students feeling valued and that their opinion was respected. The underpinning of student voice practice at this college, and the ability of the institution to develop student's social capital, appears to be centralised around notions of caring at both an individual level but also an institutional level. As Acar (2011) emphasises, institutions and educators need to develop trust and compassion for their students, which should develop a 'language of caring' (460).

Through discussion with the participants and staff at the college it was found that there were a variety of ways in which the students could become more involved with additional activities or 'enrichment', separate to their courses. Some students gave examples of extra-curricular activities, they cited clubs or societies such as: 'Pride Club' (LGBT); sports teams; guitar club or (computer) gaming club. However, most of the students did not become involved in the activities so did not have the chance to become more involved with different groups of students and staff at the college. These activities are opportunities for students to build their social capital by interacting in different social spheres, with students from differing backgrounds to themselves. There is also the possibility of the students developing their cultural capital by taking part in activities which were previously outside of their status or privilege (Allan & Duckworth, 2018). However, the majority of the students were disengaged with these activities. It appeared that they considered them as 'in addition to' their courses and did not hold them in any esteem. Some students offered reasons for this lack of engagement, such as lack of awareness (or advertising) of what was on offer, or the perception that they were 'too busy' in the rest of their lives to take part. For more students to participate in extra curriculum activities within this FEC then it could be argued that more effective ways need to be sought to try to engage students in the activities. Also a greater emphasis needs to be placed on their value and the college needs to consider different ways of reaching out to the students who appear to be unaware of the activities, or have chosen to ignore them.

The student voice representative system was one of the main initiatives the students discussed as a way of harnessing their voice. The college staff felt this was an effective means of communication, however the students in this research project largely felt it was ineffective in hearing their views. The problems with student representative or student councils is well noted in other literature as favouring those students who are the most articulate and whose voices are most in line with staff views (Bahou, 2011; Czerniawski et al, 2009). The majority of students taking part in this research project found little value in the student representative system at the college. It was found that the student representative system was used, on occasion, to listen to their views of classmates and peers in the manner with which it was created. However, most of the research participants did not engage with the system and it was not doing what it was designed to do. It was, at best, symbolic representation, which was having little detectable impact (Keddie, 2015).

Furthermore, the student representative system did not appear to be fully co-ordinated and students did not, or could not, use it as a system to put forward their views in an effective and consistent manner. The implementation of the student representative system is central to its effectiveness. The students who took part in this study did not meet regularly at a 'local' class level; therefore the views of all of the students could not be articulated to the wider college. Even though this was cited by the staff at the college as a way in which students' voices could be heard, the facilitation and implementation of the system was ineffectual. Some student representatives did not garner the views of their other classmates at all and some only irregularly. It appeared that many of the representative's attendance at the college wide meetings was inconsistent and there was no time set aside for student representatives to meet with their classmates, due to the confines of the daily curriculum. The reduction of one or two student representatives to gather the views of all the students in their class could be described as 'managed participation' (Angus et al, 2013: 571) which did not lead to the promotion of genuine student voice in this instance, at this college.

This study found that a recurrent problem discussed by the students was the lack of feedback or change occurring after they had raised issues and concerns. Coherent feedback after the students have been consulted or asked to share their views appeared to be limited. Feedback to students at an institutional level and course level is a vital part of successful student voice practice; it should be seen as a precondition of any student engagement (Collinson, 2007). The participants that took part in this study often found it a source of great frustration when they were asked for their opinions but did not hear any more about their requests, or did not see any real change being implemented.

Other student voice systems at the college included student surveys. Although the majority of the research cohort were aware of the surveys, there was a sense of indifference in completing them. As has been previously argued in this thesis, surveys and questionnaires are used across education institutions to elicit the views of students. However, their value and worth, from the student's perspective, seemed to be limited. In parallel with the other systems at the college the lack of feedback after they completed the student surveys undermined their validity. This method of listening to students was deemed by the students to be inadequate as a way of genuinely listening to their views. It appeared to be more of an institutional system designed to demonstrate that student views were sought, rather than a participative democratic system which would then be

enacted upon. Angus et al (2013) argue that examples of surveys, such as the one employed by this college, are problematic and described as a 'thin representation of student voice' (566).

5.2.2 Research question 2: How are the impacts of 'giving voice' to students manifested in pedagogical practice and how are these impacts understood by the different stakeholders?

From this research study it can be seen that teachers who engage effectively with students have a strong relationship, which encourages the students to feel valued. The students referred to interactions with the teaching staff in different ways, but the recurring theme was that the students wanted staff to show they appreciated what they said, and the participants responded well when the relationship was reciprocal. The students were less concerned about the format in which they were able to articulate their voices, but that at an individual level they were able to be heard. The participants in this study spoke about examples of change and impact, where it was important, or relevant to their lives. Although it can be argued that student voice is at its most effective when it allows for involvement in teaching and learning (Garlick, 2008), the participants in this study also spoke not only about changes to their curriculum but also about the relationship with their teachers.

