



Using Student Voice in the Appraisal Process

Sabbatical Report Term 3, 2014

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The opportunity to be able to take time out and look in depth at an aspect of school practice, to indulge in uninterrupted reflection and to have a period of refreshment has been invaluable.

I also thank my Deputy Principal, Shevaun O'Brien, for ably leading the learning of our school and managing the school in my absence. Further thanks is extended to all Hawera Primary staff who assisted the Deputy Principals in whatever capacity to ensure quality teaching and learning for the school community continued at a high standard in my absence.

I am indebted to the professionals who assisted with my research as I delved further into this topic providing me with thought provoking questions and ideas that formed the basis of my report. My sincere appreciation for your professional opinions, feedback, information and comments that challenged my thinking to improve leadership practices.

Executive Summary

I have been a principal for 25 years and seven of those years I have spent at Hawera Primary School, a Decile 4 school with 228 students, situated in the heart of South Taranaki.

Following recent Professional Development around Appraisal Systems provided by NZ Teachers Council & Evaluation Associates, I wanted to further transform our system by investigating the role "Student Voice" might play in our system to further enhance teacher practice for better student outcomes.

Methodology

I engaged in a literature research reading a number of articles on the internet and other professional literature on student voice

Process

During term three 2014, I had the privilege of researching the “Use of Student Voice in the Teacher Appraisal System”. I looked to see if:

- There is any merit in students having a voice in the teacher appraisal process
- Students were capable of using their voice in the teacher appraisal process
- If so, how Hawera Primary and other schools might go about including student voice in the teacher appraisal process.

This report presents the findings of my research and the conclusions that will help the practices at Hawera Primary School move forward from this experience.

Findings

Is there any merit in “Students having a voice in the Teacher Appraisal process?”

“No one has a bigger stake in teaching effectiveness than students. Nor are there any better experts on how teaching is experienced by its intended beneficiaries. But only recently have many policymakers and practitioners come to recognise that- when asked the right questions, in the right ways- students can be an important source of information on the quality of teaching and the learning environment in individual classrooms.”¹

Analysis by the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project finds that teachers’ student survey results are predictive of student achievement gains

- Student voice by means of survey results can provide outcome-related results in subjects which no standardized assessments are available
- Student surveys aggregate the impression of a number of students who spend a number of hours with a teacher (High –quality classroom observations entail only a handful of classroom visits)
- Student voice provides feedback for improvement- teachers want to know if students are sufficiently challenged
- End of year data provides little opportunity for improvement – it is usually too late to do much about it

¹ Asking Students about Teaching- Student Perception Surveys and Their Implementation- MET project

Graham Nuttal tells us that “students already know on average about 50% of what a teacher intends his/her students to learn, although that 50% is not evenly distributed. Some students may have more topic knowledge than others. If we want to see effective teaching one of the criteria is to ensure students manage their own learning. This is because a parallel goal of the effective learning activity is for the students to internalise the procedures so that they become part of their natural way of thinking”². – i.e students learn and understand how to learn

Michael Absolum talks of Learning-focused relationships. Students want to see their teacher “as a guide and mentor who provides them with excellent feedback, challenges and motivates them to do better, respects their capacity to learn, and who doesn’t waste their time with distractions and irrelevancies”³ (Pg 73)

This view of student voice is similar to that of Rosemary Hipkins⁴ who argued that applications of student voice rested on particular pedagogical traditions. Drawing on constructivist theories, she suggested that teachers cannot know exactly what or how students have learned unless students are consulted about the learning they have made from any particular learning experience(s). She indicated that it is vital that student voice is used for determining the ‘next learning steps’ and how teachers can support students to take these steps (p.86).

Dr Cheryl Doig poses the question as to whether today’s schools reflect their learners’ needs. In today’s world “there are some clear trends: client voice and wider community opinion matter more than ever before; personal, professional and organisational behaviour is amplified; and feedback cycles are accelerating. The world has changed, and the pace is accelerating. We ignore these signals at our peril.”⁵

Ka Hikitia- Accelerating Success 2013-2017 strategy presents one of the five Guiding Principles, Ako- a two- way learning and teaching process as one of the important components.

