

Student voice

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How do schools encourage, collect and use student voice to enhance student assessment and school review?

Acknowledgement:

I would like to thank and acknowledge the board and staff of Kapanui School for supporting this sabbatical and also the schools, their principals and staff, who willingly shared their experiences and practice with me

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Report format:

This report is not intended to be an academic report or based on academic research. It simply records reflections upon the readings, observations and discussions I undertook during the sabbatical for the purpose of increasing my own knowledge and clarifying my thoughts relating to student voice and its role in New Zealand primary schools. My approach did not consist of collecting hard data but more on building impressions and reflecting on the impressions or feelings that I formed against relevant professional readings.

“what pupils say about teaching, learning, and schooling is not only worth listening to but provides an important—perhaps the most important—foundation for thinking about ways of improving schools” (p. 1). - Rudduck, J., Chaplain, R., & Wallace, G. (Eds.). (1996). School Improvement: What can pupils tell us? London: David Fulton

Purpose:

- To visit schools to investigate and reflect on systems, practices and gather innovative ideas that use student voice particularly in relation to assessment and school review
- To improve my professional knowledge and practice by engaging with other schools and school leaders
- To improve my professional knowledge and practice through the opportunity for professional reading and reflection
- To reflect on current practices using student voice at Kapanui School and assist the leadership team with developing effective and innovative practices to use student voice to enhance learning

Activities undertaken - Methodology:

My learning activities included

- A review of relevant literature available from Internet searches. Information relating to student voice both nationally and internationally was prolific. During the sabbatical I downloaded and read 168 internet items.
- Visits to schools to interview principals and teachers, and to observe practice and processes – this included a number of the schools involved in the local Kapiti Assessment Cluster (7 schools) and a selection of schools recommended by colleagues or identified through the Ministry website - The New Zealand Curriculum Online (11 schools, Dunedin, Napier, Hastings and Auckland.) For the local Kapiti cluster schools I used a set questionnaire to assist with framing the information gathered. For the other schools I used a more free flowing conversation which often moved to areas beyond student voice.
- Reflecting on the literature and the school visits.

What is student voice? – Definitions

- David Hargreaves defines student voice as *'how students come to play a more active role in their education and schooling as a direct result of teachers becoming more attentive, in sustained or routine ways, to what students say about their experience of learning and of school life'*.
- *Student voice describes the distinct perspectives and actions of young people throughout schools focused on education. "Student voice is giving students the ability to influence learning to include policies, programs, contexts and principles."* en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student_voice
- *Student voice is the individual and collective perspectives and actions of young people within the context of learning and education. This can include, but isn't limited to, active or passive participation, knowledge, voting, wisdom, activism, beliefs, service, opinions, leadership, and ideas.* - (2006). *SoundOut Student Voice Tip Sheet.* - <http://www.soundout.org/tips.html>
- *"[Student voice is] the active opportunity for students to express their opinions and make decisions regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their learning experiences."* Rogers, A. (2005). *Student voice: Bridges to learning.* Seattle: University of Washington. - <http://www.soundout.org/tips.html>

How does student voice link to current schooling sector priorities and the New Zealand curriculum?

As outlined in the quotes below current New Zealand education trends and curriculum support a focus on effectively encouraging, collecting, analyzing and using student voice as one way to increase student engagement, motivation and ownership of their learning and therefore student achievement.

Directions for Assessment in New Zealand

- *It is critical, therefore, that students' identities and voices are heard, developed, and valued, and that differences among students are acknowledged and accounted for in systems design*

- *They (Effective teachers) look for opportunities to involve students directly in decisions relating to their own learning. This encourages them to see what they are doing as relevant and to take greater ownership of their own learning.* - <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-in-the-classroom/Directions-for-assessment-in-New-Zealand-DANZ-report/Section-3>

Assessment for Learning

- *Students learn best when they feel accepted, when they enjoy positive relationships with their fellow students and teachers, and when they are able to be active, visible members of the learning community* - <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-in-the-classroom>