This investigation did find that, in some instances, staff had been able to be responsive when students wanted changes to their curriculum timetables. The students were positive about the support from the college to their changed timetables, which meant the students would not have to stay so late in the evening. This was a good example, to the students, that if they felt strongly about an issue, then the situation can be changed. This is a fundamental issue which needs addressing when listening to any students, there needs to be the space, willingness and desire to negotiate based on the voice of the students, as Cook-Sather (2002: 8) notes 'to really listen means to have to respond.'

Some students felt happy at the college, and linked this happiness to the positive experiences they had at college. Some students felt supported and that they were listened to when they spoke. Although student involvement in change within education institutions is not just about making students happy (Fletcher, 2005), learning can be a 'powerful tool to enable people to live healthy, happy and meaningful lives....the experience of being listened to, of experiencing that one has a

voice and can act as a valued citizen is important for personal development.’ (Gordon, 2018: 265). This investigation found that there were students at both ends of the spectrum, those that were content and happy, through to those who were dissatisfied and wanted further change. However, the findings from this study also showed that there were aspects of the course that students were less happy about.

Students who were involved in this research project were studying on a vocational course, which are designed to have a mixture of both theoretical and practical work; this will help enhance their employability skills in the future (Towler et al, 2011). Students cited the lack of practical work on their courses, which was a major concern for them. The students were dissatisfied that they had spoken about this issue with the curriculum, but that changes had not happened. The students’ views on curriculum matters should be taken seriously. Student voice practice should not just be based around issues which are related to pastoral concerns, (Fielding and McGregor, 2005; Walker and Logan, 2008), but the agenda should include issues around teaching and learning.

The teaching practice of some of the staff at the college was also an issue for the students. This was not indicative of all of their experiences but raised an issue that perhaps was endemic to the institution; that the students’ views were not taken seriously and they were marginalised. The findings from the study showed that students had shared concerns about some of teaching and the management response to this issue was to observe the teacher’s practice during lessons. However, students did not notice any change after they had spoken. This may be because the institution is not at the stage where it is able to involve students in this way, or perhaps more worryingly it could be that the institution does invite these views from students but then restricts the depth of participation or influence the students can have. Either way the students felt that this was an example of them being ignored or marginalised by senior managers at the college. The structural inequalities in the college may have contributed to this, or it could be, as Wood (2003) notes, that the students’ voices are rarely taken seriously when discussing teaching and learning. The suppression of the students’ views on what matters to them can lead to power structures of the institution being exemplified even further. As Kohn (1993: 13) maintains ‘parting with power is not easy, if only because the results are less predictable than in a situation where we have control.’

5.2.3 Research question 3: What kinds of empowerment are evident as a result of listening to student voice initiatives, on which terms are these expressed?

Using student voice as a strategy to empower young people, particularly those that are disadvantaged or disenfranchised is often heralded as one of foundations of practice in the field (LSIS, 2012). However, as Chadderton (2011) cautions not all student voice projects will empower the participants involved. The ability of the students to be fully empowered at an institutional level, to speak and have ownership of decision-making, was arguably not present at this college. For students to have a sense of empowerment through student voice practice there needs to be a cultural shift away from mere consultation to students being actively involved in their learning, so they can make decisions about the learning process (Mok, 1997).

From this research study it can be demonstrated that some students value their teachers and management team but several students mentioned the value of the support staff. Advocates for students can come in different guises and from staff who are not directly affiliated with their day-to-day studies. These members of college staff supported the students and enabled them to feel as if their opinions mattered and that they were listened to. The students that took part in this research also offered different ideas about how they could share their experiences, opinions and feelings, anonymously, which could indicate that the college is not at the stage where students feel empowered to speak directly to staff about the issues that affect them. However, for students to feel empowered through student voice practice there needs to be a cultural shift, from some of the teaching and management staff, to being equally receptive to both the positive and negative feedback they receive (Seale, 2010).

Within this college students felt that being treated like an adult, even though legally many were not, was a central element to the success of the teacher-student relationship, this is reflective of other studies (Collinson, 2007). It was through these relationships that students felt 'connected' to the teaching staff, that they were able to share their thoughts and opinions, but also that they were valued and appreciated as individuals. This study has demonstrated that the students wanted to be listened to by staff at the college. This investigation found that students not only voice their concerns in formal student voice contexts but also informally, which was arguably where they felt more confident and secure. As Prieto (2001: 88) describes students 'are continually expressing themselves and narrating their experiences in a natural way.'

