The Power of Student Voice

ASB/APP A Travelling Fellowship-Term 2, 2013

Maree Bathurst
Principal
Albany Primary School
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School visits</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings and Reflections</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future inquiry for my school setting</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.”
Augustine of Hippo

Words cannot adequately convey just what an amazing experience the ASB / APPA Travelling Fellowship 2013 has been, both personally and professionally. When sharing this opportunity and my absence with the pupils I presented the story of Cinder Bathurst winning the “golden ticket to see the world.” The sabbatical also gave me the luxury of time; time to explore my own thinking and perspectives, time to read, research, reflect, and discuss. The experience provided me with the ability to make international comparisons - not just from the theory of educational policy, but to see what really makes a difference in classrooms. I returned to New Zealand and Albany Primary with fresh eyes and pride; having repositioned my compass as to the factors that reinforce what is unique, innovative and precious in our education setting.

My thanks to;

- The ASB Bank Trust for supporting education leadership through funding international travel to the U.K. and Scandinavia. Thanks Alan Jermaine for your assistance and communication
- The Ministry of Education for providing salary funding and identifying the value of supporting professional sabbatical release
- The Albany Primary Board of Trustees for granting leave for Term 2, and identifying both the personal growth and value for our school this opportunity provided. Special thanks to Dr Philip Voss (Chairperson) for his assistance and guidance throughout the process
- Helen Furness for the exceptional job she did leading Albany Primary in my absence
- To the leadership team and all the staff at Albany Primary who took on additional responsibilities, and supported me in every step of the journey
- All staff at Albany Primary School for their continued commitment to the school and for embracing student voice
- Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) Professional Learning Group - Michael Absolum (Evaluation Associates), Lin Avery, Peter Ayson, Steve Collins, Gary Cain, Kay McCallum, Richard Limbrick. Thank you for triggering this inquiry and sharing your wisdom
- The Principals, teachers and students from the school that I visited. Thank you for giving your time and sharing your expertise so willingly
  - Springfields School, Blenheim
  - Victory School, Blenheim
  - Brommer Montessori, Oslo
  - Traeleborg School, Norway
  - Gallions School, London
  - Sandringham School, Doncaster
  - St Bennets R.C Primary, Durham
  - Abbey Hill, Edinburgh
- Reinhal and Piers Isachsen for your hospitality and for sharing your beautiful country
- To Marilyn Way, James Nottingham, and Helen Richards for assistance with international contacts and school visits
- And finally to my family, without your love we may never have got on that plane
Background

“If the person you are talking to doesn’t appear to be listening, be patient. It may simply be that he has a small piece of fluff in his ear.”
A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh

The concept of student voice has been one of personal interest for some years. As a teacher of some 30 plus years (the most recent 10 years as principal of Albany Primary School), the rate of educational change in this last decade has been unrelenting. As professionals we have been fortunate during this time to have more evidence and research based information, but at times the paradigm shift that has been required to keep abreast of change has been overwhelming. Having the time to step off the daily “merry go round” that is school leadership to critically evaluate one small (but not insignificant) area for school improvement has been a deeply valued opportunity.

Our school journey is by no means unique and no doubt reflective of the majority of New Zealand primary schools. In the last decade schools have faced a barrage of change. As teachers and leaders you will no doubt identify with many of the following initiatives.

After a number of professional learning developments our school has been involved in over the last decade, teachers have become more adept at using both summative and formative assessment. Our teachers became more aware of the importance of specific feedback, feed forward, subsequent changes to teaching practice using direct acts of teaching, student self-assessment, the importance of learning intentions and success criteria, etc. Teachers have become reflective practitioners using “Teaching as Inquiry” (New Zealand Curriculum (N.Z.C.), 2007) as a model for looking at data and identifying the changes teachers need to make to their own practice. For our school’s journey it was a natural progression to include student led and three way conferences as an opportunity for students to share their own learning goals and achievements with their parents. As one student voice stated so eloquently “why wouldn’t I be part of a parent teacher meeting when it is all about my learning?”

Student led conferences are just one example of how student voice is shared with parents and whānau. High quality teachers have always modelled practice that had students fully engaged with ownership of their learning. In the last decade continuing research has provided us with clarity about identifying the key factors that really make a difference to teaching and learning. We have moved from the “the font of all knowledge” to “the guide on the side”, from “passive recipients” to “active learners.”

