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**This is the author version of article published as:**

**Bland, Derek C. and Atweh, Bill (2003) A Critical Approach to Collaborating with Students as Researchers, in Performing educational research: Theories, methods and practices, pages pp. 331-344. Post Pressed.**

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Faculty of Education Postgraduate Student Conference,  
*'Performing Research'*  
Kelvin Grove Campus, QUT, 24-25 October 2003.

## **A Critical Approach to Collaborating with Students as Researchers<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Young people's involvement in "real life" research activities has been raised recently by a number of researchers. This paper theorises the concept of young people as researchers by discussing potential benefits and limitations of such involvement. The literature identifies some issues that need to be considered in planning and reflecting on collaboration with young people as researchers, such as voice, i.e. insider/outsider, expert/novice and the question of empowerment. These issues will be discussed with reference to late modernity theorisation according to writers such as Habermas, Hargreaves, Giddens, Kemmis, and other writers within the action research literature and within the practice of students as researchers movement in different countries.

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<sup>1</sup> In E. McWilliam, S. Danby & J. Knight (Eds.), *Performing educational research: Theories, methods and practices* (pp. 331-344). Flaxton, Qld: Post Pressed..

In the prestigious Radford lecture, given yearly by a leading Australian researcher during the national annual meeting of the Australian Association of Educational Research, Stephen Kemmis (2000) argues that, among the many shifts in educational research during the past twenty years, there was a shift from disciplines associated with education such as psychology and sociology, to research for the practice and profession of education. He traces the historical foundation of practitioner-researchers' networks in Australia during that time and offers a challenge to the Australian educational research community to assist teacher-researchers find funding, training and support, and assisting with dissemination of reports through practitioner-research networks. He argues for further integration between "university educational research and practitioner research", not only on the basis of good corporate citizenship, but because "it is essential to the well-being of educational research itself" (p. 9).

This chapter extends this argument to the involvement of students themselves in the conduct of this research. Young people have been referred to as "the missing voice" in educational research (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 5). In the fast-changing climate of the early twenty-first century, Cook-Sather said, "students must be included among those with the authority to participate both in the critique and in the reform of education" (p. 3). Further, Levin (2000) has argued that reform of education cannot succeed and should not proceed without much more direct involvement of students in all its aspects.

There are a few instances of projects involving students as key participants and researchers in educational reform processes, particularly in the United Kingdom (Atweh & Burton, 1995; Burke, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001; Kirshner & O'Donoghue, 2001; Thomas, 2000). It has been noted, however, "while great advances have been made in theorizing researcher-practitioner partnerships, research collaborations with youth remain under-theorized and under-utilized" (Kirshner & O'Donoghue 2001 p. 4).

This chapter has three components. First, it discusses some theoretical foundations for the involvement of students in meaningful educational research. In particular we attempt to ground this involvement in critical theory and its later developments in the writings of

Habermas. Second, it discusses some examples of projects involving students as researchers and highlights some of the benefits to students themselves arising from such involvement. Third, we will critically discuss some of the arising issues relating to the theory and practice of working with students in education research settings. The chapter concludes with a short discussion on needed further theorising and research in the area.

### **Theory and practice in students as researchers paradigm**

We will attempt to locate students' involvement in research in the theory of *communicative action* developed by Habermas in the 1980s. For us, these theoretical tools represent a comprehensive analysis of society in late modernity that allows the interrogation of the practice of education and, in particular, research, as well as providing a commitment to the project of emancipation that, we argue, is an inherent rationale for the involvement of students in research activities on aspects of their "real" life.

