



Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Learner Voice in an Inclusive Framework Whose voices? Why Listen?

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Overview

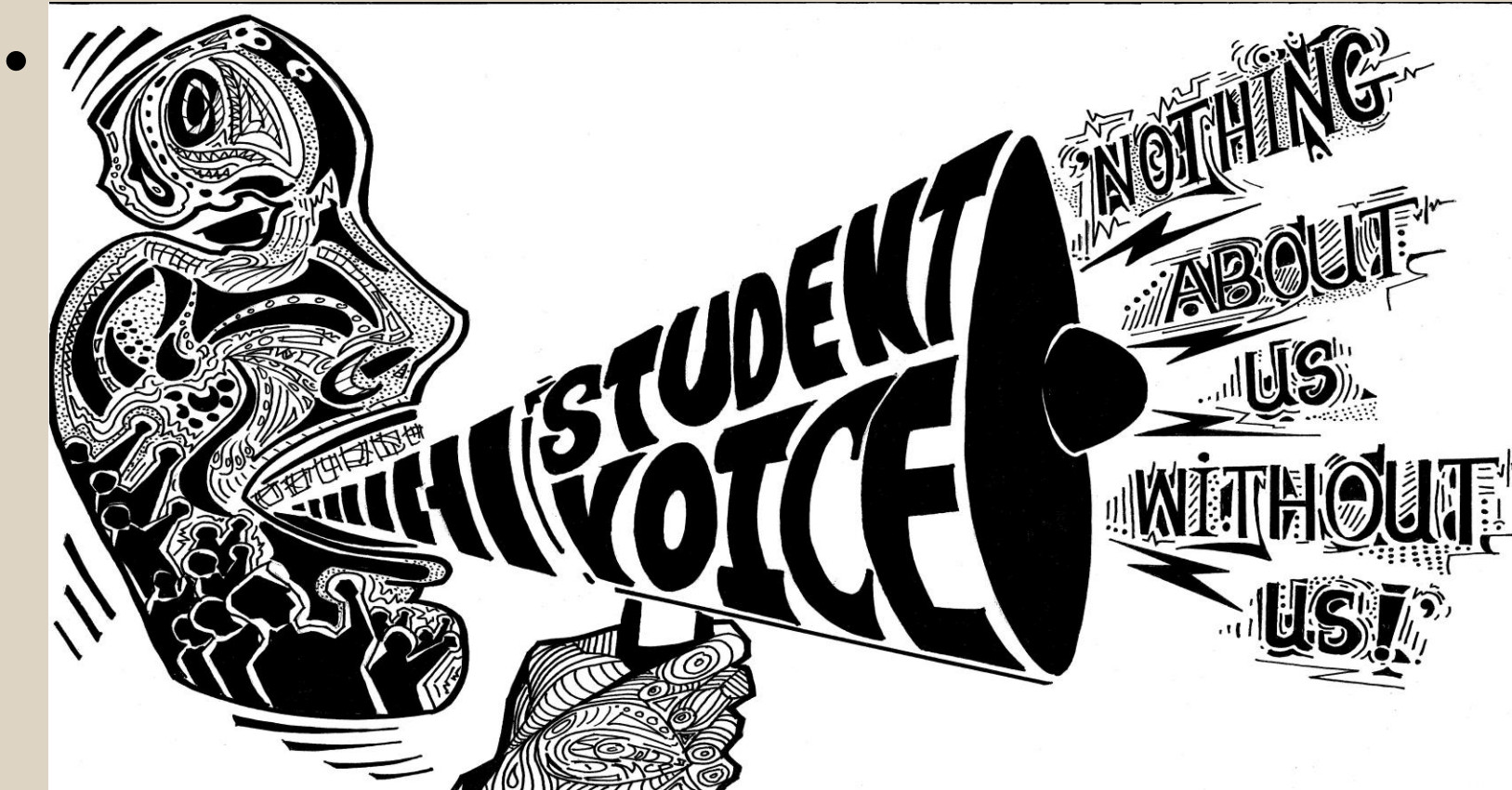
- Inclusion/inclusive education
- Learner voice, why listen?
- What have we learned from recent learner voice research conducted in Ireland and how can we progress this learning?
- A new framework, 'the learner voice space'
- Leadership, listening and learning....how is this relevant to YOU?