New Zealand research has gained an international reputation through the work of inspirational professionals such as Graham Nuttal, Jane Gilbert, Viviane Robinson, John Hattie, Helen Timperley, Michael Absolum, Russell Bishop. Each of these researchers identify different aspects of the changes teachers have had to make as educators, but more importantly why these aspects have made such a powerful difference to the way we teach in relation to improved student learning and achievement.

In addition to improved teacher practice the Key Competencies (N.Z.C.) identifies “Students who are competent thinkers and problem - solvers actively seek, use and create knowledge. They reflect on their own learning, draw on personal knowledge and intuitions, ask questions, and challenge the basis of assumptions and perceptions.” Additional Ministry of Education initiatives and programmes echo the critical importance of students sharing their thinking and learning, and the value of teachers listening to student feedback. Ka Hikitea - Accelerating Success (2013) identifies the concept of “Ako as the teaching and learning relationship where the educator is also learning from the student in a two way process…Ako is grounded in the principle of reciprocity.”
Our school journey of improvement has also seen us investigate a variety of thinking tools, taxonomies and graphic organisers. Engaging our 21st century learners and how technology can be used to enhance learning a further development. We are continually reflecting on how to support our students’ knowledge of how to learn, ways of learning, and how to develop the language of learning.

My interest in this field was further heightened after several conversations with a principals’ professional learning group (originally established as part of the M.O.E. / University of Auckland Experienced Principals). As my colleagues shared our goals for school improvement, regardless of our school setting or context, each inquiry appeared to have a common link to that of student voice. Their investigations ranged from questions about students learning voice, enhancing student led conferences, student voice in relation to teacher feedback for appraisal / development purposes, as well as how to build learning capacity and power. This discussion led to further reflection; if student voice is multi-faceted and such a critical part of improved teaching and learning how can school leaders effect relevant change?

The term student voice can be interpreted in many different ways and is used in a range of settings. When applying for the ASB / APPA scholarship the attached overview (Appendix 1) identified the areas of investigation for my inquiry i.e., the learning voice, democratic voice, cultural / ethnic voice, relationships, and teacher development.

In addition to the student voice inquiry I also had an underlying concern and question regarding international comparisons. How could it be that our New Zealand reputation for such an innovative, child centred and creative education system was no longer warranted? At the time of my application the latest tables identified New Zealand data as declining. At this time most of us were still grappling with the introduction of National Standards and poorly implemented teacher knowledge of consistency for Overall Teacher Judgement. In each of the schools and countries I questioned teachers and education leaders on what educational reforms had either enhanced or disadvantaged their systems and practises. Where scores had improved had there been a relevant national strategy for this international success or was their definition of success different to ours? Alternatively, where success was not being achieved what were the factors that had caused decline? I began my sabbatical by meeting with New Zealand Principals and visiting their schools to provide a comparative base other than my own school setting.

**Methodology**

This report is not presented as an academic paper but is set out to provide a practical review of the multiple definitions of student voice. I have summarised my reflections of discussions with New Zealand principals, as well as provided a synopsis of my visits to both New Zealand and European schools.

I have included the background to my inquiry, literature review, and reflections after discussions with educationalists and observations in schools. I have also included a section of recommendations with some attached samples collected from schools. These may be a trigger for further reflection in your school or used as models for your adaptation.

My initial research was completed through a comprehensive literacy review. I also realised that the scope of my inquiry was too wide and prioritised student voice in relation to learning as my key focus. Prior to my school visits I contacted principals with an explanation of my sabbatical, purpose of school visit and key questions for discussion.

After confirming which European countries I could visit (given the time restraints of the European school summer holiday), discussion with colleagues as well as past A.P.P.A. recipients I was provided with a wealth of suitable schools and international contacts. I included a range of types of school (public and integrated), small and large student roll, as
well as a variety of both ethnically and demographically diverse schools. I also met with James Nottingham (director of Challenging Learning (http://www.challenginglearning.com/) when he was presenting Leading Challenging Learning in Auckland. James was able to set up visits for several schools from the Philosophy 4 Learning school network in the U.K.

Research Setting

My school visits began with two New Zealand schools followed by four schools in England, and three schools in Norway, and Sweden. I had originally hoped to visit schools or meet with MOE representatives in Finland but after numerous emails and phone calls discovered that this was not possible due to the overwhelming request of some 2000 international visitors per week. Both the Swedish and Norwegian principals I visited were very keen to share their perspectives on why Norway had such outstanding OECD figures as well as the differences and similarities between each of the education systems of the Scandinavian countries.

Literature Review

Introduction

“In the widest sense, student voice is young people’s views about conditions of teaching, learning and schooling” (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004)

There is a wealth of literature available on the many facets of student voice. Flutter, (2007) and Mitra (2004) identify “the benefits of student voice can be seen through specific dimensions.”