Perhaps more familiar to educational researchers is the early work of Habermas on *knowledge constituted interests* developed in the earlier decade. Many researchers in the critical traditions have employed this aspect of Habermas's theory (e.g., Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Grundy, 1987). Carr and Kemmis (1986) point out that the designation of this theory reflects its basic epistemological assertion that knowledge "is always constituted on the basis of interests that have developed out of the natural needs of the human species and that have been shaped by historical and social conditions" (p. 134). Habermas (1972) discusses three types of knowledge-constitutive interests: *technical*, *practical* and *emancipatory*. In general, *technical* interests are grounded in the need of the human species to survive and reproduce certain valued aspects of the social and biological spheres. Carr and Kemmis (1986) point out that the concern regarding this type of knowledge is not about its usefulness or validity, but in the mistaken assumption that "it is the only type of legitimate knowledge" (p. 135). Likewise, the *practical* interests are about understanding the environment so that one is able to interact with it (Grundy, 1987, p.13). Lastly, Grundy states that "the *emancipatory* interest gives rise to autonomous, responsible action based upon prudent decisions informed by a certain kind of

knowledge” (our italics) (p. 18). While control and understanding are the motivating factors of the previous knowledge-constituted interests, empowerment, i.e., “the ability of individuals and groups to take control of their own lives in autonomous and responsible ways” (p. 19), is the motivation for emancipatory knowledge. Further, since autonomy of one individual cannot be isolated from that of others in a social group, and since any practice is a social process that involves many others, there is more emphasis in this type of knowledge on the role of the social dimension of the practice. The development of such knowledge is enhanced by collaborating with other people from the “inside” and the “outside” of the practice. These terms will be further elaborated upon below. Also, this knowledge cannot arise simply from experiential processes, or be based on understanding, but develops through critical reflection. The project of empowerment and emancipation has been one of the main criticisms of the theory of Habermas and we will return to this issue further in this chapter.

In his later work on communicative action, Habermas (1984) provides a critique of the philosophy of the subject where he argues that “truth resides not in the mind of individual cognitive subjects ... but in the eternal conversation of people who interrupt what they are doing to ask “Is it comprehensible?” “Is it true (in the sense of accurate)?” “Is it morally right (appropriate)?” “Is it truthfully (i.e., sincerely) stated?” (Kemmis, 2000, p. 4). Habermas (1984, p. 44) defines communicative action as the “form of social interaction in which the plans of action of different actors are coordinated through an exchange of communicative acts, that is, through a use of language orientated toward reaching an understanding”. Arguably, in a certain sense, the whole process of education can be seen as developing this communicative competence.

Of particular interest to us here is the two-level theory in which communicative action takes place: the *lifeworld* and the *system* world (Habermas, 1987). While the lifeworld is the taken for granted pre-interpreted everyday life existence, communicative action in this world is saturated by tradition and routine. Through the lifeworld, individuals construct their own identities and create social solidarity and participate in, and create culture. On the other hand, the social world consists of social organisations dominated by technical goals and outcomes. The function of the systems level of society is to

coordinate and control natural and social forces, as well as the resources and organisations to administer them through bureaucratic structures. Seidman (1998) explains that whereas in the lifeworld “action is oriented to mutual understanding”, the emphasis is on “instrumental control and efficiency” at the systems level (p. 197).

Habermas goes on to argue that these two life spheres are highly differentiated into subsystems and that their interactions are complex. In analysing late modernity, Habermas makes two key observations about this interaction. The first he terms the *uncoupling of the system from the lifeworld*. This refers to the fact that systems have become increasingly autonomous from the concerns of the lifeworld. Systems seem to have developed a rationality of their own and act according to their own imperatives even at times when they contradict the processes of the lifeworld that sustain them. The second observation that Habermas makes about modernity relates to the *colonisation of the lifeworld by the system imperatives*. This is seen, for example, in the dominance of the systems language of efficiency, productivity, goals and roles on the lifeworld on people. For instance, our roles in social systems functioning contribute to our notions of our own personal identity, for example as clients and consumers.