This study has found that the student perception of the communication between themselves and the staff was of paramount importance to them. The students felt a strong affinity with staff that they felt cared for them and listened to them. The teaching staff that had a genuine interest in the students' and their college lives allowed them to build a reciprocal relationship which enabled them to 'open up' and share meaningful dialogue with them. It was these staff that the students felt they could go to if they had issues or concerns; these staff were empowering the students by being supportive of them and taking time out to listen to them (Wierenga et al, 2003).

One of the continual frustrations expressed by the participants in this research study was the lack of feedback they received after they had voiced their thoughts and opinions. Even though the college was using different means to allow the students to have a voice, the lack of coherent feedback was a consistent problem highlighted by the participants. For students to feel empowered there needs to be an 'outcome' to their contribution, and for all staff to act upon their views (Rudd et al, 2006). Whilst it should be recognised that listening to students can bring up issues which are hard to resolve or act upon, this investigation has found that the students were mature enough to realise that the changes suggested may be difficult to implement or take time to solve, however their biggest complaint was that they did not receive any feedback at all. If students are to feel empowered through student voice practice then their views should not be 'bracketed' (Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005) because this undermines the entire process. If students are to be treated as 'passive objects' rather than 'active players' (Hodgkin, 1998: 11) in student voice practice there may well be an argument for not involving them at all.

Unsurprisingly this research study has highlighted that different students had dissimilar experiences at the college; students also had different perceptions about student voice practice at the college. As Cremin et al (2011: 587) note 'the context of pupil voice in the UK and elsewhere is complex, contradictory and fluid.' The differing experiences of students on the same course is part of the complexities of interpretative qualitative research, but also of student voice practice, there is no 'univocal truth', and divergent accounts of the same experiences should be considered useful (Angen, 2000: 384). This investigation found that a limited number of students were empowered to speak out and that they knew what they needed to do affect change at the college. This could stem from their prior perceptions or experiences of education, or from experiences directly at the college, but it is to be celebrated that some students felt confident and secure to speak their minds.

As outlined previously, the students who took part in this research study discussed communication with a variety of teaching and non-teaching college staff, including the management at the college. For student voice practice to be effective there needs to be a culture of participation and engagement, it cannot be limited to individuals or small groups of staff. This investigation found that many students were disengaged with the managers in their curriculum area and frustrated at the lack of changes after the managers were informed of their concerns. Fielding (2004) argues that there needs to be an acknowledgement of the 'power differentials' between staff and students within student voice practice; the students within this research felt a disconnection between themselves and the college management. Within this college it would appear vital that students need to have 'new opportunities for dialogic encounter' (309) with senior college staff if the voices of students are to be heard in a genuinely transformative way.

The participants in this research study recognised that it was beneficial for the college to be seen to be 'listening to them', it would 'look good' for the institution. The performative nature of the contemporary FE system and the demands made on colleges to appease external agencies such as Ofsted, mean that student voice initiatives are seen as 'a necessity'; it could be argued that they are imposed upon colleges in order to comply. This is no fault of the college that was the site of the research study, and is reflective of the wider education system in the UK. However, if student voice practice is not followed by action then this may lead to issues of tokenism, manipulation and disempowerment of the participants (Hart, 1992). To move away from tokenistic student voice practice that pays lip service to the notion of listening to students there is arguably a need for senior staff at the college to involve students 'more extensively in the decision-making processes' (Collinson, 2007: 9) which would be a significant step forward in empowering the students and listening to student voice at the college.

