WARREN KIDD AND GERRY CZERNIAWSKI

27. VALUING STUDENT VOICE
IN PRACTICE-BASED EDUCATION

Transforming the Professional Practice of Teachers

Practice-based education (PBE) is a pedagogy of professional learning which privileges the importance of learning through reflection in practice, contextualised and situated within professional craft knowledge, tacit legitimation claims and theoretically informed practice. It is "an approach to education that is grounded in the preparation of graduates for occupational practice" (Higgs, 2011), a work-*based* and workplace *training*. This locates PBE within wider debates around the role of reflective practice and professional craft knowledge. As such, PBE and related pedagogies often find expression within teacher education and the education of healthcare professionals. There is much congruency of these professional learning practices and contexts – both being characterised by boundary-crossing practices between the field of practice and the academy. PBE is deliberately characterised as professional *education* rather than the perhaps more mere utilitarian and instrumental *training* (Billett, 2010; Higgs, 2011). This distinction makes troublesome some recent UK education policy which seeks to privilege a discourse of "teacher training" as a policy technology aimed at reducing the value, priority and role of theoretical knowledge and the university. It is into this context – PBE valuing practice, reflective learning, workplace experience and clear links between the boundaries of the university and the boundaries of the occupational practice – that we position a need to capture and utilise Student Voice. We assert that Student Voice is a vital lens (Brookfield, 1995) through which professionals in training can understand their practice.

   As a pedagogic practice, we can understand PBE as comprising normative and relational elements and, as such, teacher learning fits well within a PBE paradigm. We assert that teachers' professional learning is complex and sophisticated. In discussing teachers' professional practice-based learning, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) wrote of knowledge *for* practice, knowledge *in* practice and knowledge *of* practice. PBE locates learning in all three of these domains and their interrelations. In this conceptualisation of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983), PBE embraces a "form of social practice which shapes the educational development of individuals, framed around a perspective, model or theory of education that encompasses interactive philosophical, political, moral, technical and practical dimensions" (Higgs, 2011, p. 9). It is a way of making sense of action; a way of learning from and in practice (Schön, 1983). Thus, professional practice prefigures and frames individual tacit knowledge and individual action and learning. Our

argument here is that authentic Student Voice is a powerful pedagogic and relational medium through which we can provide educators, as professional practice-based learners, with a sound basis for reflective practice and intimacy with others. In presenting the two case studies here, we suggest that the incorporation of the Student Voice "lens" into PBE pedagogy helps to construct the meaning of practice and of professional reflexive identity.

Contextualising the Value of Student Voice for Professional Learning

The term *Student Voice* itself is highly contested. As Fielding (2009) suggests, Student Voice is a "portmanteau term." In speaking and writing about "voice" we recognise its role as "strategic shorthand"' and its limitations (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 6). Despite the diversity of reasons why individuals, practitioners and institutions become interested in and involved with Student Voice work and research, the requirement for capturing and utilising voice remains. The Student Voice "movement" represents something rather special in the field of education – an opportunity for theory and practice, researchers, academics, practitioners and teachers and (most important of all) learners to co-construct the meanings of what they do and how and why they do it. To co-construct the field and the shared understandings within which professional practice takes place requires the voices of learners, and any articulation of PBE omitting those voices is barren, disembodied and unsubstantiated.

What is exciting about the Student Voice movement is the diversity of practice and the commitment of learners and practitioners to the principles of social justice, democracy, active citizenry and children's' rights. On some levels, Student Voice is itself fundamentally bound up with social justice and democracy. On other levels, Student Voice can be seen as a mechanism for school and college improvement. Occasionally, schools and colleges pay lip-service to Student Voice and in doing so construct a discourse of Student Voice that operates as a controlling agent, "*an additional mechanism of control*" (Fielding, 2001, p. 100). Furthermore, some commentators suggest that Student Voice is a "policy technology" (Ball, 2001) providing "efficiency gains" which aid and legitimise competition between educational institutions, leading to increased marketisation (Gunter & Thomson, 2007).

Student Voice that is authentic and inclusive has the potential to subvert, undermine and transform limiting and limited market cultures: there is some genuinely exciting, diverse, radical and meaningful practice "out there." Yet all too often educational practice is invisible, hidden away, with academic and policy-makers' voices taking priority over the stories of teachers and learners themselves. Student Voice is often linked to what we mean by an "active citizenship" (Ruddock & Flutter, 2000) in its broadest sense: to develop learners who can participate in society in a socially responsible fashion we need to involve them in decision-making. We need to encourage and moreover allow young people (and learners of all ages, in fact) to have a voice, as a means of educating them about their role in the world as much as their role in their own learning. In this way, Student Voice

informs teachers' practice and teachers' professional learning. In asserting this, we situate Student Voice as a valuable and powerful mechanism for educational change. It provides rich professional learning evidence that can be used to foster reflective practice, research-informed practice and professional learning. However, developing research programs and mechanisms through which voice can be captured is by no means simple. Some Student Voice practice comes with a warning (Ruddock & McIntyre, 2007) that cynical attempts to capture learner voice for "performativity" purposes alone end up perpetuating the cynical use of learners as objects, passive in their own educational journeys.