How can we conceptualise students’ involvement in research in these constructs developed by Habermas? Undoubtedly, today’s youth inhabit a world where roles, traditions and understandings are shifting at an unprecedented rate. In these postmodern times, the only certainty left is that of uncertainty and risk. Here we argue that student involvement in research is an opportunity for participating in meaningful and empowering communicative action where they work collaboratively with other students, teachers and academic researchers to posit their own questions and problems, and to find creative ways to deal with and improve aspects of their lives. In doing so, students are not only developing some technical knowledge about survival in the lifeworld and the system world, but also developing practical knowledge about the world, and, arguably, developing a sense of empowered agency as active participants or actors in the world.

Students’ involvement in meaningful research activities serves two purposes with reference to the two observations that Habermas makes on the interactions of the

lifeworld and system world. On one hand, it allows the students who are constructed as recipients of the benefits deriving from the education system world's knowledge and policy, to be active agents in that world. This reflects the attitude of Habermas in turning to the developing grass roots, democratic, social movements as redemptive agents and the carriers of a rational society to counteract the colonisation of the lifeworld by the systems level (Seidman, 1998). Moreover, young people engaging in deep participation as researchers may find empowerment through having a direct impact on systems' processes. On the other hand, the students' participation in research assists reconnecting the system and lifeworlds in making the system more responsive to their own lifeworld. Research conducted in a university culture that is increasingly commercialised and commodified may not be relevant to the daily lives and concerns of young people. This involvement challenges the traditional educational system construction of students as clients of research and educational services rather than as active agents in their own education.

### **Example projects of students as researchers**

Several educational researchers in the literature have used the term *Students as Researchers* to refer to the students' involvement in real research activities (Atweh & Burton, 1995, Fielding, 2001; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). The level of students' involvement in such activities varies from one project to another: from mere collectors of data (eg. Crane, Brannock, Ray, Campbell, Smeal & Atweh, 1996) to full participants in the planning, conducting and writing about the research activity (e.g. Atweh, 2003; Fielding, 2001). Similarly, the context of research varied from work done by students as part of their school work (e.g. Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998) to specialized funded projects (e.g. Daws, Brannock, Brooker, Patton, Smeal, & Warren, 1995). We will discuss only a few examples in this chapter to illustrate the variety of projects that students have been involved in.

Fielding (2001) reports on a project that took place in a United Kingdom high school in collaboration with a British university designed to improve the culture of the school

through increasing student participation. The project design ensured that the students themselves identified the important issues from their daily experience of schooling. With the support of staff in facilitating and enabling roles, they gathered and analysed data, and made recommendations for change “shared with their fellow students, with staff and with the governing body of the school” (p. 125). Importantly, the students in this project had primary control of the directions of the project which aimed to be “open and dialogic, not merely managed and informative” (p. 126). The group explored three topics - student voice, student experience of trainee teachers, and the school’s assessment and profiling system. After the first two months, using a variety of data gathering techniques, each group produced and presented reports at a range of forums including staff meetings and parents’ evenings. This initial stage was followed up in the second year with a larger cohort, with some students continuing as student researchers and others becoming consultants to the new groups. A successful outcome of the project was structural change “brought about by cultural change in attitudes *to* students” (p. 129, our italics).

Three recent Australian examples of young people as researchers were provided by Howard, Hoyer, MacGregor, Maltman, Spencer, Skelly, and Hardy (2002) in which regional authorities aimed to improve the general environment for local youth. Although not specifically targeting education, the research is valuable for its contribution to the discussion of young people’s participation as researchers. “What’s the Story” was a youth participation project involving eight young people in a fifteen-week program leading to the development of a short film as a community resource about crime. The authors also reported on a project facilitated by the local city council aimed at making the immediate area more “youth-friendly” (p. 10) and leading to the establishment of a Youth Association. Finally, they reported on a newly created project employing eleven young people as peer researchers to gain insight into the types of activities relevant to young people in the area. From these three projects, and drawing on the available literature, the writers constructed principles for working with young people as researchers. These principles include:

- 1 young people must be involved from the outset of the project;

- 2 key decisions must be in consultation with the young people;
- 3 the participation structure must include exit strategies; and
- 4 professional co-researchers have the responsibility to ensure young people are not set up to fail.