The New Zealand Curriculum

- *Our vision is for young people: who will be confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners.* - <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/Vision>
- *Effective teachers stimulate the curiosity of their students, require them to search for relevant information and ideas, and challenge them to use or apply what they discover in new contexts or in new ways. They look for opportunities to involve students directly in decisions relating to their own learning* - <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/Effective-pedagogy>
- *Learning is inseparable from its social and cultural context. Students learn best when they feel accepted, when they enjoy positive relationships with their fellow students and teachers, and when they are able to be active, visible members of the learning community.* - <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/Effective-pedagogy>
- *Effective assessment: 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.* - <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/The-school-curriculum-Design-and-review>

Ka Hikitia - Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008 - 2012

- *Support schools to include student voices in school improvement decisions by developing innovative Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) tools.* - <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PolicyAndStrategy/KaHikitia/StrategyOverview/StrategyFocusAreas/YoungPeopleEngagedinLearning.aspx>

The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) articulates a shared vision of “Young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (page 8). One of the characteristics of effective assessment identified is that it “involves students –It is important that educators inquire into how they can deepen their understanding of students’ perspectives and engage with students in school and classroom communities where everyone is a learner.

Teaching as Inquiry - Collecting student voice helps teachers to find out about the impact of their teaching, so this fits well with teaching as inquiry. It can also help teachers to co-construct next learning steps and direction if students are involved in deciding what, and how, they learn.

School Review - It is crucial to include the voices of all the different groups within the community. One of those very important groups is, of course, the voice of children.

Student voice can also add a valuable source of information to school review. Providing students with a role in influencing their school and their learning can improve student motivation and engagement, both vital factors in student achievement. Students have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling. Their views deserve not only the attention but also the responses of adults. They should have opportunities to influence their class, their school, their education.

Why encourage student voice?

Student voice, learner voice or pupil voice, are terms used to describe the move to consult and deliberately provide opportunities for learners to voice opinions about things that matter to them, and that effects their learning and other school experiences, and have these views have the potential to influence teachers' pedagogy and practice.

“Current research suggests that “student voice”, when it involves students having a genuine say in their learning, has served as a catalyst for change in schools. Positive outcomes include: helping to improve teaching and learning; improving teacher-student relationships; increasing student engagement with their learning; and raising student esteem and efficacy.” - Fielding 2001; Mitra 2003, 2004, 1995; Ruddick and Flutter 2000.

“Student voice” can help schools develop a culture in which learners feel listened to, respected and valued as individuals, where their views are seen as important to the teachers they work with, where teachers want to know what interests and motivates the learners and where learners feel confident about taking responsibility for aspects of the learning.

If after reviewing “student voice” opportunities a school decides that it wants to move to providing a higher or deeper level of “student voice” opportunities, what would be the justification?

“Student voice ‘fits with constructivism and co-construction theories. “Student voice’ enhances relationships and engagement. If you believe in teachers as coaches, facilitators or co-learners’ then “student voice” is valuable. ”Student voice” is a useful addition for teachers inquiring into their teaching.

David Jackson, 2005, promotes six reasons why student involvement and “student voice” strategies make sense

1. Education values: valuing the learning that results when we engage the capacities of the multiple voices in our schools.
2. Community values: school community is characterised by collaboration, aspirational optimistic and high challenge cultures.

3. Rights: students are a significant voice in school.
4. Social responsibilities: young people have rights and responsibilities now enshrined in international law.
5. Legitimacy: the authenticity of student perspective is about learning and school community.
6. Pragmatics: if students are not allowed to change what they do, then we will never transform learning.

Asking for student opinions and listening to “student voice” reminds teachers that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about the schools in their learning which adults cannot replicate. Giving students the opportunity to have a voice, in regard to their learning and teaching and how the school operates has benefits not only for school review but has personal benefit for students themselves in terms of self-esteem, and growth of personal skills.

Fielding, 2001, Holdsworth, 2005 - they have seen the central issue of “student voice”, not as one of providing data for others to make decisions, but as integral to encouraging young people's active participation in decisions, and consequent action about their own present and future learning. This participation is strongly linked with the constructivist theory, Bruner 1966, of learning which emphasises the importance of students actively determining what they learn and having a role in the direction of the learning.

