

Editorial

Recent attention to the idea of “student voice” provides an interesting framework for considering the articles in this edition of *set: Research Information for Teachers* as an overall collection. They cover a range of different issues, with a special focus on mathematics education. The potential to read a “voice” dimension into the collection raises some interesting possibilities for professional reflection. Only Rachel Bolstad’s He Whakaaro Anō contribution has a specific focus on *student voice*, although reference to this idea is made in several other contributions. Many teachers worry that the very idea of student voice implies that important learning decisions should be placed in students’ own hands and they rightly see this as an abdication of their professional responsibilities. This way of thinking frames decisions taken in relation to making space for student voice as a dichotomy where either the student’s or the teacher’s voice can be heard, but not both. In this editorial I use the collection of articles presented here to play with ideas about how we might reframe “voice” challenges as explicit both/and opportunities rather than implicit either/or problems.

We could think about student voice as a continuum of possibilities for interactions between young people and adults who support their learning. At one end of this continuum we could position student voice initiatives that address issues of power and control over learning, and foster students’ ongoing progress in becoming active, engaged citizens in their communities and the world. This *transformative* agenda is the topic of Rachel’s think piece. Fully teacher-directed learning with minimal space for students’ voices to be heard would be the other end of such a continuum.

Some way along from this conservative pole we might position approaches that allow teachers to *improve* learning while still remaining within a more traditional pedagogical framing of what the teacher and the students are each expected to do. For example, constructivist learning theory and associated pedagogical developments such as assessment for learning emphasise the need for teachers to figure out how students understand ideas and then use these insights to determine next teaching and learning steps. They can’t do this unless they have access to students’ sense making (i.e., their “voices” as expressed through learning activities and outputs). Both students and their teachers need to be able to access spaces where a number of “voices” are able to be safely and thoughtfully heard. Thus, within this improvement framing, it is important to consider both the content of learning and the pedagogies that teachers might employ to facilitate the interactions that bring multiple voices into the open.

The three mathematics education articles provide examples of how important it is to attend carefully to the content of what students say and think. Whether the topic be understanding fractions (Michael Drake), developing greater statistical literacy (Sashi Sharma and colleagues) or additive thinking strategies (Jenny Young-Loveridge and Judith Mills), the research findings show how knowledgeable teachers need to be if they are to respond appropriately to students’ sense making as expressed through their work in

class. Although Charles Darr does not directly discuss students—his assessment notes address moderation questions related to the implementation of National Standards—we might read between the lines to reflect on the power of shared professional conversations about the *meaning* of the responses students make to their learning. As in the mathematics education articles, implications for the consideration of next learning steps might logically follow.

Jody Plummer describes her use of small focus groups to reflect on students’ conceptual gains and struggles in social studies. The learning-to-learn focus of these conversations ultimately fostered deeper learning for the class as a whole and students learned to talk more conceptually as they worked together. Widening the frame to include a wider range of voices, Bronwen Cowie and colleagues discuss the use of homework books as a means of making spaces for *family* voices to come into the classroom and be heard in science learning. Claire Coleman and colleagues discuss using process drama to involve students in historical learning inquiries, creating opportunities for students to try out *voices other than their own*, including thinking and speaking as if they were historians. Again, these authors report on greater student engagement with the intended history learning, a developing sense of empathy for the choices other people have made and opportunities to tell new stories about themselves as capable of being successful learners. Fostering positive learner identities is a common thread of the “voice” considerations in all of these articles.

Whether the foregrounded focus be on content or pedagogy, an implication of these articles is that the teacher must employ considerable expertise and skill to draw together the threads and connections that keep learning on track. This participatory, multivocal framing of learning shifts the intended learning further along the continuum towards the transformative end. Directly or indirectly, the articles that foreground pedagogy also illustrate how engaged *teachers* can be when they create opportunities for students’ “voices” to be taken seriously as important learning inputs. They are energised to consider and act on insights into the impact of their practice on the students as responsive individuals. Lexie Grudnoff’s article on beginning teachers expands this frame by reminding us of how important it is to also making spaces for teachers’ voices to be heard by those who work with them in a professional support role.

In summary, then, there are many different ways in which the idea of “voice” might be framed and its merits debated. What I have tried to do here is to keep the focus on the question that matters most—how we best support students and those who teach them to be actively engaged learners. The various framings of voice arguably all have their place and a contribution to make to our ongoing professional work. It’s not a question of which approach is best but rather of what each might contribute to the messy, busy whole of a learning life.

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