Further, the authors identified key issues relating to young people participating as researchers, including the need to take the risk to share power; overcome scepticism; provide closure through debriefing; ensure adequate training for novice researchers; and ensure adequate support.

Other examples of young people as researchers include a collaborative research project with Indigenous Australians on matters of early school drop out and high levels of absenteeism (Sanderson & Allard, 2003). Also, students participated in a US study into the large percentage of failure of 14 and 15 year olds at a particular school to obtain student views of the reasons that students struggle in school (Mitra, 2001). A Chilean project involved key personnel of the UK *Students as Researchers* project who worked with Chilean educators (Prieto, 2001). In the context of emerging democracy in Chile after a long period of dictatorship, the “Voices Project” involved students in designing and developing an educational program for democracy in their own schools.

Finally, we will discuss the SARUA (Student Action Research for University Access) project in some detail since it forms the main source of issues raised in this chapter. Commencing in a single school in Brisbane in 1991, the project has been employed in at least 20 other metropolitan schools and formed the basis of similar projects in at least two other states in Australia (Atweh, 2003). The SARUA project’s aims are directly related to addressing the under-representation in higher education of students from identified groups (principally, Indigenous and low socio-economic status). Participatory action research was adopted as the preferred paradigm for constructing this project because the emphasis it places on:

- 1 the participation of the students themselves in the whole research process;

- 2 the collaboration between the students and their teachers and university researchers;
- 3 the cyclic nature and nexus between knowledge generation and improvement of practice and the conditions of the practice;
- 4 the social aspects of the practice; and
- 5 the empowerment of participants as active agents for change.

In advancing the aims of the SARUA Project, university-based professional researchers work with schools to:

- 1 develop collaborative school-based projects between students, school staff, and the university;
- 2 investigate barriers to higher education; and
- 3 plan and perform action needed to bridge the gap between schools and universities. (Atweh & Dornan, 1999).

In this project, high school students volunteer to participate and are finally selected by their collaborating teachers according to their interest and ability to participate in the task. The project commences with a two-day student workshop at the university in which they examine some of the social concerns of students in their school, consider some of the social issues with respect to access to higher education, develop some research skills and learn something of university life. At the conclusion of this session, the participants identify specific issues for research and/or action in their school community and they develop plans to carry out their investigations. Having carried out their action research projects at their own schools, the students then return to the university towards the end of

the year to discuss ways of reporting their findings and to consider the next stage in the action research process.

### ***Benefits to students from participating in research activities***

The various research projects involving students as researchers have resulted in a variety of learnings to inform participative research and to highlight the benefits for students and schools. For example, Sanderson and Allard (2003), argued that through such participation, for some students whose voices are often silenced or devalued by the structural relations of power, new insights arose where innovative solutions to recurring problems were drafted. Similarly, Mitra (2001) found that student voices gave a clearer picture of the reasons for academic failure that contradicted some teacher beliefs. This study also found that, when given the chance, students at risk of dropping out of school “spoke articulately and compassionately” about the issues (p. 91). As one participating student in the UK *Students as Researchers* project stated “not only can the students come to school to learn; but that they can and indeed must be an integral part of the school’s own learning” (Crane, 2001, p. 54). Crane suggested that students are likely to be more honest with their fellow students than they would be with teachers in research responses. As a result, the project encouraged some teachers to reconstruct students as equals, and a source of help in their teaching. This project also changed how students thought of themselves, seeing that they were a valued and respected education knowledge base. Using Habermas’s language developed above, these projects have contributed to the bridging of the lifeworld of the students and the schoolteachers and administration representing the system world of education.

