# Editorial

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Young people across Europe are increasingly finding themselves in schools and colleges that operate within neo-liberal market forces (Taysum, et al., 2012; Taysum, et al., 2014; Taysum, et al., 2017). Agendas are driven by performativity and standardised curricula and there is little space for pedagogical relationships to develop that facilitate the rehearsal of democratic processes and practices within daily life.

The aim of this Special Section is to generate new understandings about how young people aged 14 – 16 years old, and adults participate in school processes and practices to optimize learning, achievement, and learning outcomes. The study is located in eight different nation states including England, India, Israel, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, and Russia. The research was conducted by an European-Transnational research team who developed the methodology together. We present findings from the first stage of an: 'Action research project for an International Boundary Crossing Study to improve student and teacher participation in school processes, learning and learning outcomes'. Our research also reveals the characteristics community members most valued, that connected with developing diverse and inclusive communities, hearing voice, and empowering others. We analysed relationships within communities regarding trust, respecting the self, and the other, agreeing to disagree and thereby resolving conflict peacefully, and recognising diversity through inclusive practices. We considered the extent to which learned behaviour regarding democratic participation in processes and practices was empowering or embedding a learned helplessness. We also examined the influence of conforming to societal norms and traditions.

We invite the reader to connect with the findings in this journal, and consider the implications for their leadership and management in schools and colleges in two ways. First, the implications for enabling young people to participate in planning what they will learn and to make connections between their learning and their hopes for their future life styles. Second, the

implications of hearing young people's voices to empower them in intergenerational school and college communities to optimize learning, and evaluate and critically reflect upon what they learn to underpin future achievement. Intergenerational work also connects with students' parents, grandparents, and extended families. This is important because when enabling students to gain important life skills to be drivers of social change, they will be influenced by family networks (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The intergenerational aspects of education will therefore need to be considered when engaging with traditional knowledge, hopes, and fears based on past experiences of older generations, that can shape the identities of the younger generations.

A discussant, Potter, for this special section journal provides his critical commentary in this editorial. The second paper by Taysum and Arar presents the methodology of the research that all researchers in the team developed together. The third paper by Taysum presents an English case. The fourth paper by Chopra presents an Indian case. The fifth paper by Arar presents an Arabs in Israel Case. The sixth paper by Imam presents a Nigerian case. The seventh paper by Harrison, McNamara, and O'Hara presents a Republic of Ireland case. The eighth paper by Pogosian presents a Russian case. The ninth paper by McGuinness and Taysum presents a Northern Irish case. The tenth paper by Mynbayeva and Yelbayeva presents a Kazakhstani case. The eleventh paper presents an International Comparative Analysis of these cases that all used the same methodology, some principles that emerge, and a hypothesis for testing for proof of concept with a model as a Theory of Change.

When we analysed our findings, patterns emerged around cultural, economic and political participation. Culturally, the findings revealed few young people spoke of activities, clubs, societies, or heritage trusts outside of their community other than computer games and social media, and some sports such as tennis and football. Economically our findings revealed that young people did not understand how their learning was preparing them to transition to the labour market in the roles they wanted. Politically our findings revealed young people did not understand their rights and responsibilities with regard to their learning in their school communities, or how they might be empowered to realize their rights and responsibilities in 'big society' as adults. Our research did not find that the young people had a sense of how they would engage politically as drivers of social change in the future. For example one young person was asked how he might engage politically in his community in the future and he said he would pay his taxes. Whilst this is very important, it demonstrates a lack of understanding of what full civic participation might be. This is troubling when in some cases, nearly one in four is jobless and in some parts of Europe the youth unemployment reaches 50% (Manos et al., 2014).

The transition from education to work has become more difficult with many young people only gaining temporary contracts for which they are over-qualified (European Union, 2014). This has consequences for starting independent lives, saving to buy a home, and impacts upon self esteem and often results in low motivation to start a family or become civically engaged (Horizon, 2020; 2014). This results in lower future earnings, insufficient social security protection, higher risk of poverty, and a loss of human capital in an unequal society (European Union, 2014).

Young people with a migration background and/or disabilities also face multi-discrimination that needs to be addressed within whole communities rather than through exclusion and isolation (Horizon 2020, 2014). The impact is a 'lost generation' who will face their own societal and personal challenges whilst not being able to effectively support a growing elderly population in the future (Castellani, 2012). The potential impact may be lowered well-being for all European Citizens (Castellani, 2012).

The young people need processes and practices that facilitate the growth of democratic values and norms related to the declaration of human rights (United Nations, 1948) to enable them to successfully navigate transitions from education to further or higher education and/or employment. The overall concept of this special edition journal offers a first step to understanding young peoples' participation in educational institutional, and community activities' processes and practices under unequal regional conditions and expectations in relationship with other community members of all ages. We will reveal the opportunities the young people and stakeholders have to express their views and advocate their interests in relationship with the processes and practices in their educational institutions, local communities, in national, and regional spheres, and within a Global Europe. Our findings will also indicate if participants are aware of the goals of the major European policy initiatives such as 'Youth on the Move' (European Union, 2010), the 'Youth Employment Package' (European Union, 2014a) and the 'Youth Guarantee' (European Union, 2014b).