Collecting “student voice” helps teachers to find out about the impact of their teaching, so can be an import source of information for teachers inquiring into teaching.. It can also help teachers to co-construct next learning steps and direction if students are involved in deciding what, and how, they learn. It is crucial to include the voices of all the different groups within the community. One of those very important groups is, of course, the voice of children.

“Student voice” can also add a valuable source of information to school review. Providing students with a role in influencing their school and their learning can improve student motivation and engagement, both vital factors in student achievement. Students have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling. Their views deserve not only the attention but also the responses of adults. They should have opportunities to influence their class, their school, their education.

What systems, practices and ideas that use student voice particularly in relation to assessment and school review were the schools visited employing?

When asked about what “student voice” activities schools and individual classroom teachers were using a wide variety of ways to encourage student voice were noted. This included –

Y8 Leavers survey
Student attitude surveys
Inclusion of student voice in review teams
Student reflection
Student interviews
Peer assessment

Self assessment
3 way conferences
Student lead conferences
Student goal setting
Class goal setting
Use of success criteria
School council
Student Rep BOT - Colleges
Enviroschool group
Suggestion box
ICT Helpers
Student peer tutors
Student buddies or mentors
Peer Mediators
Road Patrol
Librarians
Student Bankers
Development of class behaviour plans
Regular circle time, class reflection
Student Learning logs
Questionnaires
Focus groups
Individual interviews with staff
Small-group interviews with staff
Attitude Surveys
Visits between schools
Bullying Survey
Regular feedback on class units, planning
Students as researchers
Student input as part of teacher inquiry
Student reports or presentations to BOT
Student led inquiry
Student visitor guides
School ambassadors
Student Action Groups

Many of these activities acted as the foundation on which increased meaningful “student voice” activity was being built. These activities could but not necessarily form the seed bed of truly transformational “student voice”.

What approaches, development could be used by schools wanting to increase or raise the level of student voice in their schools?

To develop “student voice” schools need to engage senior leadership, encourage interested staff and develop champions or leaders who have influence to move the school. A whole school approach and the use of a range of methods to involve as many people as possible are important.

Schools also need to ensure that school documentation, charters, strategic plans, annual goals, job descriptions and performance agreements include references to student voice.

For example on the internet I found -

At Hackham West Primary School we value and believe that:

- *children's ideas and beliefs should be valued*
- *all children have the ability to become leaders in some sense*
- *children should be actively involved in decision making*
- *children need to develop the skills involved in becoming active citizens in their community.*

The objectives of the "student voice" program at Hackham West include:

- *developing in students a sense of self-worth, as well as an awareness of their place in the community*
- *actively involving students in decision making*
- *nurturing a sense of community spirit in students*
- *valuing and respecting students*
- *developing students' leadership and team skills*

At one of the schools visited a unit had been allocated to leadership in student voice and this was framed by an appropriate performance agreement.

A review to identify current use of student voice would be a valuable starting point. A first action could be to collate and then categorise the activities being undertaken in the name of "student voice" across the school. This could include using a mind map to identify all activities school wide, followed by evaluating the identified activities against agreed criteria. Examples of this include Fielding's typography of the four possible groups of "student voice" activity (Fielding 2001), (Fig.1) and/or Hart's Ladder of Community Involvement (Hart 1994). (Fig. 2)

Levels of "student voice"

Level 1: "student voice" is not heard.

Level 2: Students' views are sought by teachers.

Level 3: Students' views are sought by, and feedback is given, by teachers;

Level 4: Students' views are sought by, and feedback is given, and this followed by dialogue with teachers;

Level 5: Students are involved in designing how views are sought with teachers and feedback is given, followed by dialogue with teachers.

Level 6: Students voice is integrated into school organisation at every level and initiative can be taken by students.

