
In Progress Internationally: student voice work in four countries

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The late Jean Rudduck led the most extensive and sustained programme of Student Voice work in the United Kingdom to date through the Economic and Social Research Council project 'Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning'.^[1] She continues to inspire discussion around Student Voice and its transformational possibilities, bequeathing also a specific legacy, executed by John Grey, to support a visiting fellow, Alison Cook-Sather, at Homerton College, Cambridge. In June 2013 the third of four seminars was held entitled 'Linking across the Lines: works in progress', hosted by Alison, John Gray and Julia Flutter. It was an exploration of cross-context and cross-level projects from 'differently positioned participants' in education (Cook-Sather, 2013), including students, teachers, researchers and policy makers, all committed to the development of relationships highlighted in Michael Fielding's special issue of *FORUM* on Student Voice (2001).^[2]

Echoing the adventurous ground-note of this current *FORUM* issue, the following four articles are representative of the international dimension of the seminar held at Cambridge. Roger Holdsworth has worked tirelessly within education to document and promote Student Voice initiatives and resources, particularly in relation to (variously named) student councils. *Connect*, the extraordinary journal he has edited from Australia, is now archived and online at <http://research.acer.edu.au/connect>. In his article Roger explores the structural conditions necessary for authentic discussion and reflects on the spaces that need to be created and nurtured for genuine and productive dialogue between teachers and students.

Jean Courtney provides a powerful account of a province-wide Student Voice initiative in Ontario, Canada. She describes how a close relationship with the Ministry of Education, making particular use of technology, has directly linked the process of policy-making to school students, with the effect of increasing, engaging with and embedding Student Voice in what she terms the 'acoustic' of Ministry, district, school and classroom.

From New Zealand, Emily Nelson's account of an action research project explores and problematises the power relations at classroom level. She addresses the tensions inherent in developing partnerships that lead to real joint decision-making and the disruption of existing educational hierarchies and relationships.

In the final article of the quartet, Alison Cook-Sather outlines the profound changes occurring in student and staff relationships within an academic development programme at Bryn Mawr College in the USA. This focuses on the foundational principles of respect, reciprocity and shared responsibility within the Students as Learners and Teachers programme and has much to offer in informing both the professorial development of academic staff and teaching and learning in general.

While there are a variety of Student Voice projects and arenas of activity in England (such as through the Phoenix Trust, Young Advisors, and the Cambridge Primary Review Trust), it is chastening to see that, although there is engagement at a classroom – even school – level, there has been relatively little progress in exploring interconnectedness between contexts of different scales since the *FORUM* special issue 12 years ago. The seminar 'Linking across the Lines' gave a glimpse of what can be achieved through embedding Student Voice in practice, particularly in relation to policy, while always holding to the principles of respect, reciprocity and shared responsibility.

The seminar participants are developing an international network through different media, such as the Facebook page set up by Dana Mitra [3] and supported by resources such as the website curated by Bethan Morgan.[4]

Further information about the seminars and outputs can be obtained from jane.mcgregor@educationresearch.co.uk

Note

[1] http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/no5_ruddock.pdf

[2] Available free online at www.wwwords.co.uk/FORUM

[3] <https://www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/>

[4] <http://www.scoop.it/t/student-voice>

References

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<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=509912447466777;res=IE LHSS>
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