1. Organisation (connectedness)
2. Personal (self worth)
3. Political (agency)
4. Pedagogical (teaching and learning)

“The pedagogical benefits of student voice are perhaps the most significant. Students benefit from having a say about how they learn, when they learn and what helps or hinders their learning (i.e., switch on or switch off).”

The Learning and Teaching Voice

“The more the student becomes the teacher and the more the teacher becomes the learner, then the more successful are the outcomes.” (Hattie, J, 2009)

When I first began my investigation into the concept of student voice I was aware of the negative perceptions of what this term meant and possible implications held for teachers and parents. When sharing the focus of my research with a London cabbie he struggled to understand why a New Zealand principal would come to the U.K. to visit schools with this question. He would no doubt have many supporters with his view that the best schools were ones that had “children who should be seen not heard.” There are parents and teachers alike who perceive our silent learners as our best.

Rosemary Hipkins in a presentation to Post Primary Teachers' Association (P.P.T.A. April, 2011) referred to evidence from the New Zealand Council of Educational Research (N.Z.C.E.R.) National Survey to Secondary Schools regarding the high number of teacher responses to the statement “There is too much emphasis on student voice and similar ideas nowadays also associated concepts of offering many of the Key Competencies (K.C.’s / learning to learn opportunities.”

Clarifying what effective student voice is and why schools needed to change George, A., Brown, S., and O’Neill, J. (2007) state “Student voice a fad - schools had to become more
democratic - student voice means speaking with students (rather than for them) and involving students as co-researchers (rather than be researched). Effective facilitation of student voice is as much dependant on the **attitudes and values** held by teachers and leaders about students’ ability to make a contribution, as it is on processes and practises that are in place.” Of a similar view Bourke (2007) identifies student voice as not about speaking “to and with” but a much more complex picture involving attitudes and beliefs of teachers (i.e., the value is in the way student voice is heard.)

Rather than the simplicity of the single element of student voice the notion of active engagement in a social context is also identified in The New Zealand Curriculum (2007) vision statement. “Young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, life-long learners” emphasises the concept of students **actively** engaged in their learning. The curriculum also identifies effective assessment techniques (pg. 40) as those that “involves students - they discuss, clarify and reflect on their goals, strategies, and progress with their teachers, their parents, and one another. This develops students’ capacity for self - and peer assessment, which lead in turn to increased self-direction.” In addition the Key Competencies (pg. 12-13) identify “Participating and Communicating” as well as the values “Community and Participation.”

Further evidence of the link between student voice and engagement is paramount to effective learning is clarified by Bolstad and Gilbert (NZCER, June 2012) “The idea of changing the scripts for learners and teachers is often shorthanded with phrases such as ‘student centred pedagogies’ or ‘student voice’, alluding to the need to engage learners (and their interests, experiences and knowledge) in many decisions about their learning.” The challenge is to move past seeing learning in terms of being “student centred” or “teacher-driven”, and instead to think about how learners and teachers would work together in a knowledge building learning environment.

There are numerous examples and links to the teaching and learning voice in “Visible Learning” (Hattie, J. 2009) meta-analysis of the factors that influence achievement. It is difficult to isolate specific effects that relate primarily to student voice as the concept of students talking about their learning is a resounding tenet throughout “visible teaching and visible learning”. What is relevant is how either the learner or teacher voice is used, the purpose of the interaction and the result of listening to in terms of outcomes for learning. Hattie (Pg. 25) states “there is no deep secret called ‘teaching and learning’: teaching and learning are visible in the classrooms of the successful teachers and students, teaching and learning are visible in the passion displayed by the teacher and learner when successful learning and teaching occurs, and teaching and learning requires much skill and knowledge by both teacher and student.”

**The Democratic Voice**

I have identified two meanings around the term democratic voice in relation to a school setting. These include;

- Students being involved in decisions about the schools environment, direction or in some form of student action or project
- Students exercising democratic choice over their learning in terms of chosen curriculum

Democratic voice can also be identified on a scale from low level participation through to full consultation. Hart R, (1992) reflects the range of democratic voice though the language of “tokenism to citizenship.” Hipkins (2010) identifies “five types of student voice, that of improvement by making teaching and learning within our current ways of thinking about learning and teacher practice; or that of transformative - where students can fully participate in shaping and shifting the schools functions.” Smith, A. (APPA Magazine Vol.3, (2012) distils these types “into two main agendas – that of ‘improvement’ by making teaching and learning
better within our current ways of thinking about learning and teaching practice; or that of ‘transformative’ - where children can fully participate in shaping and shifting the ways schools function."