5.3 A framework for change

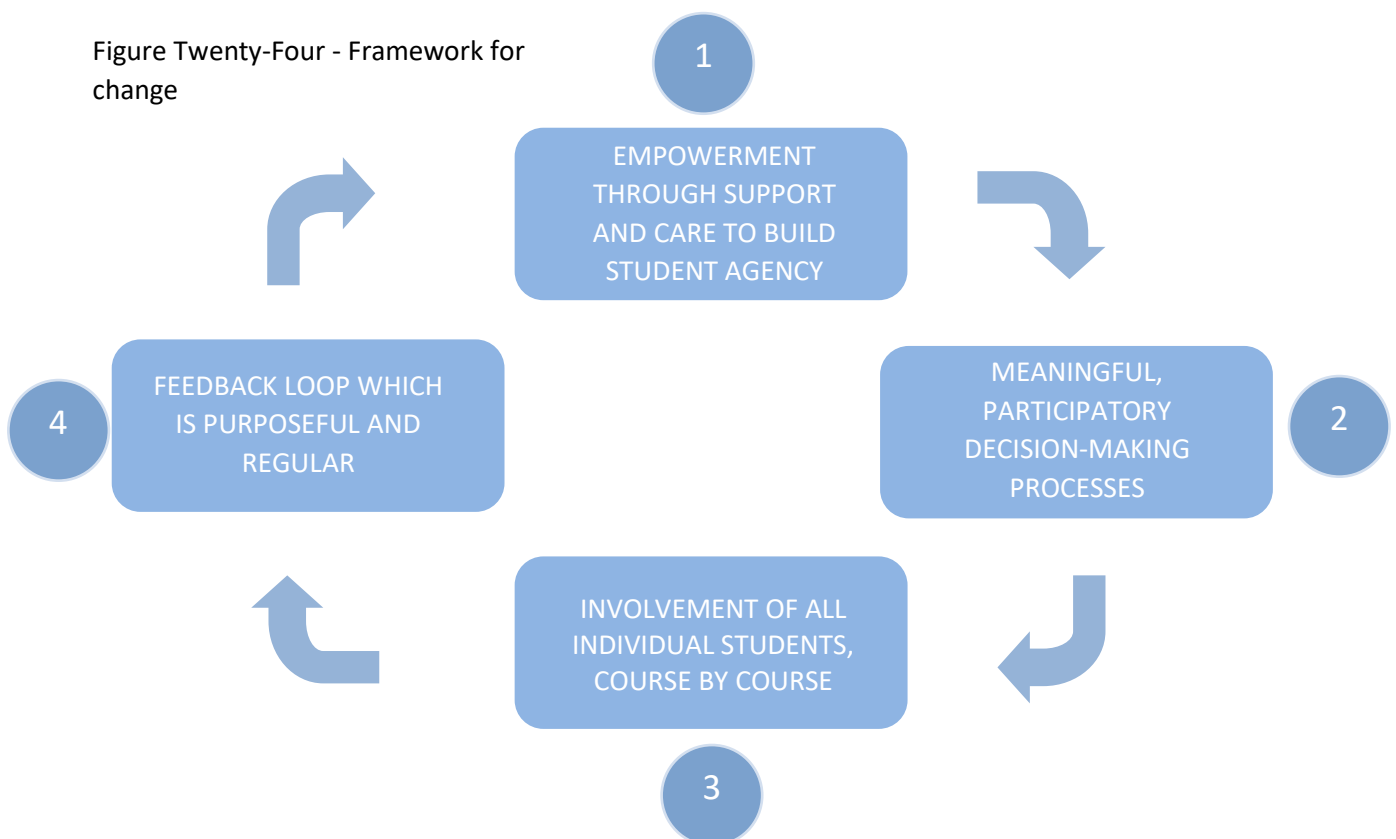
As this research project has shown student voice initiatives have a long history within schools and colleges across the UK and the wider western world (Quinn & Owen, 2016). Student voice practice, which has roots in radical and democratic models of education, goes back even further with examples cited in schools from 1940's onwards (Fielding, 2011). This research seeks to offer a

framework for change to build on the work that has already been done, but also acknowledges the previous substantial work in the field.

From this study it is clear that the college has student voice initiatives that were designed to listen to the students. The college had invested in staff to support the initiatives, created systems to engage students and used different methods to listen to the students. However, for many of the students who were involved in the research project these systems were not as effective as they could have been.

The framework that is suggested from this case study is founded in the wider principles of student voice practice, but stems from what the students at this college have said about student voice initiatives in the FEC where this investigation took place. This research was formed from a single case study, which, as Yin (2009: 48) argues, can be situated as ‘representative or typical...to capture the circumstances of the everyday or commonplace situation.’ As with the research design, the ‘framework for change’ is formed from the research that is based in one FEC.

Figure Twenty-Four - Framework for change



The students' views and input was at the forefront of the research study and the 'framework for change' is based upon the students' perceptions which were captured throughout the study. This proposed 'framework for change' is for FE institutions to use as discussion point to reflect on the nature of how student voice practice works within their colleges. It is not designed to be prescriptive and the differing stages of the framework can overlap and build on student voice practice that already exists within the college. Its purpose is to provide a device for reflection and discussion. Working with students is a constantly evolving process and the aspiration of this framework is that it will enhance the initiatives and practice that already exists in many FECs.

How the framework is used would be for individual institutions to ascertain, but the hope is that students would be involved in the discussions from the outset, as it is their experiences that will inform how successful student voice practice is within each FEC. An outline of some of the questions that could be considered is seen below (Figure Twenty-Four):