Inclusion and Inclusive Education



Voice?



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Why Listen to Learners' Voices? (LV)

- Consultation and participation for learners encourages **engagement in learning, empowerment and active agency**
- Accessing learner perspectives on school problems and possible solutions reminds teachers and administrators that **learners possess unique knowledge and insights**
- Informed by learners' insights on their experience of supports and obstacles to learning – there is potential to facilitate **leadership, ownership and responsibility** with respect to engagement and learning (bottom up approach/top down response)
- Facilitating LV has the potential to **improve teacher-student relationships and quality of school life** for learners
- Centrality of learner-teacher relationships and the classroom climate as crucial influences on self image and wellbeing
- There is a significant link between **learner voice, relationships, attachment (connectedness/belonging) and impact on positive sense of wellbeing**
- When learner voice is linked to changing curriculum and instruction – **impact on learning and greater understanding of how they learn, stronger sense of own abilities**

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

- **Article 12** - the right to express their views in matters affecting them and have their opinions given due weight commensurate with age and maturity
- ...appearing to listen to children is relatively unchallenging; giving due weight to their views requires real change. Listening to children should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means by which States make their interactions with children and their actions on behalf of children ever more sensitive to the implementation of children's rights

(UN Committee 2003, p.4)

Authentic versus Tokenistic Listening

- (Lundy, 2007)
 - easy for adults to comply with outward signs of consultation and ultimately ignore children's views - tokenistic or decorative participation is not only in breach of Article 12 but can be counter-productive
- (Flynn, 2013)
 - “**Authentic**” listening and engagement: When learners are consulted seriously, it can make them feel, often for the first time, that their school and their class are to some extent **their** school and **their** class – impact on sense of belonging and attachment
 - Through consultation, we may deepen our understanding of marginalised groups



‘In the acoustic of the school, whose voice gets listened to?’

(Arnot et al. 2001)

NCCA study: [Embedding student voices in education discourse – curricular co-construction and development](#)

3 year Irish study – 20 schools, > 350 learners

- To facilitate a process of student consultation on the development of new junior cycle curriculum specifications
- To determine *how* to include learner voice in education discourse for participating schools and the NCCA such that there is:
 - an embedded culture of listening
 - a strategy to support a sustainable structure and response to student voices.

Culture of listening in schools

- Sample – not representative – no homogenous voice!
- School culture & learner voice activity
- Partnerships rather than data sources
- Opportunities to ‘do more’ – necessity for acknowledgment and evidence of impact
- Shared language within co-construction – avoidance of **adulteration**/check interpretation
- Variety of media to facilitate breadth of learners’ voices

Sustainable practice within an inclusive model

- ❑ Shared practice – opportunity for learning (all stakeholders)
 - support for schools - dissemination and sharing
 - inter-agency
- ❑ Inextricable links: inclusive education/framework & voice – attitude and buy in!
- ❑ CPD for teachers – different skillset
- ❑ Leading by example – not confined to research and occasional projects! Habitual practice of learner discourse
- ❑ Significant links between ‘voice’/being heard/having a say with ‘positive learner-teacher relationships’ **and** ‘wellbeing’
- ❑ Commonalities in aspirations and goals for learning – the experience of day to day school environment - acknowledgement of which is key to progressing democratic, shared process and credible approach:
 - embed culture(s) of listening
 - support sustainable structure and response to learners’ voices
- ❑ Leadership model – empowering and reflective
 - Bottom up approach
 - Top down response

Inclusive Framework – role *of* and space *for* ‘all’ learners (principals, teachers, students, SNAs, parents, policy-makers)



Leadership, learning and listening...how is this relevant to YOU?

- Which learner are you?
- What is the role for student learners, teachers, principals, education agencies, policy makers – in future dialogue, listening and next steps?
- What do you anticipate as potential challenges, changes and choices in pursuing more opportunities for ‘learner voice’/transformative dialogue?
- What are the implications for initial teacher education (ITE), FE, continuous professional development (CPD), school policy, local, regional and national school partnerships?
- “*Nothing about us without us*” – what does this mean to you?

- Thank you for listening!
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