The concept of a democratic school, one that emphasises the importance of both the curriculum and a shared whole school democracy is identified by James Beane. This school is not only one that adopts a democratic curriculum but also one that models democratic values with all stakeholders who are involved in decision making. Using key questions such as “what concerns or questions do you have about yourself, what concerns or questions do you have about the world” (Beane, J. 2002. p.26). Beane invites powerful questions that assist students to not only make sense of their world, but also identify possible social actions. From these inquiry discussions students and teachers together decide on the themes that will be focussed on throughout the school year.

School Visits

New Zealand.
Victory Primary School, Nelson.
www.victory.school.nz

Victory School has an outstanding reputation for their commitment to community partnerships and celebrating diversity. In visiting this school my particular focus was on “ethnic and cultural voice.” I wanted to identify what set this school apart in the level of engagement with their multi-cultural community and how “ethnic voices” were heard. The school campus is unique in New Zealand in that on the school grounds there is a community centre which is managed by dedicated organisation called Victory Community Health. A wide range of activities: social, recreational, environmental and cultural are offered through the community centre - through the Victory on the Move programme. There is a community garden (tended with care from the local community), English Language classes for Burmese (Myanmar) mothers plus a range of services which support health and wellbeing. The school statement “where everybody counts” was clearly evident in the way the school and community centre are a central hub for connecting whanau and families from all cultures. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0yd08aq7M

Springlands School, Blenheim.
www.springlands.school.nz

Springlands School had been recommended to me by several colleagues as a school that has a clear vision and cohesive framework in relation to student and thinking voice - (A1 Quality). Visual displays and acronyms reinforce the model however, the consistency and clarity of understanding of the staff and students was clearly evident in all interactions. Students knew what they were learning, how they were learning, and what next. There are several parts to the A1 quality school curriculum which include;

- A1 Quality Powerful Learning- The school uses the acronym “coming up TRUMPS” in reference to their attitudes and behaviour competencies.
- Springland’s School Inquiry Model “High Five it to success” develops school wide consistency in their inquiry practice. This model promotes the school philosophy of ‘Learning to Make a Difference’ and exploring the ‘So What’ aspect of making connections and transferring knowledge and skills to next step learning.
- A1 Quality Reflection and Transfer - The school focus on higher order thinking, creative, critical and caring thinking. Goal setting, reflection, self and peer assessment all support student ownership of learning.
- A1 Quality Haoura - The school values focus on “intelligent” behaviours and quality relationships - students who think carefully about rights and responsibilities, choices and consequences, and students who have high expectations of themselves as learners.
- Student voice is acknowledged in the class inquiry process and in student leadership - School Council, Eco Warriors, Peer Mediation and Physical Activity leaders. Each year a class or team can nominate (and present a plan) for a special project to improve the school environment, and these initiatives were acknowledged with signage.

**England**

**Gallions School, Newham, London.**

[www.gallions.school.uk](http://www.gallions.school.uk)

The schools recent Ofsted report confirmed they had achieved the 7th highest school improvement ranking in London. This city school is multi-cultural and has been running Philosophy for Children (P4C) programmes for several years. All classes are taught philosophy sessions twice per week and are a central ethos for “student voice.” The school is also a P4C training school, and I was extremely fortunate to join the staff of a visiting school from Whales (FfynnumTaf Primary) for their first day of professional development with Headteacher Paul Jackson and Lisa Naylor. I observed several circle of inquiry sessions with a variety of year levels. A weapon was the stimulus for one of these sessions and the reflections included such statements as “what if you had to use this weapon to protect your family, would that be justified?” I was also given the opportunity to interview a group of students in relation to the value of P4C. The students could clearly articulate how the programme gave them the tools to, and ability to think about, issues or situations “from someone else’s way of thinking” as well as “there isn’t always a right or wrong. Sometimes it all depends on the situation.”

“P4C model: to achieve the aims of Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (P.L.T.S.), social and emotional aspects of learning (S.E.A.L.), critical thinking, creativity, pupil voice and inquiry-led learning.