1	Empowerment through support and care to build student agency	<p>How does the college ensure it hears the voices of all students, not just course representatives or student governors?</p> <p>Who are the advocates for the students?</p> <p>How often do students receive information regarding the availability of support staff at the college, is this just during induction week?</p> <p>Who supports students to develop their skills outside of the curriculum?</p> <p>What are the ways in which the college is able to demonstrate care for all students?</p> <p>How many students are involved in extra-curriculum activities and how often do staff support students to attend?</p>
2	Meaningful, participatory decision-making processes	<p>What are all the ways in which the college harnesses the voice of the students and have students' views been sought on the quality of those processes?</p> <p>If the institution uses a cross college survey, what is its function?</p> <p>How are the results fed back to the students and do students see any purpose to the surveys?</p> <p>How do students feedback to teachers about their lessons, who facilitates this process and how regular is it?</p> <p>Does decision making about the curriculum design happen in partnership with students?</p> <p>How can all students input into management decision-making and work with senior leaders to support change at the college?</p>
3	Involvement of all individual students, course by course	<p>How many students are listed as representatives or governors?</p> <p>What is their attendance at whole college meetings?</p> <p>What is the proportion of representatives and governors in relation to the whole college population?</p> <p>How do staff facilitate students meeting regularly (weekly) with representatives or curriculum leaders?</p> <p>Has the college considered whole class councils rather than the views of one or two individuals?</p>

		Who ensures that all students are heard regardless of perceived ability or skills?
4	A feedback loop which is purposeful and regular	<p>What are the college mechanisms for feeding back the results of student voice practice to all students?</p> <p>How do students at individual course level know what is happening across the college?</p> <p>Can the college think of more creative ways of disseminating feedback to students?</p> <p>What is the frequency of feedback to students and what happens if students want further changes?</p> <p>Is feedback purposeful, regular and meaningful for students and staff?</p>

5.3.1 Empowerment through support and care to build student agency

The first part of the framework is related to notions of empowerment that can be built through support and care for students. Although empowerment is difficult to quantify, and therefore complicated for colleges to measure, there should be a sense that students are involved in all aspects of the college, such as curriculum matters, and their input not limited to just pastoral issues (Fielding, 2004), and they should be actively shaping FECs’ pedagogy. This can be achieved by the college staff and students working together, on issues local to their courses but also within the wider college context. Students should ‘see’ the purpose of their involvement and an increased sense of student empowerment. This may mean a reshaping of the relationships between staff and students, and it would be necessary to ensure that staff feel comfortable, and able to work with students, in a collaborative, meaningful manner.

The development of the student’s agency, building on Charteris & Thomas’ (2017) observation, is defined as a student’s capability to take action, and to gain the skills they need to be articulate both in a college situation but also in the wider world as they grow older and move into their careers.

This is summarised by organisation in New Zealand (CORE Ten Trends, 2017):

Learner agency is about having the power, combined with choices, to take meaningful action and see the results of your decisions. It can be thought of as a catalyst for change or transformation. Within a school context, Learner Agency is about shifting the ownership of learning from teachers to students, enabling students to have the understanding, ability, and opportunity to be part of the learning design and to take action to intervene in the learning process, to affect outcomes and become powerful lifelong learners.

5.3.2 Meaningful, participatory decision-making processes

The second part of the framework relates to students becoming involved in meaningful, participatory decision-making processes. As was found in this investigation, too often student's views are sought and then little happens after they have spoken. Participatory collective decision-making, as outlined by Fielding (2012), is doubtlessly not without its challenges in large organisations such as FECs.

The issues are exemplified by the recent Area Reviews, predicting the merger of many colleges (Foster, 2018) with large numbers of students to be now more commonly based within the 'umbrella' of one FEC. The Area Review outcomes are not fully realised but the proposals (following the estimated 50 and 80 college mergers) are for students to be spread out amongst one of many campuses. If these mergers take place then it will be a huge challenge to involve students as they will be at different locations across increasing larger geographical locations. An effective starting point for the newly merged colleges would be to ensure that the senior leaders in the organisations take the transformation seriously and are willing to support the change and ethos that is needed. This should be underpinned by the notion of the individual student and the concept that it is their college. Further thought should be given to cross-campus student voice practice, along with fundamental recognition that students need to be at the heart of decision-making processes at both a macro and micro level within their courses and the wider institution.

5.3.3 Involvement of all individual students, course by course

The issue of which students' voices are heard and 'who talks' on behalf of students is also a common concern of student voice researchers (Silva, 2001; Fielding, 2004). The challenge within student voice practice in FECs is to provide opportunities for all students to effectively engage on a consistent basis. By ensuring that it is not just the student representatives or governors who have an opportunity to speak, senior management within colleges will be closer to understanding the views of all, not just the 'privileged few'.

This may mean that some of the emerging issues that are raised by the variety of students are perhaps harder to hear. As can be seen from the data collected for this research project, some students are less linguistically developed than others, but giving students regular opportunities will

increase their confidence and allow all students to achieve their potential. As Quaglia & Fox (2018) argue there should be habitual questioning, and reflection by those staff supporting students, to question whose voices are missing within student voice practice and how those voices might best be reached. Consideration of whole class representative meetings would be beneficial as this would mean that it is not just one or two individuals speaking for the whole class, but rather it could be a rotation of students being given the responsibility and tasks.