“Ako describes a teaching and learning relationship where the educator is also learning from the student in a two-way process and where educators’ practices are informed by the latest research and are both deliberate and reflective”⁶

A decade ago, an economist at Harvard, Ronald Ferguson, wondered what would happen if teachers were evaluated by people who see them every day – their students. Results show that even the youngest students have capability to give quite reliable feedback about their teachers.

² Graham Nuttall –The Hidden Lives of Learners 2007

³ Michael Absolum- Clarity in the Classroom 2006

⁴ Hipkins, R. 2010. Reshaping the secondary school curriculum: Building the plane while flying it?

⁵ From Teachers Matter – “The Breadcrumbs of Learner Voice” Dr Cheryl Doig

⁶ Pere,R.R.1982-Ako,Concepts and learning in the Maori tradition.Wellington: Te Kohanga Reo National Trust Board

The Atlantic newspaper⁷ gives insightful comment as to how survey results can be used to inform teacher practice but also to negate. Many schools across the states are now including surveys as part of performance management appraisal systems related to performance pay.

The *Tripod Project*® has been developed and refined over more than a decade by Dr. Ronald F. Ferguson of Harvard University. *Tripod*™ surveys and analysis methods have helped millions of students communicate about their experiences in school. The *Tripod* survey assessments were an integral part of the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project.

Using the Tripod survey assessments, educators have access to high quality measures in the following areas:

- Teaching Effectiveness: Measures tied to each teacher are quality assured and benchmarked against national norms.
- Student Engagement: Data concerning effort and motivation indicate for each classroom how students judge their own attitudes, behaviors and effort.
- Student Satisfaction: Data indicates whether each classroom, building and district is a place where students feel safe, welcome and satisfied with their progress.
- Whole-school Climate: Data from individual classrooms can be aggregated up to measures of whole school climate. In addition, surveys include questions that pertain to the school as a whole.

Appraisal is a performance management system aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. It typically involves (1) identification of performance expectations and appraisal goals, (ii) classroom observations, (iii) teacher self-appraisal, (iv) discussion of the teacher's self-appraisal and the appraiser's evaluation, and (v) the setting of new performance goals.

(BEST- School Leadership and Student Outcomes Identifying What Works and Why)

ERO surveyed 173 primary schools with Years 1-8 and 27 schools with Years 9-13 students in Term 1, 2013. Their findings published in May 2014 show that

In appraisal discussions primary schools surveyed were more likely than secondary students to use an analysis of achievement data in their conversations about links between teaching and student outcomes. Secondary schools surveyed were more likely to use feedback from students in these conversations

The Principals' survey about their Appraisal of Teachers showed

⁷ theatlantic.com-Why Kids Should Grade Teachers 2012

20% provided templates for feedback from students and parents

40% used feedback from students as a source of information contributing to the appraisal process

33% felt that their school's appraisal process promoted very effective inquiry into student learning, progress or achievement, 43% effective inquiry into student learning, progress or achievement.

In one American (Utah) school district in Year 2000, an analysis of 9,765 student surveys from 27 schools found that students were able to distinguish between a teacher they simply liked and one who supported their learning.⁸

“Students have a unique and valuable perspective on a teachers’ performance in the classroom.Meaningful student involvement improves student engagement and gives young people ownership of their education.....students who feel connected to school-that they are respected, their opinions valued, and someone cares about them- have more positive academic attitudes and are more likely to continue to attend school.⁹ Thus, engaging students as active participants in teacher evaluation and in the education reform efforts taking place in their own schools “(has) the power to teach them democratic principles, empower and motivate them towards academic achievement, and show them that their voices and unique perspective in the educational system are important and valued.”¹⁰

Teachers need to know how individual students learn. They need to be asking pertinent questions to understand students’ metacognitive ability. Utilising a comprehensive format for student voice for the purpose of assisting the improvement of quality teaching and improved student outcomes is likely to be beneficial and aligns with Inquiry into teacher practice and the appraisal cycle

If we remember that appraisal performance management systems are aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning then we can say that there is merit in including formalised feedback from student voice in the appraisal process.

Are students capable of having a voice in the teacher appraisal process?

⁸ Kenneth D. Peterson, Christine Wahlquist, and Kathie Bone, “Student Surveys for School Teacher Evaluation,” *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education* 14 (2000): 135-153

⁹ Robert Blum, “A Case for School Connectedness,” *Educational Leadership* 62.7 (2005)

¹⁰ Colorado State Council on Educator Effectiveness Student Engagement Technical Advisory Group Report (March 2011)

Before we look at student voice in the teacher appraisal process we must consider the attitudes and values held by teachers and leaders about students' ability to make a contribution to the process.