P4C typically takes the form of a Community of Inquiry, which is characterised by:

- Sitting in a circle ready to think, talk and engage with each other
- Sharing a source of puzzlement or intrigue (e.g., picture, story, music, news, artefact etc.)
- Examining the source and creating relevant questions
- Persisting in the search for knowledge and understanding
- Giving reasons for opinions and distinguishing good reasons from bad ones
- Fostering mutual cooperation, trust, tolerance, fair-mindedness and a heightened degree of sensitivity to fellow inquirers
- Rich feedback that promotes thinking that is self-correcting and reflective

Source - [http://www.philosophyforchildren.co.uk/index.php/225](http://www.philosophyforchildren.co.uk/index.php/225)

**Sandringham School, Doncaster.**

[www.sandringham.school.uk](http://www.sandringham.school.uk)

This suburban school of working / middle class families (5 % families on lowest income level) had a roll of approximately 450. There was clear evidence of student voice in terms of achievement and topic approach to inquiry learning. The children were very proud of their school and could talk about why their school was different. “Everyone in our school feels valued, it wasn’t like that in my last school” stated a pupil. There was a genuine emphasis on student voice embedded in the school culture.
The school had recently had an Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) review. The Head teacher Sue Turner explained the ramifications for the school following a change of Ofsted ranking, which include changes to funding and staffing. A form of performance pay has been introduced in England so hearing the demoralising effect on the way this initiative had been implemented could have similar implications for New Zealand. The local principals were meeting the day I was visiting the school to plan how they could collectively manage the decision making around teacher review, removing direct responsibility for individual school governors and principals.

**St Benets RC Primary School. Durham.**
www.st-benets.durham.sch.uk

This rural Catholic school has a roll of 250. The principal Damian Groark is a consultant for the Thinking Schools International. [http://www.thinkingschoolsinternational.com/](http://www.thinkingschoolsinternational.com/) St Benet’s has the accredited status as a Thinking School - University of Exeter (Cognitive Education Development Unit) and has also trained in the Philosophy for Schools.

Damian and his staff were passionate about the difference these programmes have made to student engagement and achievement. The school had clarity of purpose in the way students learn and authentic learning contexts e.g., the Year 6 class had recently visited London to look at the architecture, effects of bombing on the city as well as Jewish persecution. Large wall murals reinforced the schools vision, as well as three large visuals of the three key elements of the school’s curriculum- Thinking Hats, Thinking Maps, and P4C.

**Scotland**
**Abbey Hill School, Edinburgh.**
http://www.abbeyhill.edin.sch.uk/

My visit to Abbey Hill was unscheduled but I was so fascinated by its central city location, architecture and age of the buildings that I could not help inquire into the school’s history. The school had been on the same site and buildings since 1881. One of the oldest blocks was closed due to cracks and movement, causing me to reflect that property issues are a common theme of concern for principals all over the world. Although it was the last week of the school term I was welcomed for a walk around the school, briefly observed classes and learnt a little about the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence. The reputation of our pre-school curriculum Te Wharika has spread widely as, when hearing I was from New Zealand, the nursery teacher (4-5 year olds) produced the document from her desk drawer with great admiration and praise for its personalised child centred philosophy.

**Norway**

Although most staff spoke English fluently this was not the situation for many students. Teachers kindly translated and I discovered some creative ways of asking questions and the students used modified sign language when sharing examples of their learning with me. The iPad proved invaluable as language barriers disappeared when sharing videos of my school. No matter what age or culture the children loved seeing themselves played back on video, particularly when they knew their voices were being taken back to New Zealand classrooms.

James Nottingham facilitated contact with Ragnhild Isachsen, a recently retired principal of Hogsnes School (the first school in Norway to join the OUR Education Network.) Ragnhild is an inspirational educational leader with an international reputation presenting at conferences and continuing to work as a facilitator in schools, and with school districts. She was able to share her considerable knowledge of both the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish education systems.
Traeleborg School, Tonkin District

Ragnhild organised this visit which included a highly informative meeting with the principal, discussion with teachers and students, and in class observations. This large school had a growing roll as many smaller local schools have been closed due to government funding. The school had a clear strength in the arts and evidence of student voice in classroom interactions. Text / activity books appeared a norm for reading and maths. After meeting with teachers there was a similar pressure to New Zealand around identified school achievement as well as teacher performance and subsequent funding issues.

Villastadsskolan

This was a small suburban school on the outskirts of rural Norköping. The principal (rektor) Maria Svalin was able to share many examples of student learning voice in her school. This school was probably the closest to a New Zealand classroom setting that I observed on my trip. Evidence of students reflecting on their learning was very strong in this school. They could articulate their next learning steps through showing me on large wall charts of learning stages. Reading at senior level was through whole class novel study, with three levels of the same text available. This allowed the teacher to cater for three different ability levels while the whole class were all able to speak about the book.