Levin (2000) made a special point about “the importance of engagement and active learning” for students who are the least academically successful and stated that such learners may be motivated by “forms of education that give them more control over what they do and how they do it” (p. 164). This view is illustrated by one participating student who acknowledged his boredom with school and was initially reluctant to become involved (Harding, 2001). He then found, however, that not only did he learn research

techniques related to his studies, but was able to directly influence school policy on profiling and assessment, which gave him “a great sense of achievement” (p. 56). This student went on to become a student adviser within the project, reflecting that it provided him with the greater opportunities and skills than that offered by mainstream education.

There is a sense of excitement apparent in the reflections of some SARUA project participants (Atweh & Dornan, 1999). For instance, one student stated:

...I was really pleased with myself. Well, looking at the first draft of the final report, I sat there looking at it and thinking, ‘We couldn't have done this!’. It was the biggest thrill to look at it and say ‘That is mine!’ ... It has boosted my self-esteem a lot. I’m very proud of myself for this and I feel very capable of undertaking a project so large, like, I’d be willing to do it again just to see if it would actually turn out like this again, but I feel very capable. (p. 11)

Another participant referred to the impact on her grades and her family life:

... now I've picked my grades up too, like B's and A's and I surprised myself too. And my marks are getting better and my Dad's a lot happier and everybody is a lot happier ... it's making me more confident about getting to the end of grade 12 and getting into university ... And I really want to go now more than I thought I did. (p. 11)

A sense of achieving something worthwhile for others has been reported by students in a number of projects. For instance, one SARUA participant was pleased that “knowing that the report I have participated in will help future Polynesian students for years to come” (Atweh & Dornan, 1999, p. 10). It is also reflected in the reports of the Chilean Voices Project (Prieto, 2001) in which the researchers’ peers and their school community recognized the importance of their work as something new and worth doing. Students said the project had helped them to know themselves better, whilst the research team recognised the importance of including students in the solutions to their own problems and challenges. This improved understanding of education systems can motivate students

to take more responsibility for their own academic progress (Mitra, 1998) as well as resulting in them becoming more a part of the school community.

In reflecting on the SARUA project as a participatory action research project, Atweh (2003) argues that, as a result of their engagement in this project, students increased their awareness of the social conditions operating at their schools and at universities. Rather than constructing lack of participation as an individual issue they started thinking of disadvantage as a social group issue. Further, the students' participation in the project allowed them to develop confidence and research and writing skills useful for university study. It also allowed the development of their knowledge about the university by directly experiencing university life. Moreover, the project gave the message to the rest of the school that young people from that school could achieve success in intellectual and academic activities. Further, the collaboration between students and researchers was successful because it demonstrated a parity of esteem (Grundy, 1998) whereby the participants worked to develop a reciprocal sense of trust and respect and that all parties involved, students, teachers and university staff, shared common commitment towards the content of research. Also, as discussed in Atweh, Christensen and Dornan (1998), claims as to the "empowerment" of students were demonstrated in the students' lobbying their teachers and community organisations to support aspects of their activities. Finally, through their involvement in the project, the students have developed skills that are useful in the pursuit of university study and in being socially critical citizens.

### **Issues in students as researchers**

In this section we will turn the critical gaze on the practice of students as researchers. This is an attempt of a critique from the inside; that is, it is a reflection by the authors, as well as others, who are sympathetic, and in many cases experienced, in projects of this nature. We will discuss some of the problematic issues and some tensions in working with students as researchers.

### *Multiple voices*

Collaborative research with young people allows for a range of knowledge to be brought to the project by each of the participants. In SARUA, for instance, process knowledge is provided by the university researchers, systems knowledge is provided by the coordinating teachers, and local insights are provided by the student participants. In such collaborations, professional researchers offer their experience in organizing research processes as well as encouraging some theorising behind the immediate data obtained (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). Insiders, on the other hand, can provide extensive and long-term knowledge of the immediate problems as well as the contexts in which they occur, and local knowledge about relevant sources of essential information. As Denzin (1986) notes, “The researcher who has not yet penetrated the world of the individuals studied is in no firm position to begin developing predictions, explanations and theories about that world” (p. 39). Undoubtedly, the experiences in many of the projects reported above attest to the benefits in this regard of working with students as researchers.