Fig.1

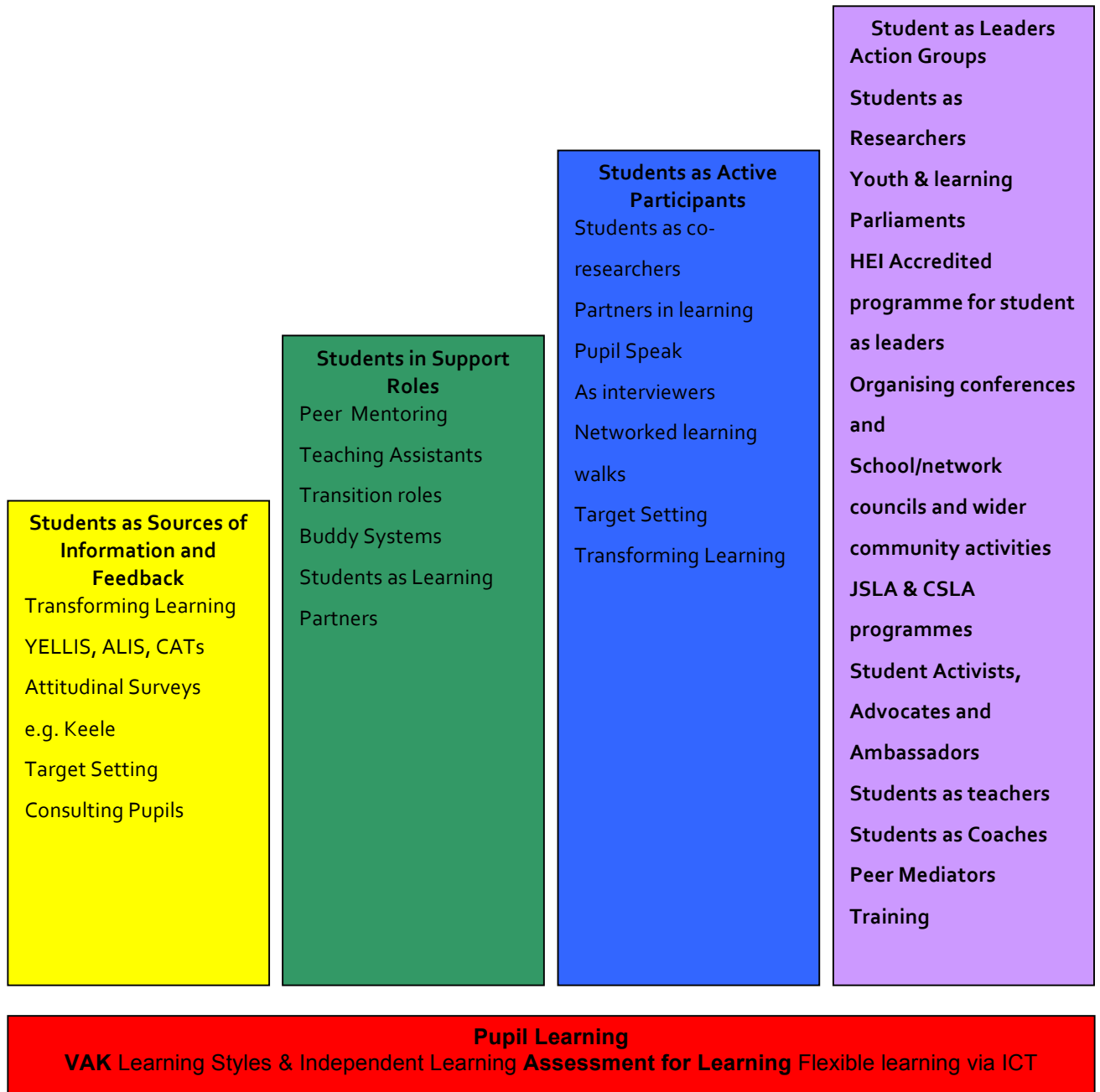
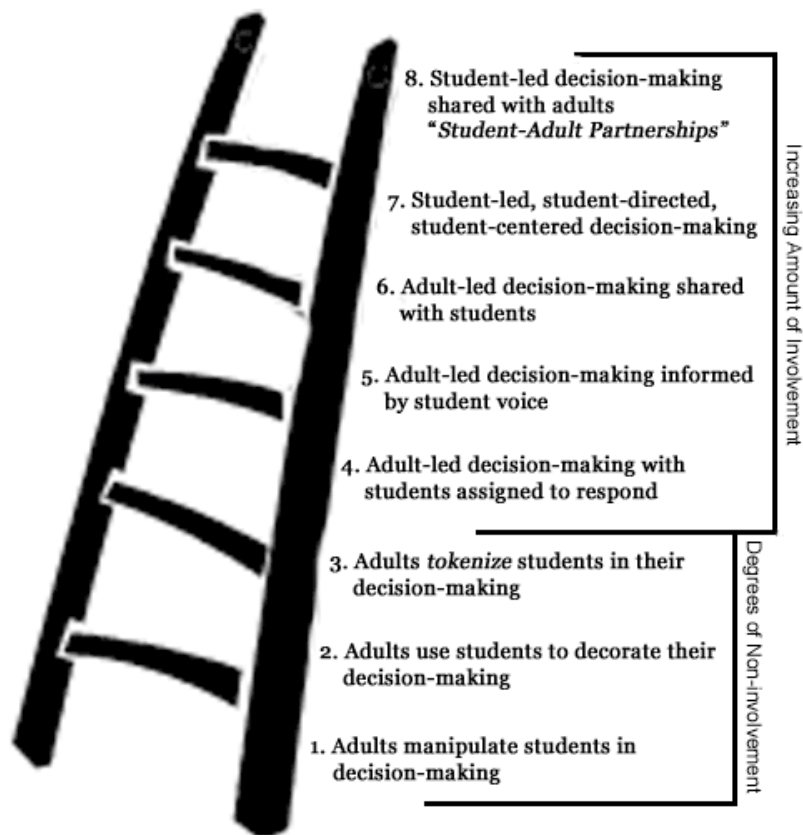