Sweden

Bromma Montessori School, Oslo.

This small suburban independent school had a strong sense of community and family involvement, as well as a focus on the importance of the environment. The principal, Ulla Höberg has visited New Zealand schools several times as have some 6 of her staff. Students were highly engaged in their learning, with clarity and specific feedback from teachers. Resources and activities were not stored in the room with modern Swedish minimal design interiors evident. The school is considering reviewing their status as a Montessori School to ensure their current they are more “in tune” with Swedish 21st century curriculum. Evidence of the holistic curriculum with arts, science and technology were a visible strength throughout the school. It was an honour to be invited to the schools end of term performance held at the local church (as few schools have their own hall), followed by a spring celebration picnic for all families back at the school.

Findings and Reflections

“Schools have a good idea of what students should know, and why they need to know it, but students can play an important part in deciding the when and the how.”

http://involver.org.uk

As frequently occurs in research it is not until you actually dip your feet in the water that you appreciate how vast and deep the lake really is. Through my literature review as well as discussions with educationalists I realised that my naïve wonderings about the power of student voice were merely a “whispering in the wind.” The voice is but a representation of a multitude of concepts.

To understand the dimensions of student voice I categorised my original inquiry questions into learning, democratic and ethnic voice, linking them to the associated concepts.
Student Voice

Learning voice  |  locus of control  
|  participative pedagogy  
|  co creation  
|  student agency  
|  learning to learn / metacognition  
|  teacher reflection and inquiry 

Democratic voice  |  youth-adult partnerships  
|  student / project leadership 

Ethnic voice  |  invitational / cultural partnerships 

The Learning Voice

It is far easier to identify when student voice is not being heard than to attempt to pull the threads from the rich tapestry of a classroom environment in attempting to define what “part of the voice” actually makes a difference to learning. You know from the moment you enter a classroom if the learning voice is allowed to “shout with curiosity” or if it is even being heard “as a whisper”. How do you unravel this complicated and multi-dimensional process to define what actually makes a difference to learning? I have identified locus of control, participative pedagogy and co-creation as relevant factors and examples of the learning voice, but these factors have no value if they stand alone. The key to success is when all factors are linked through an inter-connected web that also includes the context of teacher student relationship, classroom culture, and whole school environment. “When teachers seek, or at least are open to feedback for students as to what students know, what they understand, where they make errors, when they have misconceptions, when they are not engaged - then teaching and learning can be synchronised and powerful.” John Hattie in James Nottingham Pg. 21.

Student Agency

The concept of student agency transforms the notion of student voice to a completely different level. Agency invokes action, responsibility, mutual engagement and respect. The student is a “learning agent” whose self-efficacy makes the difference to their learning. In other words the teacher may have set the culture for learning but the student needs to be an active participant for engagement and deep learning to occur.

Derek Wenmouth (www.core.education) adds a further dimension to the concept of student agency in relation to learning as a social endeavour. He identifies “agency is interdependent and has a dimension of social connectedness i.e., It is …not just about a learner in isolation doing their own thing and what suits them. Learners must develop an awareness that there are consequences for the decisions they make and actions they take, and will take account of that in the way(s) they exercise their agency in learning. Every decision a learner makes, and action she or he takes, will impact on the thinking, behaviour or decisions of others – and vice versa. You can’t just act selfishly and call that acting with agency".

12
Teacher reflection and inquiry
The evidence is clear that student voice is a mechanism to identify and monitor engagement but the question is- are teachers asking and listening? How can leaders share the relevance and significance of this fundamental shift in pedagogy? Can student responses be used as reliable evidence to improve learning and teaching?

The T.K.I video clip of Waiharoa School “Dissonance as a Catalyst for Improvement” http://instep.net.nz/Learning-cases/Case-1/Learning-and-impact provides a case study of the principal sharing her reflections, followed by a teacher’s perspective of listening to students share their learning and how it has made a difference. After the lesson the questions the principal or teacher may ask students:
- What were you learning today?
- Were you successful? How do you know you were successful?
- What do you need to learn next?

Basic questions but the point of difference is how student voice is providing the teacher with first hand evidence and feedback about they may need to teach, change or review.

Richard Limbric, Principal of Arahoe Primary (Auckland) has trialled the voluntary use of student feedback survey for teachers to reflect on their engagement with students. There can be no more valuable evidence than that directly from students. The data collected to date indicates positive shifts in teacher practice.

