Students amid pedagogic change: Partners or pawns?

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Within a wider study of pedagogic change, students from two innovating secondary schools described their experiences of the changes presumed to be occurring in their schools. The students exhibited scant knowledge of the innovations. While their learning was promoted as the motive for change, their role appeared to have been peripheral at best. There were indications, however, that enthused student engagement with new learning approaches, or, conversely, apathy or resistance, had the potential to intensify, or to sabotage, any change of pedagogy. An authentic, informed partnership between learners and teachers may be an essential element of any strategy for pedagogic innovation.

Pedagogic change, secondary schools, practical theory, students, teachers

INTRODUCTION

Schools are facing intensifying and simultaneous demands: (a) for improvement of current performance, (b) for adoption of priorities relinquished by other community organizations, and (c) for innovation to meet future educational challenges (Haseloff, 2005). They are, in fact, being urged into a paradigm shift in pedagogy. Nevertheless, despite bold plans and rich resources in the literature, deep and sustained change remains partial and scattered.

The interviews reported in this article were part of a broader research project, which examined whether it was (a) the existing individual "practical theories" (Handal & Lauvas, 1987, p. 10) about learning, teaching and managing change held by participants in pedagogic change; or (b) the collective codes they shared with peers, that facilitated or blocked innovation; and, if so, (c) what factors shaped the outcome.

Participants in structured programs of pedagogic change at the secondary level described their own experiences. In the first strand, 183 trainee teachers provided reflective written comments on their intensive one-year course; in the second strand, 36 experienced teachers and 10 groups of students were interviewed.

The second strand of the investigation took place in two non-government, non-Catholic schools. Both enrolled students across the complete range from Reception to Year 12, but in each school, the study was restricted to the secondary section. Because confidentiality was an important factor both in gaining access to information and in promoting the frank exchange of opinions, the schools are identified merely as School A and School B. School B is a well-established boys' school, while School A is a coeducational school that had been opened about a decade or two before interviews took place.

There were several reasons for approaching these schools. Both were known to have undertaken programs that featured modern priorities in pedagogy, particularly the encouragement of active learning and the application of higher level cognitive skills in the middle years. School A had undertaken a careful study of recent changes in middle schooling before adopting the Middle Years Program (MYP) of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO). School B had explored innovations in the management of secondary school, particularly within the Coalition of Essential Schools (Sizer, 1992), and eventually had selected Dimensions of Learning (Marzano et

al., 1997) as the basis for refreshing pedagogy throughout the school. Dimensions of Learning emphasises five types of student thinking essential to successful learning: thinking involved in (a) managing attitudes and perceptions related to learning, (b) acquiring and integrating both declarative and procedural knowledge, (c) extending and refining knowledge, (d) using knowledge meaningfully, and (e) developing powerful habits of mind. It was expected that Dimensions of Learning would provide teachers with guidelines for planning syllabus units and assessing students' use of knowledge, as well as offering a repertoire of learning strategies that they might encourage their students to use. Within a few years, School B also decided to adopt the IBO's Middle Years Program, together with the Diploma and Primary Years programs. Other factors, too, drew attention to these schools. Both stood alone in their decision making. On the one hand, their plans were less encumbered by directives or constraints that might be found within a structured school system; on the other hand, they did not have the same levels of advisory support and resources often available within a system. Each school's educational initiative was strongly motivated by the need to differentiate and promote its offering in a highly competitive environment. Moreover, levels of staff morale and commitment appeared to be high. It seemed, therefore, that these schools offered an excellent opportunity to study a single school's effort to change itself. Here, too, the roles of individual practical theories and collective codes might be seen in their simplest and clearest light. In short, the schools were ideal candidates for 'purposeful sampling' (Wiersma 1995, p.214).

In each school, interviews were conducted with (a) teachers of English, mathematics and science, (b) the heads of those subject areas, (c) the leaders of change, and (d) groups of students from Years 8 to 12 inclusive.

LISTENING TO STUDENTS

It was seen as important that students should have an opportunity to describe their experiences of change. They, too, had their own individual practical theories of learning (or perhaps, more realistically, theories of 'studenting'), which coalesced into a collective code that shaped their behaviour, motivation to learn, and attitude to schooling. Such a code could be a potent influence (for good or ill) on the outcomes of classroom activities.