George, A., Brown, S., and O'Neill, J. (2007) state "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."

"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."¹¹ (Pg 21).

Rachel Bolstad, senior researcher at NZCER shifts away from the discourse of student voice in favour of "youth-adult" partnership. She looks at power differences between student and teacher. She states that "genuine and productive partnerships are unlikely to be achieved without transforming those aspects of school culture that work against young people's abilities to genuinely participate"¹²

"Learners of all ages value the chance to give feedback and to know that it is acted on; to feel that they are contributing; and that their views are treated fairly. In our schools and learning organisations of today, adults need to listen more and speak less". (Dr Cheryl Doig)

School culture and relationships will determine whether including a formalised process of gathering student voice in the appraisal process will be beneficial to the school.

If school culture presents a low-trust model related to goal setting it is unlikely that any student voice in the appraisal system will have impact.

Investigating in a variety of thinking tools, taxonomy's and graphic organisers to assist students' knowledge in methodologies of how to learn, in ways of learning, and developing language of learning will be precursors to enabling robust conversation.

Developing student capability in metacognition will be beneficial in utilising student voice effectively in the appraisal process as a learning tool for the teacher.

Many schools already utilise student conversation to assist teacher feedback. After lessons questions teachers may ask:

¹¹ John Hattie in James Nottingham

¹² Rachel Bolstad set: Research Information for Teachers, 1, 31-33, From "student voice" to "youth-adult partnership"

- *What were you learning today?*
- *Were you successful?*
- *How do you know you were successful?*
- *What do you need to learn next?*

Student voice provides the teacher with first hand evidence and feedback around what they may need to teach, change or review.

Students do have the ability to contribute to teacher effectiveness and development.

How might Hawera Primary School and other schools go about including student voice in the teacher appraisal process?

The BEST synthesis tells us that leader's direct involvement in in teacher professional development (Dimension Four) is the most powerful way that leaders can influence the quality of teaching and learning in their school.

Its goal is to develop the capacity of teachers to teach what students need to learn while being open minded about what that is and how to achieve it .It has a strong focus on collaborative analysis between what students have learned and how they have been taught. Much of this work should be collaborative because it is hard work, because relevant expertise is not found in the head of one person, and because systematic collaborative learning builds a professional practice that reduces the isolation of teaching and the variation in teaching quality¹³ (Pgs 145-146)

Principal and senior management should lead the development

Focus professional development around "Teaching as Inquiry"¹⁴

Share sabbatical findings

Review current performance management systems and look to formalise "Student Voice in the Appraisal Process" as a goal within the appraisal cycle

Look at existing measures of evidence as set against the Registered Teachers Criteria and Tataiako and establish where student voice already fits

As a staff collaboratively "Measure What Matters"

- *focus on what teachers do to make the difference within the learning environment they create*
- *measure metacognitive processes, reflecting the theory of teaching*

Ensure student feedback reflects accuracy. Do students, particularly at the younger level understand what questions asked of them really mean? Responses must remain confidential to the student. Responses should not reflect idiosyncrasies of a particular group of students

If surveys are used they should support improvement and be used for professional development and growth. They should not be a popularity contest. Students should be

¹³ Viviane Robinson- Student Centered Leadership 2011

¹⁴ He New Zealand Curriculum- Teaching as Inquiry Pg 35

asked to report only on elements of teacher performance that they have directly experienced.

Examples of questions asked in the Tripod Survey. Responses are to be highlighted: Always/ Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never