5.3.4 Feedback loop which is purposeful and regular

The perennial concern, particularly with students in this investigation, is the ability for students to share their views with staff, only for them be disregarded and not acted upon. Inaction and the lack of visible change means that students become disenfranchised and are left feeling that it was pointless speaking in the first place. It becomes a vicious circle of apathy, where students 'give up speaking' and become more detached and disempowered because meaningful feedback is rarely given to them. This is even more pronounced within student voice practices such as whole college surveys, as Angus et al (2013: 570) states:

Such data cannot provide the kind of rich description that could be generated by engaged participants in particular contexts by producing honest, considered narratives about their attempts, successful or otherwise, to hear and respond to the voices of learners and to work with them to address the needs of particular students and students in general.

The types of feedback that can be provided to students is important and these can include a variety of means, as highlighted by Collinson (2007: 38) 'posters, newsletters, annual reports, email/website, tutor groups, and via governors and student councils.' Whilst these are undoubtedly mechanisms that may be of value to the students, the most important consideration should be for face-to-face feedback. Students need to know that staff care about their views, and that they will see results after they have spoken. This does mean that time would need to be assigned to regular feedback from staff at the college to the various groups of students. Teaching staff, managers or support staff, could facilitate this.

Students do not want to feel like they are just a 'data source' where there is no direct feedback given to them (Czerniawski et al, 2009). By involving students more in the decision-making process within curriculum areas, or the wider college, there would hopefully be more collegial engagement with

college life and students could start the process of feeding back to each other, or perhaps using more technologically advanced ways of sharing what is happening at the college.

5.4 Contribution to knowledge

This case study has demonstrated that many students have valuable insights into their everyday educational lives that can benefit the institutions in which they study. The use of mixed methods research design, which uses both traditional research methods as well as visual method approaches such as photo-elicitation, has brought a depth of understanding to these young people's experiences in a contemporary FEC. Using photo-elicitation methods within social research projects is becoming increasingly popular (Croghan et al, 2008) but particularly with marginalised groups such as children and young people (Smith et al, 2012). However, research with FE students, utilising photo-elicitation methods to share their experiences of student voice practice is unique. It has enabled the students to be involved and to articulate for themselves where their previous influence and visibility may have been traditionally low (Bates et al, 2017).

This research project has allowed the students to create unique artefacts that provide a narrative of their everyday lives as they have moved from school and into post-16 education. Through the use of visual methods I have been able to 'support two-way communication, facilitate partnership, reduce power dynamics and increase the validity and rigour of the process' (Wall et al, 2012: 226).

The use of digital imagery to take the photographs meant that the students were able to take images, in their own time; the image reflected their experiences, without undue influence from an adult, who may have encouraged students to take more positive images. The students' use of their own 'smartphones' enabled them to take images, which they saw as fitting, and to take photographs with a device that was individual to them. This may have empowered them to take images that were more personal to them; in particular as they are of a generation where photography is a changed medium, 'smartphones' have now become 'expedient devices in daily life' (Peters & Allan, 2018: 358).

The participatory research design has allowed the students to share an understanding of their perspective from an 'insiders' viewpoint. It has enabled them to express ideas and thoughts that

may have previously been noticed or unheard (Woolhouse, 2017). The students that took part in this research have been empowered to share their experiences through a combination of discussion and photographs which capture their unique experiences in the time and space in which they were able to define themselves (Wang and Burris, 1994). Within all research processes there should be an acknowledgement of the relationships of power that exists (Pillow, 2003). Although my positionality in this research project has been acknowledged previously, and I undoubtedly had a position of power within the construction of this research, the students have been enabled to share their views without suppression or fear of a negative reaction from my 'outsiders' viewpoint.

Research within FECs is not as prevalent as in other education institutions, and the students that took part in this research had not been involved in a research project such as this before. The involvement of the students in taking the photographs, followed by a discussion of the meaning of their images, allowed this research project to generate a deeper understanding of what their images meant to them, without my preconceived notions or analysis. I agree with Heisley & Levy's (1991: 260) view that the use of photo-elicitation allows the participants 'to raise issues that are significant to them.'

Research into student voice within FE is not unique to this study; however this research project has allowed the students involved in this case study to reflect on student voice practice at their college, by using their voices. By putting the students at the forefront of this research it is their voice which is the most powerful, and their opinions which are central to the understanding of what it is to be a student in this large FEC in Central England.