Fig.2

The Ladder of Student Involvement in School



Adapted by Adam Fletcher from Hart, R. (1994). *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. New York: UNICEF.

At Kapanui School we also identified what student year levels the activities involved, the numbers of students involved and if they were curriculum, learning, behaviour, organisational, leadership or representative.

Once the current student voice activities have been identified and a picture of the quality or level has been found a process of development can be implemented.

Fitzroy High School, Victoria, Australia for example developed a plan requiring teachers to review their provision of student voice and then deliberately move through a series of stages in a learning continuum.

- *Stage one - no involvement: students are not asked for their opinion*
- *Stage two - listening: eliciting student perspectives as data*
 - *Passive role: students as information source. Students are asked for their opinion on class discussion, focus group will school survey.*
- *Stage three - collaborating: sharing planning and decision-making.*
 - *Active role: students as participants. Students work collaboratively with others and share opinions*
- *Stage four - leading.*

- *Directive role: students take the lead in design and research into effective learning and teaching*

What are the implications for Kapanui School?

In the schools that I have visited it seemed that the majority of activities involving “student voice” were at the middle to lower end of the scale using Hart’s Ladder. However all of these activities were positive and could be seen as stepping stones or the foundations on which to build.

Many of these structures, activities or programs with little modification would be able to be used to encourage and develop “student voice” to a higher level. Developing an attitude or mindset by staff to look for opportunities for “student voice” within their classrooms and programs is important as well as designing ongoing systems to ensure many opportunities arise within school activities and classroom programs.

An attitude of seeking opportunities within current programmes is important so that staff don’t feel that this is another add on to an already crowded curriculum.

For example at one school Y7/8 staff were discussing the value of cross class ability grouping students for mathematics. This was already happening by staff as part of reflection and review but the addition of student voice added another valuable source of information. How did the students see this issue, did it work for them, what were the positive and negatives? A small focus group of students was formed and used to gather, analyze and present the information.

Principals and leaders within the school need to proactively look for ways to encourage “student voice”.

Schools could also use questionnaires or surveys to assess the school systems, identifying areas of strength and weakness to work out strategic direction.

A number of the schools visited carried out their own annual surveys or used NZCER, Me and My School. The Wellbeing @school web site also contains useful surveys in relation to student views on the social climate at the school.

