

# **'Closer to the Ground': Pupil 'voice' and the Development of Knowledge about Schools**

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## **Abstract**

Most pupils, if asked, might be expected to have a view about their school and increasingly the value and significance of including pupils' perspectives in matters and decisions which affect them and their lives appears to be gaining recognition. The rationale for, and importance of, including the views and perceptions of those we have described as 'closer to the ground', namely the pupils, are asserted in this paper. The argument is advanced that pupils have an important role in helping to develop the knowledge base in schools about learning and the development of the school community. This is based on a belief that pupils have unique perspectives to offer and they deserve to be listened to when constructing our knowledge about schools. Drawing on metaphors from the literature of 'bird's eye' and 'worm's eye' perspectives on schools, the paper argues that knowledge has been traditionally constructed from the adult 'bird's eye' view and that the view from closer to the ground, the 'worm's eye view' must neither be overlooked nor constructed from an adult standpoint. A model for engaging 'pupils as partners', devised by a primary school in the City of York in England is examined. It is analysed and critiqued in the light of some of the issues surrounding pupil voice which are synthesised from the literature. The substantive argument made in this paper is that whilst the discourse about pupil 'voice' may often sound progressive, the language can be vague and imprecise and the practical applications varied. A case is therefore made for more rigour to infuse policy and planning in this field and in particular more clarity and precision in the application of concepts and use of terminology.

**Keywords:** Pupil; voice; partners; personalisation; learning