Students were interviewed in small groups, for that seemed the most time-efficient, confidence-inspiring, and prudent way in which a visitor to the school might operate. From each administrative group list at each year level, one student was selected, more or less at random, but maintaining gender balance, and ensuring that only those who had experienced the innovation over at least two years were invited. Despite careful communication and reminder notices, average attendance across the ten year–group interviews was a disappointing 55 per cent. While this prompted more than the usual caution in drawing inferences from the conversations, the smaller groups enabled a smoother development of rapport and probably led to a less inhibited discussion.

Each interview was recorded and its transcript carefully examined and summarized. Each session began with introductions and the distribution of name tags, a recapitulation of the information already provided, a reaffirmation of confidentiality, and the opportunity for each student to 'break the ice' with a brief outline of his or her school activities. While this was happening, a rough seating plan was sketched in field notes to aid recall of names during the transcribing process. The interview then addressed the following agenda.

1. Have you heard about [the change project] at [your school]?

2. How would you explain to a visitor to your school what the project was all about?

3. In any of your classes, have you seen [the change project] in action? Please describe.

4. Do you think any aspects of your school life have changed because of the project?

5. Have you formed any opinions about the worth of the project?

The questions themselves and their order of presentation were soon modified when few students were able to identify the project without prompting or explanation. The sessions became much more open-ended than the agenda might suggest. Indeed, the sounds of lunch-time activities drifting into, and sometimes invading, the allocated meeting rooms might have posed later transcribing problems, but at the time certainly enhanced the informality of the sessions, even when the only available space in School A for the Year 8 meeting turned out to be the Principal's office. Discussions with these young men and women confirmed and enhanced confidence in young people; their openness, frank comments about their own schooling, and their obvious relishing of a rare opportunity to discuss core activities of their young lives were impressive.

While items on the original agenda were seldom relevant to the daily routines of the students, it was possible to discern not only what role in learning the students saw for themselves, but also the role allocated to them by teachers. In addition, it was possible to test whether students had been a bridge to innovation or a barricade against it.

WHAT THE STUDENTS SAID

Students were very clear about their role in the learning process and their involvement in the school's innovation.

Students' Collective Code for Learning

Discussions of learning addressed the roles both of teachers and of students. There was consensus that teachers should 'give us knowledge', 'pass on their knowledge [and] give us an education', 'give us information', and 'control the class'. The role of students was clear, too: they must 'attend classes … listen … want to learn', 'put effort in … pay attention … understand … ask for help', 'remember information and write it in the test', 'write notes about what we're told … [and] do examples and tests'. This last comment came from a Year 9 student who had realized that 'we learn the way we are taught to learn'.

Senior students described the lesson typical of their five years in secondary school:

S. 2: You just go to the class and the teacher goes through the book and you write down what she's said. *[A good way to learn?]* Sometimes. It used to be because you've got to go through content. A lot of teachers are like that.

S. 3: In subjects like maths you basically go through it in class and go off and do the practice problems to find out if you understand it and know how to apply it … in your own time.

Younger students told the same story:

What is the most frequent activity in your classroom?

S. 1: Writing in your book. Copying from the board.

S. 3: Listening to the teacher.

How do you gain information most frequently?

S. 2: The book. The text book. Or the teacher tells you.

Perhaps a Year 10 student summed up the dominant student theory of learning when he declared it was best to 'sit and let things happen'.

Nevertheless, acquiescence to a traditional view of teaching and learning was not complete. Rumblings of discontent were detected in Year 8 groups for whom the pedagogy of primary education was a more recent memory. One student observed that his secondary experience provided less time and less individual assistance for his learning:

> Back at the old school … we were doing stuff—like we were studying it for longer, so you got used to it a bit more. Like the fractions—we would have done that for longer than we're doing it right now. I got used to that a bit more so I was pretty good at that … but algebra and stuff, we hardly did any of that and we get a fair bit of that in Year 8. I just don't seem to understand most of it—it's really difficult.

> *Is teaching different in Year 8?*

> Sort of. I mean, you've got more people in these Year 8 classes so they can't single you out and help you, unless you actually go up and ask for it sometimes.

> *How many in your Year 7 class?*

> 23 or 24.

> *How many in Year 8?*

> 27 or 28. So, it's not a big difference, but it's still a difference.