By taking part in this research project the students have been able to provide a true reflection of their thoughts and ideas about student voice practice at the college. Whilst this may make for uncomfortable reading for some, it is the students' voices which have been heard. The students in this research project had many important ideas, and were often hopeful as to how things may be in the future, but were also critical where they saw failings or a lack of coherent action. Student voices can be uncomfortable for staff to hear at times (McIntyre et al, 2005) particularly if they have issues which are difficult to manage or solve, but their student-eye-view of the college is a perspective that is invaluable to future improvements, both at this college, and others across the country.

5.5 Recommendations for future research

This research project was able to delve into the thoughts and opinions of a group of students in one FEC, but there are potential research areas which may help to further develop a level of understanding in this field:

Recommendation 1

Photo-elicitation as a research method with Further Education students: Further use of photo-elicitation research methods will allow students to express their opinions in the settings where they study. Although there are ethical issues around children and young people taking images of subjects which could be deemed controversial or which may be uncomfortable for college staff, it is a method which can yield a greater variation of responses which may not be found within research which just requires linguistic skills. The use of student's photographs may continue to help to encourage a deeper understanding of their lives.

Recommendation 2

Review long standing student voice practice: As student voice initiatives have been established in many colleges for over two decades, it would be prudent for future research to further analyse its purpose and whether or not it is having its intended impact. There needs to be serious consideration and reflection on FE student voice practice, what it is for, whose interests it serves and what direct benefit it is to the students?

Recommendation 3

Whole class student voice research: This research has sought to listen to the voices of all the students in an entire year group, not just those that are the most eloquent or those who speak with voices which are the most palatable to researchers or teachers. However, a commitment to develop more whole class student voice research with young people would ensure that researchers do not just find the 'articulate few'. This is obviously dependent on the consent of parents and guardians of children and young people. Support may be needed for students who may be less confident or have additional needs, and there should also be consideration for those who do not wish to take part.

Recommendation 4

Further Education research to be brought to the fore: The FE sector is a wide and multifaceted service, which educates 2.7 million different types of students across the United Kingdom (AoC, 2016). However, research in the sector is underrepresented and although there are academic journals related to the field, research by FE practitioners is needed to be able to give further insight into the 'real' world of FE. Therefore there needs to be an understanding of the importance of research within the sector and that research can enhance the everyday experiences of students across the country.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Doctoral Research Proposal – College

Name: Damien Homer

Supervisors: Dr Sue Eccles and Professor Julian McDougall (Bournemouth University)

Title: The rhetoric of participation: Student voice initiatives in a College of Further Education

What is the purpose of the study? The purpose of my study is to find out how Creative Arts students currently engage with learners' voices initiatives at the College. Colleges and schools across the country try various different interventions, such as: Student Unions; student representative groups; student governors and surveys to find out what young people think about their academic lives. The intention of this study is to reflect on what the College does and how students are engaged.

What will it involve? I propose to work with young people and relevant staff members across media courses. All participants will be asked if they want to take part, and no-one is obliged. The research is anticipated to last into the summer 2016, if at any stage participants would like to withdraw from the process at any time, they may.

What do the participants have to do? The intention is to hold a series of focus group meetings, interviews and for students to take photographs with a range of young people and staff at the college. The discussions will take place within the college day, and should not negatively impact on the student's studies, or the staff.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are several benefits to taking part, for the department, College, students and staff. Firstly the department and college will be able to show that it is engaging with academic research. Furthermore, it will not have any financial burden and it will, hopefully, allow a framework for future development at Colleges. It will benefit the students as it will allow them the opportunity to build a range of discussion and debating skills, such as sharing opinions with others, working in small groups, respecting others' views and expressing ideas and concepts.

What are the next steps? I would like to work out a research timeline, in conjunction with the management of the Creative Arts department, so that I can start to work with the young people, and staff, from April 2016 onwards. At the moment I envisage spending one day a week at the college, over several months, but I am happy to negotiate and work within the parameters of the organisation.

Contact email: _____

Damien Homer

Contact telephone number: _____

Appendix 2

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

As part of my doctoral research I am inviting _____ (Name)_____ to be part of my study into 'student voice' in further education. My project is interested in how students are listened to in a college, and how they can have more of a 'voice'. As your son/daughter is under 18 it is important you give your consent and understand why the research is being done. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have directly to me, or to share this document with others.

I work at a College as a teacher, but I am also studying for my EdD at Bournemouth University. I want to undertake this study as I am passionate about young people being able to build the skills that will help them in the future. I want to explore how young people at colleges can take a more democratic role in their education.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of my study is to find out how we can better empower our young people to have a say in their education. Colleges and schools across the country try various different interventions, such as Student Unions, student representative groups and surveys, to find out what young people think about their academic lives. It is my intention to explore what is happening at the moment, so hopefully I can offer a framework for improvements in the future.

Why has your son/daughter been chosen?