Our findings will also report the extent to which the schools were able to develop community relationships with a focus on school and college pedagogical relationships. Our position in this research is that pedagogical relationships enable the realisation of integration, and adaption of worldviews. Developing shared worldviews brings about authentic cultural alignment in diverse communities that is psychologically, emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy (Unicef, 2007; Taysum, 2013; Taysum, 2003). Cultural alignment means that community members from diverse cultural backgrounds, and needs come together and provisionally agree on integrated worldviews. These shared worldviews consist of core knowledge bases, metaphysical understandings, and religious foundations developed through

constructive cross cultural criticism (Evanoff, 2007). Community members' integrated worldview might be to agree on two key values such as inclusion and respect (Taysum & Slater, 2014). Inclusion and respect arguably prevents isolation and young people engaging with risky behaviour UNICEF (2007).

Our findings reported in this journal reveal community members including young people in schools and colleges need to evaluate, or critically reflect for themselves, the extent to which they participate in school and college processes and practices. These we believe are the first steps to them becoming drivers of social change who seek to participate in their communities culturally, economically and politically.

The second stage of the action research focuses on the Higher Education Institution and School partnerships critically analyzing the findings from the first stage of the action research. The Senior Leadership and/or Management Team of each school were then able to develop evidence informed intervention strategies. The strategies focused on optimizing democratic processes and practices of participation to optimize learning, learning outcomes, and facilitate young people's transitions to further or higher education and or the labour market to realize personal ambitions for their future life styles.

The third stage of the action research was to repeat the first stage of the research to reveal the impact of the intervention strategies on optimizing participation in school processes and practices to optimize learning, learning outcomes and facilitate smooth transitions to young people's aspirant future life styles. The findings from the second and third stages of the researches were reported at the British Educational Leadership, Management, and Administrative Society Annual conference (Taysum et al., 2014) and the European Conference for Educational Research (Taysum et al., 2014; 2015). A collaborative innovative European Union Cooperation Framework has emerged from the three stages of this four-year action research study. The research team now seek funding to test out the new European Union Cooperation framework in European Union Nation States and overseas. The framework equips young people with the knowledge, skills and experience they need to optimize school participation, learning, learning outcomes and successfully manage transitions from education to the labour market. The framework also equips young people to benchmark their progress towards meeting the values and standards for participation that are developed through the intervention strategies that emerged from the second and third stages of the research. These intervention strategies are presented as schemes of work and activities in the tool-box for adaptation and adoption. The tool box is intended to be open access and the funding will enable us to build a bespoke website. The website will be networked to institutions via Information Communication, Learning Technologies, and the World Wide Web. Thus we will be able to create transnational stakeholder collaborative com-

munities (European Parliamentary Service Scientific Foresight Unit, 2015). Young people can then award their organisations a Participation Charter Mark if the organisation provides opportunities for them to participate in school processes to optimize learning, learning outcomes, and successfully manage transitions from education to the labour market. The framework therefore develops young people as drivers of social change for a sustainable socio-economic model as Discussant for this research project, Mr Ian Potter, now explores within this editorial.

## Discussant: Mr Ian Potter Chief Executive of the Gosport and Fareham Multi-Academy Trust

Research into the place of student voice in our schools is an important contribution to the discourse on school leadership and, in particular, social justice within education. This group of researchers working internationally to illuminate practice across the globe allow us to reflect on what differences can be made in schools to enable young people to find their voice and develop a sense of leadership and influence. The research protocol that has emerged within this geographically spread group of researchers gives confidence that enquiry-led learning can be socially robust and calibrated to encourage confidence in the findings. It is therefore a privilege and an honour to present a few thoughts, by way of being a discussant, on what is presented in the papers.

Context is clearly everything and that is why it is so helpful that the authors have given insight into the national cultural factors impacting on the way in which the case study schools can operate. It is, nevertheless, affirming that common to all findings is the importance placed by nearly all student respondents on relationships between themselves and their teachers. There are differences in how these relationships manifest themselves in different contexts and national cultures, but the emphasis on the quality of human interaction to enhance learning is an important finding.

The power paradigms that exist in any relationships are contextually located in these studies. We learn of the gender differences in Nigeria; the inconsistency between what is espoused nationally in Southern Ireland and actually realised in practice; the cultural norms of an Arabic mind-set being a barrier to egalitarianism; the negative impact of performativity agendas in enabling more enlightened educative practices in Northern Ireland. These case studies provide illumination of how the aspiration to enable the voice of learners to impact on the conditions of their own learning is culturally constrained. The repressive regime in Nigeria is a stark example, but the insidious nature of the performativity agenda in Northern Ireland should not be underestimated as potentially equally repressive. Thus, we gain from

this research an improved understanding of how important it is to increase our knowledge of what needs to be done to achieve greater empowerment of our young learners across the world. The barriers to their participation in the design and practise of their learning need to be understood if we are to be able to dismantle the obstructions and promote social justice within our schools. It will be a virtuous cycle of developing the voice of the learner so that they become better able to exercise leadership in their own learning and destiny. It is this subversive ingredient that excites me and will also excite many teachers that I know. Hence, the value of this research project and one that I look forward to seeing progress further.

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