One inevitably suspects that a particular pedagogy rather than four additional students is the factor shaping learning in this student's classrooms. It may be relevant to note that his peers in the other school complained of too much sitting and too much writing. Students at both schools looked for teachers who could explain well, offer plenty of support and show them how to learn, and promote active learning that was 'more fun'. Senior students had come to realize the importance of teaching that helped them 'understand as well as know'. They valued teachers who could boost motivation through varied approaches and accommodate late developers, and who encouraged mature interaction between teachers and students.

Students' Knowledge about the Change Project

Students develop insights into learning and teaching that seem rarely to be acknowledged. During the interviews, an attempt was made to ascertain whether students involved in innovation had been kept fully informed about the project and drawn as full partners into the new approach to their learning. The answer to both questions in both schools was an unarguable negative.

It is possible that students from the school adopting Dimensions of Learning were more alert to pedagogic matters; certainly, these were the interviews that mentioned understanding as crucial to new learning, and a variety of approaches as central to catering for diverse learning styles. Additionally, in the conversations there was a faint undercurrent of the concepts and vocabulary of Dimensions of Learning:

> You make **links** between—they'll, I suppose, give you an algebra equation and you've got to make the **link between that and the basic learning**. So, I suppose, instead of having a long drawn-out formula to do something, you can use a quicker one that will work for everything. And you **extend** everything and make links between it. (My emphasis)

Despite these hints of the subliminal influence of the second and third of the Dimensions of Learning, it has to be acknowledged that attempts to elicit detailed understanding drew embarrassed silences, and indeed an inability to even name the dimensions. The scorecard for this school would have to read: No Idea: 1 (the Year 8 group) vs Very Fuzzy: 4.

In the other school, the score for understanding the innovation might be: A Vague Idea: 1 (the Year 12 group) vs No Idea: 4. Year 8 students, now in the third year of their Middle Years Program, were surprised to hear that the IBO was an international organization:

> *The International Baccalaureate Organization is worldwide. You are part of a network that spans the world and not just this city. Does that come as a surprise?*
>
> All: (An animated chorus) Yeah. Yup. Yes.
>
> *What do you know about the IBO?*
>
> S. 1: Didn't we get a big thick folder of information?
>
> S. 3: Yeah.
>
> S. 2: Yeah, we did.
>
> S. 3: Yeah, we had information, but it was too big.
>
> (Laughter)
>
> *So you didn't read it?*
>
> All: No.
>
> S. 3: Wasn't it for our parents?
>
> S. 1 & S. 2: Yeah.
>
> *But isn't it about your learning?*
>
> S. 3: They can tell us.
>
> *Is the folder still available at home?*
>
> S. 3: I think so …
>
> S. 2: Somewhere.
>
> S. 3: … somewhere.
>
> *Perhaps you could read it sometime.*
>
> S. 1: I read the first page.

A little later, the conversation turned to the Middle Years Program:

> *What do you know about the MYP?*
>
> S. 2: They give a points system, 1 to 7. That's all.
>
> S. 1: When you get a project there's all like criterias.
>
> S. 3: Yeah, and it tells you how to get a B and C.
>
> *What are criteria?*
>
> S. 3: Something that, when you do your work, you need to meet up to, something you need to complete to sort of get assessed on. To get a high mark or low mark depends on what you've done for the criteria.

This was a commendable effort on the part of Year 8 students to catch the essence of a reasonably sophisticated approach to assessment, and their confusion between the 1–7 and A–F scales echoed the misunderstandings of some teachers. It was what they did not mention—the attempts to meet their pastoral and pedagogic needs, the centrality of Approaches to Learning, the focus on the environment, and the *Homo Faber* component, for example—that showed how slight their grasp of the Middle Years Program was.

Similarly, for other year groups at this school there were no indications that initiatives in middle school pedagogy or inclusive teaching were made explicit to students. When they met them, they recognized some of the inclusive teaching strategies, such as the six box framework for planning essays, but seemed unaware of the role of students in applying the principles of the middle school template. In this respect, they were like their peers in the other school, who might have a few blurred recollections of Dimensions of Learning but, in general, were unwitting participants in a change of pedagogy.

Students Explained Their Non-Participation

Students, themselves, explained this situation in a variety of ways. Some suggested that they were not interested at the time, or that students' interests were directed away from macro issues to those that impinged most directly or forcibly on their immediate concerns, such as the Tuck Shop or the Year 12 Common Room. It seemed clear, however, that they were seldom taken into their teachers' confidence (except by a few enthusiasts) and that the patchy nature of communication and implementation persuaded students that the innovation had no relevance for them. While discussing Dimensions of Learning, a Year 12 student put it this way:

> I was just thinking … Dimensions of Learning was something that I hadn't heard about since my first few days in Year 8. And when I'd come to the school previously when I was in Year 7, and we were sitting around in the Assembly Hall, people were telling us this is Dimensions of Learning. It was almost as if it was a direct explanation to parents, which kind of seemed like it was more advertising the school, like this is our plan, but I don't think the students have ever had any really direct contact.