However, this collaboration is not without its own problems. As Grundy (1998) argues in the context of collaboration between university researchers and teachers, the experiences of each group are not equally valued by the traditional research relationships. Arguably, this is more so in the case of working with students. The expectation that such collaboration is to be seen as part of the students’ education, with the adults entrusted in this education, as well as the systems legal and ethical constraints under which the different parties interact, often runs contrary to the possibility of equal opportunity for hearing the different voices. Collaborating with young people in the decision-making processes requires a sharing of power with novice researchers and this may lead the professional researcher to lose some direction over aspects of the design of the project and data collection (Robson, 2002). External researchers cannot assume that their good intentions alone are sufficient for their gaining the status of a “trusted person” (Glesne, 1999) that can motivate other participants to be more open. Perhaps the challenge for the different parties to openly negotiate the new unfamiliar working relationship and be continually reflective on the voices represented is a guard against tokenism and superficiality in students’ participation (Wilson, 2000).

Tokenism, or superficial involvement, is a very real, latent problem in projects involving students as researchers and they may be exploited in various ways. For instance, student participation may be a policy requirement of external funding sources (Howard et al., 2002). Students' interests may also be accommodated to the status quo, "reinforcing assumptions and approaches that are destructive" (Fielding, 2001, p. 124). Further, student researchers may be seen as providing a low-cost method of data collection (see, for instance, Bryant, 1997), and this type of exploitation may prevail over reasons of empowerment or equity. Involving young people in research for other pragmatic reasons, such as using them to obtain otherwise elusive information, is likely to lead to superficial involvement rather than shared decision-making (Howard et al., 2002).

The integrity of the student voice needs to be preserved by ensuring students collaborate with their co-researchers in the analysis of the data. The potential for adults to misrecognise "student speak" (Mitra, 2001) can be a danger when adults analyse the data, and translate it into adult words that may not convey the original meaning. On the other hand, professional researchers may "uncritically or unreflectively" privilege some student voices (Cook-Sather, 2002). The intersections of "identity, language, context and power" (p. 6) must be considered throughout the research process.

### ***The question of empowerment***

In grounding a students as researchers paradigm, as we have done above, in the emancipatory interests of students, the question of empowerment becomes a central component of our self-critical reflection. Behind the rationale in many of these projects are concerns of social justice and desires to change or improve situations for students. When young people have the opportunity to become researchers, the possibility is presented for the "localized narratives" of students to be connected to the current "grand narratives of educational and social change" in meaningful ways (Hargreaves, 1999, p. 341). Wilson (2000) argues that student voice in research is underpinned by Habermas's theory of communicative action implying "some form of agreed, reasonable action" enabling the individual to act on the world (p. 26). Many researchers involved in students

as researchers projects have made the claim of empowerment for the students involved in such projects (e.g. Atweh, 2003, Fielding, 2001, Mitra, 2001). Undoubtedly, the benefits for the participating students have been significant. However, the question remains: is this a form of empowerment for the students?

Both constructs of emancipation and empowerment are often - and we argue that they should be - contested from critical and post-modern perspectives (a more detailed problematisation of these constructs is found in Carr, 1995; Kemmis, 1995; Lankshear, 1994; Troyna, 1994). All these authors have provided a critique of the term, yet maintained a commitment for the emancipatory role of critical social science and research against the neo-conservative and some postmodern total rejection and colonisation of the term. Lankshear (1994) rightly points out that the term has come to mean “all things to all people” hence it needs judicial and critical usage. Here we will make few observations on the empowering aspects of students as researchers.

Firstly, the regimes of power that exist in education systems will unavoidably impact on any contracts between students and more experienced researchers. However, constructing power as something that teachers/researchers have that can be transferred to students in the act of collaboration is not only blind to the power that students already enjoy, but also leads to a contradictory outcome in constructing a relationship of dependency of the “powerless” on the “powerful” to “inject power from the outside” (Long & Long, 1992; p.175).