Questions from the survey included;
- My teacher plans lessons that make learning easy for me
- We are allowed to talk to each other about our learning
- My teacher makes sure my learning is interesting for me
- My teacher lets us have a say in the things that we are learning about
- If I need help with my learning I will get help from my teacher
- If I need help with my learning I will get other kids to help me out

Student voice does not only refer to teacher to student but also to student to teacher. The relevance of students sharing their learning with others cannot be underestimated, either with their peers (as in reciprocal learning), when the student becomes the teacher of other students.

The concept of students listening to their own voice (reflection) is another dimension, and one that is identified in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007). Reflection may be verbal as in sharing with others, but may also be recorded, or written as in Learning journals are an example of reflective thinking recorded. Similarly E-portfolios, reading responses, student blogs are all different ways of recording student learning voice.

Student led and / or three way conferences provide an opportunity for student learning / reporting voice being shared with parents. (Kofoed, W. 2011) identifies “Reporting has two main functions. Firstly, it provides clear, positive and constructive feedback about children’s and young people’s learning and progress, looking back on what has been achieved against standards and expectations. Secondly, it creates an agenda for discussions between learners and those teaching and supporting them about their next steps in learning.”

Bolstad, R. (PPTA conference, April 2011) refers to “evidence that making more space for students to be ‘heard’ and to make real decisions in relation to their own learning is engaging for them.” The evidence (identified from Competent Learners @16) provides a useful matrix when comparing student and teacher perspectives.
Ethnic Voice

The evidence and research is unequivocal in relation to hearing the ethnic voice; teachers must see and hear learning through understanding and respecting the students own cultural and experiences. By this term I am referring to teachers removing their own lenses, in order to understand their students as individuals and respecting their potential. The MOE initiatives, documents and research underpinning Te Kotahitanga, Tātaiako, Ka Hikitea all identify the critical importance of the teacher building relationships in order for effective learning to occur.

Democratic Voice

Bolstad (2011) argues a shift from student voice to that of youth - adult partnerships. Although the voice is integral, the difference is in “relationships in which both youth and adults have the potential to contribute to decision-making processes, to learn from one another.” Knowledge is co-created and takes action on issues of interest.

Cheryl Doig [www.thinkbeyond.co.nz](http://www.thinkbeyond.co.nz) identifies the trend in society that demands “feedback and opinion are listened to. They are the breadcrumbs that connect to the pathway forward.” She challenges us to “consider the breadcrumbs of learner voices in your organisation”.

The Student Voice Grid (below) is a valuable self-assessment tool for your own school review. The axes cover the full scope from the learning voice through to global voice. The levels or stages ranging from student voice (not listened to) through to student collaboration and initiated decisions.
ENTRUST
Student initiated.
Students have the skills, information, authority and resources to make final decisions.
Students access adults/peers for support and expertise.

COLLABORATE
Students work in equal partnership to negotiate learning, explore possibilities, problem solve and make decisions with others.

INVOLVE
Usually adult initiated.
Students are involved in planning, implementation and evaluation.
Student feedback is considered before the final decision is made.

CONSULT

DISCUSS
Adult initiated.
Students’ ideas are sought to change existing plans or choose from a range of possibilities and outcomes before adult decision.

INFORM
Adult controlled.
Students are told about a decision that has happened and why and/or about something that is going to happen and how.

Cheryl Doig
www.thinkbeyond.co.nz

STUDENT VOICE WITHIN THEIR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
DRAFT DOCUMENT

STUDENT VOICE ACROSS THE ORGANISATION
16/06/2010

STUDENT VOICE ACROSS THE COMMUNITY

STUDENT VOICE IN THE GLOBAL NETWORK

StudentVoice.docx
Recommendations

Mā te rongo, ka mōhio; Mā te mōhio, ka mārama; Mā te mārama, ka mātau; Mā te mātau, ka ora.

Through resonance comes cognisance; through cognisance comes understanding; through understanding comes knowledge; through knowledge comes life and well-being.

The number of schools and countries I visited provided some limitations for my recommendations and associated implications. My personal reflections invite your challenge and debate.

- The New Zealand Curriculum is a treasure (taonga) which we must value. The key competencies identify student agency - students understanding they are responsible for their own learning. Having flexibility for delivery of authentic learning contexts promotes teacher and student engagement. The principles reflect our nation's history and aspirations.

- Parents need to have greater understanding of the critical role they play in their child's success. Learning is not “delivered or focussed simply on knowledge” but is about the student learning how to learn. How do we encourage our communities to value the importance of student responsibility for their own learning? That the dispositions of persistence, risk taking, and resilience are valuable “lifelong” lessons.