I intend to work with a range of young people across a range of courses, all participants will be asked if they want to take part, and no-one is obliged. The research is anticipated to last into the summer 2016, if at any stage your son or daughter would like to withdraw from the process at any time they may.

What does your son/daughter have to do?

The intention is to hold a series of focus group meetings, and interviews with a range of young people and they will be asked to take images of how they feel about student voice at the College. Other than share opinions, thoughts and suggestions in a discussion, there is nothing else for them to do.

Are there any disadvantages?

I cannot foresee any disadvantages, the focus groups and interviews will take in place in college time, and if at any time your son/daughter wishes not to take part they may stop coming to the discussions.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Damien Homer

There are several benefits to taking part, most notably to help their time at College and for them to express opinions about their academic life. The discussions will allow your son/daughter the opportunity to build a range of discussion and debating skills, such as sharing opinions with others, working in small groups, respecting others views' and expressing ideas and concepts.

Will the information given be kept confidential?

The information gathered in the interviews, discussions, images and focus groups is confidential; all the young people's names will be anonymous, as will the name of the College. The data will also be securely stored. Your son/daughter may withdraw at any time up to the point of anonymising the data. Your son/daughter's personal details (places, names, etc.) will be changed or removed to protect their anonymity according to the principles of the Data Protection Act 1984. Interview data will be stored for 36 months and then destroyed according to the Data Protection and the Records Management Code of Practice. I will type out the interview transcripts by hand and only my supervisors and I will have access to the entire scripts.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the study will be used in my thesis and may be reproduced at conferences, in research papers or published in journal articles; however the anonymity of your son/daughter will be maintained.

If you have any concerns, or complaints to raise during the research process please contact:

Professor Iain MacRury Deputy Dean - Research And Professional Practice

_____ (email), _____ (telephone).

If there is anything else you need to know, please contact me:

Damien Homer

Phone number: _____

Email: _____

Alternatively you may speak to my university supervisor, _____ (email), _____ (telephone).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for allowing your son/daughter to take part.

Appendix 3

CONSENT FORM

Organisation: _____ College **Researcher:** Damien Homer

Title of Study: The rhetoric of participation: Student voice initiatives in a College of Further Education

Aim of Study: The purpose of my study is to find out how we can better empower our young people to have a say in their education. Colleges and schools across the country try various different interventions, such as Student Unions, student representative groups and surveys, to find out what young people think about their academic lives. It is my intention to explore what is happening at the moment, so hopefully I can offer a framework for improvements in the future.

Contact: Please contact me if there's anything you are not sure about: _____(email), _____(telephone). Alternatively you may speak to my university supervisor: _____(email), _____(telephone).

Consent:

- I give consent to audio, photography and/or video footage being taken of, or by, my son/daughter whilst taking part in this research or while being interviewed by the researcher.
- I understand that clips of the audio, photography and/or video footage may be used in future conference and journal publications. The data will not be shared by anybody other than the researcher.
- All audio, photography and/or video footage given in the final thesis will remain anonymous and my son/daughter will not be identified. Your son/daughter may withdraw at any time up to the point of anonymising the data.
- My son/daughter is not required to answer any specific questions if he/she chooses not to and he/she has the option to withdraw at any time from the interview or study without giving a reason.
- The researcher will retain the audio, photography and/or video footage for a maximum of 36 months. The footage will then be destroyed in accordance with Data Protection and the Bournemouth University Research Ethics Code of Practice.
- I, agree that my son/daughter can take part in the study.

Signature of Parent

Date.....

Signature of Student

Date.....

Damien Homer

Signature of Researcher

Date.....

Figures:

Figure 1: Roger Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation

Figure 2: Pathways to Participation (Shier, 2001)

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

Figure 4: Research Design

Figure 5: Triangulation of research design

Figure 5: Outline of student involvement in all research elements

Figure 6: Themes and coding excerpt

Figure 7: Outline of student involvement in all research elements

Figure 8: List of themes and codes

Figure 9: Participant Thirty Four – Image and caption

Figure 10: Participant Twenty-Two - Image and caption

Figure 11: Participant Fifty - Image and caption

Figure 12: Participant Forty-Six - Image and caption

Figure 13: Participant Fifty-Four - Image and caption

Figure 14: Participant Thirty-One- Image and caption

Figure 15: Participant Twenty-Nine - Image and caption

Figure 16: Participant Forty - Image and caption

Figure 17: Participant Thirty-Nine - Image and caption

Figure 18: Participant Seventeen - Image and caption

Figure 19: Participant Six - Image and caption

Figure 20: Participant Eighteen - Image and caption

Figure 21: Participant Twenty-Seven- Image and caption

Figure 22: Participant Fifty-Six- Image and caption

Figure 23: Participant Fifty-Seven- Image and caption

Figure 24: Framework for change

Figure 25: Framework for change – Questions to ask