Summary comments

The English newspaper The Guardian published a survey in 1967 and again in 2001 on “How I’d like schools to be”. In 2001 15,000 students aged 5 to 18 responded. Being heard was at the heart of every entry. This is the one plea that also united the 1967 entries. Edward Blishen wrote, "From all the quarters of the educational scene it comes, this expression of children's longing to take upon themselves some of the burden of deciding what should be learned, how it should be learned."

One of the issues for primary schools when responding to this desire for students to be heard is developing systems that provide for the different developmental stages within a school that caters for five year olds through to 13 year olds. As children progress through primary school growing maturity levels need to be recognised. This is not to say that five-year-olds do not have worthwhile things to say but age and maturity need to be taken into account. It is important that systems across the whole school are developed so that “student voice” is used to the benefit of all students. It is also important that systems across the whole school are developed so that as students mature they have opportunities to develop skills that will assist them to take

advantage of leadership and citizenship opportunities in later years. A greater maturity of “student voice” will be evident in later years when students have had the opportunity to develop skills as they progress through the school.

“Research on the use of “student voice” has constantly affirmed the maturity of pupil responses and that they value being treated more like equals, and take seriously the opportunity to have their say to make a difference in the way the school operates. If given the right opportunity, they will speak responsibly, intelligibly and usefully” (Bragg, 2001) - Bragg, S. (2001) ‘*Taking a joke: learning from the voices that we don’t want to hear*’, Forum, vol 43, no 2

Increasing use of student voice can contribute to –

- The Operational Management of the School
- The Strategic Development of the School
- The Well-Being of Students (Physical & Emotional)
- The Representation of Students’ Views and Opinions
- The Development of Student Responsibility and Contribution
- The Continual Improvement of Staff / Student Liaison

<http://www.qkschool.org.uk/students/student-voice>

However increasing use of student voice comes with following warnings.

1. As a school listens more to students they must also ensure that the adult staff of the school also has a voice that is heard and listened to.
2. Whose voice is being heard? When evaluating “student voice” opportunities in schools it is important that we ask whose voice we are listening to as often it is the ‘chosen ones’. We must provide opportunities beyond the chosen ones, indeed we should look to include students who may be less engaged, not participating, at risk, particularly if we see one of the major benefits of “student voice” as increasing student engagement. One school visited had addressed this problem by using student focus groups to discuss issues that arise in the playground, such as behaviour. Students who may well have been part of the issue were invited to be part of student group that found solutions.
3. The manipulative and tokenism forms of student voice, when there is no actual reality of influencing what happens in the school, where the purpose is for appearance, rather than real voice may lead to students losing faith in the process.
4. Students are not adults; student voice needs to take into account the professional role of responsibilities of teachers. The following extracts and quotes from the largest union representing teachers in the United Kingdom highlight these concerns and considerations. -

The effectiveness of the active and positive engagement of pupils will depend upon pupils developing an awareness of their responsibilities in addition to their rights.

These responsibilities include learners understanding:

- *the extent to which they are personally responsible for their own learning;*

- *the impact their behaviour and general conduct can have on themselves, their peers and teachers and other adults who form part of the school community; and*
- *how the legitimate rights of all members of the school community can only be secured by each person acknowledging and undertaking their own responsibilities and obligations.*

“In some schools the approach to the student voice is extending beyond learning that aims to be relevant, purposeful and engaging for all youngsters, to the development of strategies which involve little more than opinion surveying of pupils and strategies which privilege pupils in a way that undermines, disempowers and deprofessionalises teachers. These strategies include having a full and active involvement in the interviewing of staff for new posts and promotion and being trained to undertake classroom observation of teachers.

Youngsters making judgments about the suitability for posts and competence in the classroom of those who teach them must be seriously questioned by the profession rather than accepted as either a natural extension of the concept of student voice or an appropriate interpretation of it.”

http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/InformationandAdvice/NASUWTPolicyStatements/StudentVoice/NASUWT_000279

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Assessment for Learning - <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-in-the-classroom>

The New Zealand Curriculum –

<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/Vision>

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Fielding 2001; Mitra 2003, 2004, 1995; Ruddick and Flutter 2000.

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