- Learning Voice shows evidence of a high quality teaching practice in many New Zealand classrooms. How do we capture the complex interaction of teaching and learning in this area not only share with each other? We need to keep the spirit of collaboration not competition between schools. Professional learning through cluster initiatives supports this as teachers gain greatest value from learning from each other.

- Schools are using inquiry based models and most schools are using data effectively for teachers to self-assess value added. However unless engagement and relationships are truly valued learning is restricted. Direct student voice in terms of student feedback to teachers is a powerful means for teacher reflection. Feedback could include questions around quality of relationships, teacher effectiveness in terms of organisation or clarity of instruction, child’s perception of teachers’ expectations. Some countries are using student surveys as an integral part of their teacher development. There were positive results and shifts in teacher practice when there was a school culture that reflected teachers as professionals, self-motivated inquirers and not used in any form of punitive or comparative model.

- The research conducted by New Zealanders around effective teaching is highly regarded internationally. As leaders how do we convert such valuable research (such as John Hattie’s Visible Learning) into our classrooms so that we are teaching smarter not harder? Our challenge as leaders is to share this knowledge with our students, teachers and communities for what really makes a difference in teaching and learning.

- We encourage smart teaching but how are we modelling smart leadership? My observation is that New Zealand principals are asked to do SO MUCH more than our international colleagues as we continue to focus on instructional leadership. We need resourcing, time and support if we are to continue to grow our leadership capacity.

- If we have only ever taught in New Zealand we may not recognise teaching practices that we do intuitively (e.g., flexi or micro teaching, personalised and differentiated teaching). These practices are considered innovative compared to more traditional or formal education systems. We have a rich educational legacy for a creative, holistic and student centred education system but how do we ensure we never lose sight of what it is that makes our education system so unique? We were once acclaimed
internationally for such innovations as reading recovery. The challenge remains to once again share innovative practice and research internationally.

- We need to remain open to what we can continue to learn from other successful international education systems. International benchmarks are useful for comparison of benchmarks and trends however they provide a limited picture. There are many other factors that underpin these test scores including cultural values and respect for education, equity, poverty and diversity.

- The “Asian Tiger” challenges. We cannot be complacent - are we doing enough to truly value education in terms of the global nature of New Zealand place in the world and our current students’ future life and career options?

**Future inquiry for my school setting:**

- Develop vignettes / video snapshots of classrooms where student agency clearly evident

- Student feedback to teacher to support greater teacher awareness of student perspective of themselves as learners

- Further investigation into student / class selected learning focus

- Student self-reporting: written reports, e-portfolios showing evidence of progress

- Student leadership: inclusive model that encourages shared problem solving as well as collaboration in our schools direction and improvement

- Identify how to consult with our increasing diverse ethnic groups to foster active participation in our school that will support partnership and a unified school community

- How do we develop greater instructional leadership while balancing other leadership requirements?

- Investigate Philosophy 4 Schools New Zealand connections.
Appendix 1

The Power of Student Voice

- Learning
  - sharing by students how they learn
  - learning journeys / sharing with parents

- Teacher Development
  - powerful data that can be feed back to students

- Relationships
  - student voice - "the bridge between home and school"

- Planning
  - students input to support

- Ethinic / Cultural
  - Maori / Pasifica

- Social
  - key competencies

ALBANY STUDENT
TEACHER - HEAR MY VOICE
Bibliography


Bourke in *Facing the big questions in teaching: Purpose, Power and Learning* by A. St George, S.Brown and J.O’Neill


Hipkins, R. Presentation to PPTA conference, April 2011. *Exploring connections between engagement and student voice*


Smith, A. (editorial) APPA Magazine Vol.3, number 3

Sabbatical Reports

Kofoed, W.J. (2011) *Principal Sabbatical Report*  
http://assessment.tki.org.nz/
Websites and links

NZ Ministry of Education tki. website
http://instep.net.nz/Learning-cases/Case-1/Learning-and-impact

Scottish Education
www.scotland.gov.uk

James Beane. Democratic Voice
http://voices.yahoo.com/james-beane-democratic-classrooms

Cheryl Doig. The breadcrumbs of learner voice.
www.thinkbeyond.co.nz

Variety of U.K. projects and resources involving student voice
http://involver.org.uk

Derek Wenmouth- Core Education. Student Agency
http://edtalks.org/tag-video-list/student%20agency

MOE publications:


Ministry of Education.) Ka Hikitea - Accelerating Success- 2013-2017
Wellington: Learning Media.