1. When he/she is teaching us, my teacher asks us whether we understand.
1. I like the ways we learn in this class.
2. In this class, you must pay attention all the time in order to keep up.
3. In our class, mistakes are okay if you tried your best.
4. My teacher is nice to me when I ask questions.
5. I have pushed myself hard to understand my lessons in this class.
6. If you don't understand something, my teacher explains it another way.
7. I like the way my teacher treats me when I need help.
8. My teacher pushes everybody to work hard.
9. In this class, we learn to correct our mistakes.
10. Our class stays busy and does not waste time.
12. Students behave so badly in this class that it slows down our learning.
13. Everybody knows what they should be doing and learning in this class.
14. My teacher explains difficult things clearly.
15. My teacher makes me want to go to college.
16. My teacher in this class makes me feel that he/she really cares about me.
17. My teacher doesn't let people give up when the work gets hard.
18. If I need help with homework, there is someone at home who can help me.
19. My teacher has several good ways to explain each topic that we cover in this class.
20. My teacher gives us time to explain our ideas.
21. Homework helps me learn.
22. In this class, my teacher accepts nothing less than our full effort.
23. My teacher knows when the class understands, and when we do not.
24. We spend a lot of time practicing for the state test.
25. In this class, I take it easy and do not try very hard to do my best.
26. My teacher tells us what we are learning and why.
27. Lessons in this class are often hard for the teacher to make clear.
28. Being in this class makes me feel sad or angry.
29. My after-school activities don't leave enough time to finish my homework.
30. We have interesting homework.
31. My teacher asks questions to be sure we are following along when he/she is teaching.
32. When my teacher marks my work, he/she writes on my papers to help me understand how to do better.
33. The teacher in this class encourages me to do my best.
34. School work is not very enjoyable. (Do you agree?)
35. My teacher checks to make sure we understand what he/she is teaching us.
36. In this class, doing your homework is not very important (Do you agree?)
37. This class is a happy place for me to be.
38. My teacher wants us to share our thoughts.
39. My teacher takes the time to summarize what we learn each day.
40. Students get to decide how activities are done in this class.

41. My teacher explains things in very orderly ways.
42. When doing schoolwork for this class, I try to learn as much as I can and I don't worry about how long it takes.
43. My teacher wants me to explain my answers -- why I think what I think.
44. Students don't share ideas in this class, we mostly just listen to the teacher.
45. My teacher pushes us to think hard about things we read.
46. I am happy with how well I have done in this class.
47. In this class we have to think hard about the writing we do.
48. Getting ready for the state test takes a lot of time in our class.
49. In this class, we learn a lot almost every day.
50. I understand what I am supposed to be learning in this class.
51. I have done my best quality work in this class.
52. At home, I don't have a quiet place where I can do homework.
(Do you agree?)
53. Students speak up and share their ideas about class work.
54. This class is neat -- everything has a place and things are easy to find.
55. In this class we have to write every day.
56. If I am sad or angry, my teacher helps me feel better.
57. I have learned a lot this year about the state test.
58. Because of my teacher, I think more about going to college.
59. In this class, I stop trying when the work gets hard.
60. My classmates behave the way my teacher wants them to.
61. My teacher in this class does not know me very well yet.
62. My teacher seems to know if something is bothering me.
63. School work is interesting.
64. In our class, getting right answers is very important.
65. I think we get more homework in this class than kids in other classes.
66. For a new student, this class would be a good one to join.

Numerous other forms of student voice can be utilised and already will be, in school systems

e.g Feedback exit slips ,Peer evaluations, Surveys about the content and approaches in classes, Students journaling, talking about or discussing reflections on their learning, Video footage of students discussing their learning, Student focus group interviews or discussions, Teacher reflections on insights from student in everyday classroom interactions¹⁵

Utilise findings as part of understanding teacher learning needs, develop goals from these. Plan and participate in professional learning, trial new learning, analyse the effect changed teaching has on outcomes for learners and on self and begin again.

Ensure the timing of student evaluations allow students to benefit from, or observe, changes as a consequence of their feedback.

¹⁵Evaluation Associates, New Zealand Teachers Council - Using Student Voice in Teacher Appraisal

Summary

As part of Hawera Primary's Appraisal process, observations of lessons have follow up conversations with students around how they are learning, with staff very much interested in the metacognitive process.

A more formalised manner in which this data is gathered and utilised to support teacher development and improved student outcomes could be entertained.

Comprehensive discussion with students around "how" they learn as a result of the deliberate acts of teaching the teacher implements will be an element to be further explored as we further promote teacher effectiveness across the school.

A growing number of school systems across countries are administering surveys – we must be mindful that results are not linked to performance pay.

School cultures that nurture and develop all capabilities within the learning community must continue to be fostered.

RECOMENDATION

To the Hawera Primary School Board of Trustees:

That Hawera Primary, in 2015, resource investigation into "Student Voice in the appraisal process" via teacher release and subsequent professional development as required through our Performance Management process.

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