Perhaps, this is one of those rare occasions when the last word is left to the students!

STUDENTS AS BRIDGES TO INNOVATION

It is clear that students themselves were only minimally aware of the pedagogic innovations thought to be surrounding them, and that they exerted little influence on the outcomes of the projects. Nevertheless, there are grounds for suggesting that students are potential allies or adversaries for innovators, as well as being perceptive commentators on the process.

At the very least, students in the two schools being studied seemed content to comply with teachers' demands, betraying a practical theory of learning that ceded almost all authority on pedagogic matters to teachers. The pockets of discontent in Year 8 and the maturing insights of Year 11 and 12 students, however, pointed to a readiness to do things differently. This was revealed in the somewhat nostalgic accounts of learning experiences that had been engaging and valued. A Year 12 student spoke enthusiastically about his Group 4 Science Project:

> I looked at the effect of caffeine on physical ability. Me and another guy got tanked up on coffee and ran up and down stairs. That's the one thing where they said, 'Go your own way and bring us back your results'.

> *Can you comment on the quality of learning in that context?*

> Well, the results were an abysmal failure, because I drink coffee a lot, so it had no effect on me, and the other guy is one of the fittest guys in the school. So, we didn't do a very good job of selecting out our variables, but we learnt a lot about how you go about doing a practical, especially about planning.

In the same interview, another student described her satisfaction with an art project:

> I had to develop the project, conduct different tests and come back with the conclusion. It was a good project and was very interesting.

A third member of the group said of an English assignment:

> We could come back and ask for suggestions, but most of it was just us doing it. I learnt so much more than probably I would have just doing it in class. I spent about 20 hours, but I was doing something I was interested in.

Words on the page offer only a faint suggestion of the lively enthusiasm that bubbled into these segments of the interview, but the experiences being described appeared to have been rare. Indeed, a question that had earlier sought to find out how frequently they had been challenged to work something out for themselves, rather than being told the principle or formula, drew the response, 'That's a bit revolutionary!'

Students in other year groups seemed also to glimpse the potential for more active and engaging learning. A Year 11 student, for example, supported her peers' wish for more facilities but added:

> Sometimes I think I need more research stuff and sometimes I think I could achieve something quite good like that.

A girl in Year 10 probably voiced the views of many when she described her appreciation of the opportunity to influence the choice of topics that she investigated:

> Some teachers sort of compromise with what they want to do and with what the students want to do. You might have an idea of what you want to do and it might be different from what the teacher said … Sometimes a compromise is made where you do part of what the teacher wants and part of your own idea.

One of the most interesting, and possibly most relevant, responses was the joy and satisfaction that accompanied episodes of effective learning. Some of this was revealed in the extracts already quoted from the interview with senior students, but the following exchange with Year 8 students best caught the freshness and sense of achievement that might be the innovator's strongest allies:

> *What, would you say, were the best bits of learning you've done in recent weeks?*
>
> S. 2: Art. We did print making. I did a dolphin. [*What made you feel good about it?*] I was happy with what I did. [*Did you learn new things in order to do this*?]
>
> S. 2: (confidently) Yes. We learnt the process of printmaking and how to do it.
>
> S. 3: Well, I finished all my sheets in maths. There's, like, 18 to do. [*Why pleased*?] Most of the things we did, I've never done before, so I had to, like, learn them, like how to do algebra. I took weeks to do them—like all last term—eight weeks. [*Relief or sense of achievement?*] Bit of both. I'm relieved I've finished them all.
>
> S. 1: In art we were starting to make puppets. We started collecting all the stuff. We're in the middle of it now. [*Enjoying*?] Yes! [*Learning*?] Yes! A lot.

In summary, the strongest student-based facilitators of innovation are likely to be the excitement, the fulfilment, and the recognition of successful learning promoted by the innovation. Other factors provide useful support. The content has to be seen as interesting and worth the effort of learning, and teachers must be able to strike some spark of motivation. Surpassing all other factors is the academic trust that students place in their teachers—the comments reported earlier might well be repeated in this context: the Year 10 boy was content to 'sit and let things happen', while the Year 9 told us that 'We learn as we are taught to learn'.