Secondly, we do not understand empowerment as a state that an agency does possess or does not possess, or a state that somebody is either in or not in. Rather, empowerment is a process in which both students and collaborating researchers are continually “coming to power” (Lankshear, 1994, 68). Lankshear constructs the process of empowerment as a process of participation and mastery of other discourses including the ability to critique these discourses. Through participation in formal research activities, students have a chance to participate in the system world of education and develop a critical understanding of the assumptions and processes of this world. The challenge for those who claim empowerment of students in such projects is to define what they mean by the

term and to demonstrate the students' development in understanding and theorising about their world and practice.

### ***Grounding imagination***

Collaborating with students on meaningful research projects is potentially as creative as it is demanding, having within it “the possibility of helping us to make a practical and theoretical leap of grounded imagination” (Fielding, 2001, p. 138). Fine (1994) argued that educational research should “challenge what is, incite what could be, and help imagine a world that is not yet imagined” (p. 30). In this way, the processes of participatory action research fit well with what Greene (1995) called “social imagination: the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools” (p. 5). Such imaginative invention may be a form of “utopian thinking”, a concept explored by Giddens (2001). Giddens, however, cautioned the use of *disciplined* imagination as “the creative ability of the imagination has to be restrained by conceptual and empirical rigour.” (p. 1)

There is, indeed, a tendency among some of the student researchers, in particular student action researchers, to engage in utopian idealism. They may propose some solutions to immediate problems that may not be practical based on the realities of schools and education systems or solutions that are very egocentric based on their individual preferences. These solutions lead into some conflicts among the students or between them and collaborating researchers (Atweh, Christensen & Dornan, 1998). Inevitably, such conflicts lead to tensions between the educative role of the adult researchers and their commitment to democratic principles of project design. On one hand, it is crucial to avoid discouraging students as their interest in the project and their belief in their ability to make a difference in their school underlies their imaginative responses. On the other hand, an important component of action research is the ability to base decisions on knowledge and shared interests.

## Concluding remarks

In this chapter we have considered the international movement increasing the involvement of students in educational reform and in particular in educational research. While several projects around the world have included students as researchers, this chapter has addressed a possible theoretical foundation of such involvement as well as some problematisation of aspects of collaboration between experienced researchers and developing students. Using constructs from the theories of Habermas, we have argued that students' involvement in authentic research on aspects of their social and school lives may act towards the "coming to power" of students to become active agents in the education system as well as to contribute to bridging the lifeworld and system worlds of students - and we may add of teachers. In these final comments we will identify certain further areas for research and theorising needed in the area.

We first note that the majority of the projects reported in the literature, including the ones above, have dealt in some detail with the benefits to students deriving from their involvement in authentic research activity and with the problems and issues arising from such participation. What is missing in many of these reports is a demonstration of the learning about the substantive area of research that the students were involved in and the student voices in writing about these projects. Perhaps the findings of the student projects are reported in other locations - at least this is true in the SARUA project. However, if the intention and the claim is made that students *can* produce useful and defensible knowledge not only for themselves but also for the system, then this should be matched by public voicing of that knowledge. Only such public dissemination of the knowledge generated by students can contribute to an increasing respect by the education system for the students and contribute to answering the question: Is there an empirical argument for students as researchers in educational reform? Projects involving students as researchers need to demonstrate: How effective are students as researchers in generating useful, insider knowledge?

Secondly, it would do students an injustice to regard their involvement as representing students as a singular voice or interest. At least the conduct of the SARUA project has

pointed to issues related to the varied participation of students from different backgrounds based on gender and ethnicity. These observations have not been targeted for systematic observation and theorising. It was noted above that social justice concerns are behind the rationale of the majority of students as researchers projects reported in the literature. This concern should be extended to the critical self-reflection of these projects in terms of students' background and varied contributions. In particular, whether there are differences in the outcomes of their participation relating to gender or ethnicity.

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