STUDENTS AS BARRICADES AGAINST INNOVATION

As attention shifts to factors that block innovation, it soon becomes apparent that academic trust is a double-edged sword. In six of the ten group interviews, students indicated that typical

learning activities required sitting, listening, writing notes and doing tests. Teacher talk may, at times, have been excessive, too; as Year 12 students put it:

> S. 2: …the teacher talks all the time, and it gets really boring, like we say can we have a bit of discussion but he just keeps talking. You just get so bored, and people fall asleep. Maybe, sometimes, there should be class discussions on different topics.

> S. 1: You need a balance between the two 'cos too much of either one and you won't get anything done.

> *Isolated or frequent occurrence?*

> S. 2: Oh, I've had a few … like, I remember back in Year 9 we had [a subject] where the teacher talked most of the time. It got boring. The class eventually went wild and was naughty all the time…

Nevertheless, in spite of hints of mutiny when provocation became extreme, students generally were compliant, especially when hand-outs and work-sheets filled lesson time with busy work, and success was attained through recall of information and practice of skills. The group interviews indicated that, in many classrooms, often over a span of years, teachers' and students' expectations had coalesced into a shared code that protected the *status quo*. It was probable that the persistence of that prior code posed the strongest barrier to any paradigm shift in pedagogy, for it continued to govern decisions made about learning.

Assessment policies were potent forces, also. Reflecting a more widely held idea, Year 10 students saw the purpose of their schooling as 'getting good grades'; to do so, they had to 'remember information and write it in the test'. Such an emphasis on grades rather than learning outcomes, on memorizing rather than understanding, on teacher effort rather than student activity, could only strengthen resistance to approaches that advocate unfamiliar and threatening learning processes.

Even though there were spirited efforts to establish a new approach to learning in both schools, powerful influences locked students into the existing paradigm. For example, few of them had more than a passing interest in the actual processes of learning, deeming this to be the territory of parents—'They can tell us'—or teachers—'The teacher gives you information and you store it'—rather than a matter of great relevance to their daily activities. Careful explanations of Dimensions of Learning or the goals of middle schooling had been lost on most students interviewed, or at best recalled in part and incoherently. Year 12 students, for example, struggled to describe an innovation which was thought to have influenced their five years of secondary education:

> S.4: All I know about it, it was some five-step thing. We were told about it by some teachers in the first few weeks when it was brought in, but since then we haven't heard a thing about it. You're not really conscious they're using it at the school.

> S. 6: Occasionally you see a poster about it.

> S. 3: It hasn't been much really. It hasn't been enforced in the classroom. Basically, I learnt about it in the Outdoor and Transition Education Week in Year 10.

> S. 5: To be perfectly honest, I'd forgotten about it. It's just not really applied in the classroom … Maybe they are applying it, but there's certainly not much talk about it around the school.

In a similar conversation, Year 11 students offered useful insights into student thinking about changes in their school:

S. 1: The problem with change is [that] most often it's gradual, so most often you say, 'Oh, they're doing that next year', and it sort of happens gradually, so you basically make an impact for the younger people. If you're at the senior level, you impact on them more than for yourself … the change can't be immediate; it has to be got round …

S. 3: I think some of the changes that are going to be made will happen after our time.

S. 2: The other thing is, like the air pollution thing, any change made now is going to make a difference down the track. If you want to make a difference now, it should have started before you had a chance to. It's always going to keep changing because what we think's good now will change by the time the Year 8s become the Year 12s.

The indication here is that students may have assumed a future orientation for the current innovation, and have sensed that their involvement needed only to be avuncular and altruistic, failing therefore to see the immediate gains available for the quality of their own learning.

Given that students recognize the capacity of enthusiastic teachers to lead them into new experiences (for example, the Year 10 student who enjoyed Geography because 'the stuff was worth learning … and the teacher just made the subject interesting and showed us just lots of things about it and the way to do it'), questions ought to be asked about why students weren't engaged in discussions of their important and daily tasks. Students have some suggestions to explain this state of affairs.

The perception of Dimensions of Learning held by Year 12 students was that the program attracted mere lip service from many teachers, and was, therefore, only partially and spasmodically implemented. Year 11 students put the same point more devastatingly:

S. 1: With certain teachers, like, I mean, you notice [Dimensions of Learning] with some teachers who, sort of, not ram it home but just say this is declarative knowledge. One thing that just sort of triggered something in my mind is [Name] who—she would use that even now, even though I'm doing the IB. She would still use that or say this is Dimension Five. I had [Name] a year or two ago; he would do that too, but some other teachers, especially the new ones, don't have a clue, to put it bluntly. You wouldn't know they were doing anything different or whether they knew anything about it or not …

S. 3: Just then you were saying about graphic organizers [as one of the Dimension Two strategies for organizing declarative knowledge]. The only time that I really encountered that wasn't from a teacher—it was from a past Year 12 who came back to speak to the school and said he remembered all his stuff for Year 12 exams (he was dux of the school) and he put posters up on his walls of what he wanted to know …

S. 2: I think … students have become—they're not really sure what it is—unless they actually sat down and read it for themselves and tried to get a grasp on what it is, they don't—because they see a bit here and a bit there and then a whole chunk of it here, and they have to, sort of, piece it together to try and get an idea of what Dimensions of Learning is.

Moreover, it became clear during this last interview that a four-hour mini-course for Year 10 students about students' use of Dimensions of Learning had been cut from the previous year's program, thereby signalling an administrative shift of priorities and, probably, a confirmation of student perceptions that the place of Dimensions of Learning in the curriculum was not really important, despite what school leaders might be saying to the contrary. A Year 11 student summed up the significance of the innovation when he suggested that Dimensions of Learning

was 'not … the icing on the cake, it's the eggs and stuff'. However, a Year 12 student went to the heart of the matter:

> S. 5: It kind of sounds as if it's a little bit—it's almost as if the teachers are saying it because they feel, like, it needs to be said, and it's not really enforced, if that makes sense. It's touched on at the beginning of the year, and now when exams are coming up it's touched on again, but it doesn't really seem like it's a really enforced kind of concept.

Students were aware, however, of the contrast between the low profile of Dimensions of Learning and the frequent reminders about assessment procedures required by the International Baccalaureate Organization:

> S. 4: I first heard about this Dimensions thing in Year 7, but—no offence—I don't think it's done anything, because teachers haven't used that within their teaching as much. If they were to incorporate that into everything they do, I think we'd look at the Dimensions of Learning, then attack whatever we were doing. It's just that the IB, because it's a whole lot of different criteria [and] because we keep using that criteria and get reminded to use it, we know it's different and approach something differently and to how we learn it. Because Dimensions of Learning isn't really talked about much at all, I think that's why it hasn't had too much of an impact.

CONCLUSIONS

Senior students appear to be saying that pedagogic innovation is more likely to be successful if students are helped to perceive the immediate, personal gains that they may achieve, and if the basic principles are both clearly understood and kept at the forefront of their minds. No students, in any of the ten group-interviews, gave any indication that these conditions had been met in their experience. Again, the question ought to be asked: Why did these things not occur? Other questions inevitably follow. Are the students correct when they claim that their opinions are not valued or heeded by teachers and parents? Do teachers remain silent about the principles of learning because they believe that students are incapable of understanding them? To what extent does the non-involvement of students release the pressure on teachers to be innovative? Do teachers avoid public descriptions of new teaching approaches in order to protect themselves from accusations of failure? Is it a reluctance to share power? Or is there an outmoded but intransigent collective code operating in this situation?

The change initiatives that formed the background for this article recommended that students be regarded as valuable allies for pedagogic change rather than encumbrances. The IBO requires that their middle years' curriculum feature Approaches to Learning as a precursor to the senior subject of Theory of Knowledge. The Dimensions of Learning model also values students' informed involvement in the learning process, and urges teachers to encourage metacognition in their pupils. Elsewhere, the incorporation of students into school restructuring programs is a feature of the Coalition of Essential Schools (Sizer, 1992) where students may write their version of the principles that underpin school activities, be informed guides for visitors to their schools, and mingle constructively with teachers at the annual conferences or, indeed, attend their own student-led conferences.

Are these or similar features characteristic of Australian secondary schools? In some, probably, but we can't be sure how widespread they are. Perhaps it is time to take note of the broad and longitudinal study of 1,000 children mentioned by Csiksentmihalyi in his interview for *Educational Leadership* (Scherer, 2002, p. 12), and to use his model to conduct an extensive census of Australian students' school experiences. Would Australian students prove to be partners in the process of pedagogic change—or pawns?

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