Our argument here, in both the case studies we present, is that genuine engagement with the Student Voice can inform and transform professional learning. It can help to provide a rich context within which practice can be better understood. In this way, Student Voice can aid professional practice, which is itself identity forming.

THE CASE STUDIES

We present here two case study examples drawn from the authors' own research, documenting the role of Student Voice as a basis for teachers' professional practice-based learning. In Case Study 1 (see Kidd, 2011) we have an example of how Student Voice (in the form of podcasts made by younger learners) can be used to inform the reflective and reflexive practices of pre-service teachers-in-the-making in the UK. In Case Study 2 (see Czerniawski & Garlick, 2011), Student Voice is examined within the community of a large inner-city school, informing the practice and continuing professional learning of in-service teachers and teacher educators involved in a 5-year project between the school and a local university.

CASE STUDY 1: SUPPORTING THE REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICE OF TRAINEE TEACHERS THROUGH STUDENT VOICE PODCASTS

The Setting

In this case study a Student Voice initiative is deployed as a means to better inform pre-service trainee teachers' views regarding teaching and learning in the all-important induction period of the training year (Kidd, 2011). A series of interviews was conducted in a diverse variety of local contexts in schools and colleges, which sought to explore young learners' views on teaching and teachers. The recordings were then categorised and segmented into a rich variety of small audios (podcasts) and used as a learning and teaching resource as part of the teaching in a pre-service Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). This professional (work-based) learning program was developed specifically for London-based teachers in the UK to enter employment in the "further education" or "lifelong learning" sector. The audios of the Student Voice(s) better inform trainee teachers' boundary-crossing practices as they seek to unite what they learn from the academy with that from practice in the field. The Student Voice initiative seeks to

reform unsituated learning as situated in and contextualised by what the Student Voices have to say.

The Focus

This case study presents a research-informed practice which focuses upon the links between the twin lenses of (a) trainee teachers' reflective voices and reflective learning and (b) young learners' voices articulating their experiences of learning and teaching. The use of the insights, reflections and opinions of local learners is significant here. Within the author's own PBE pedagogy, as a teacher educator, it is desirable to model to trainee teachers the importance of utilising the Student Voice as the basis for reflective (and reflexive) practice; another lens through which to understand how our own practice and professional learning is located and grounded (Kidd, 2011). It is vital to develop a context through which Student Voice can be expressed, and to demonstrate the value to be had for (new) teachers to listen to (their own) learners.

The Strategy

Through a series of interviews, a "resource bank" or archive of podcasts/audio records has been created which is then used as a teaching resource to support the professional learning of trainee teachers. The interviews took place with 16 to 19-year-old learners (from the UK Further Education sector) in institutions local to the university where the teacher education program is based. These recordings provide an insight into what young learners in a variety of situated contexts – schools and colleges – think about teaching and teachers. The audios are used extensively during the induction period of the pre-service teacher education program. In this way they are a resource to aid the reflective learning undertaken by trainee teachers. The argument is that reflecting on the Student Voice can support novice teachers' boundary-crossing (Heggen, 2008). In this way, listening to learners is framed as a "democratic educational" (Giroux, 2005) practice, one with tremendous value in informing PBE. In this context,

> Voice, quite simply, refers to the various measures by which students and teachers actively participate in dialogue. It is related to the discursive means whereby teachers and students attempt to make themselves "heard" and to define themselves as active authors of their own worlds. (Giroux, 2005, p. 454)

Challenges Faced

Central to the teacher education pedagogy and PBE of this case study is the value proposition that echoes much Student Voice enquiry (Ruddock & Flutter, 2000; Ruddock & McIntyre, 2007): that teachers and learners must co-construct their own social relations and social practices. This is itself a challenge for pre-service

trainee teachers, many of whom arrive at the training program with a conceptualisation of teaching as something which is "done to" learners; seeing classrooms as a space for their performance, and not taking into account the agency and reflective practice of their own younger learners, who are often articulated and naively positioned as a passive "audience," rather than a co-conspirator. From this practice – using Student Voice audios early in induction – many trainee teachers are surprised at the insight younger learners can demonstrate into classroom practice. As Salisbury, Martin, and Roberts (2009, p. 421) suggest, "it is important to locate teachers and learners as active participants in at least some of the processes of learning."

It is by utilising the Student Voice within the PBE of teachers that we seek to move towards a more "*democratic schooling*" (Giroux, 2005):

> The concept of voice constitutes the focal point for a theory of teaching and learning that generates new forms of sociality as well as new and challenging ways of confronting and engaging everyday life. (p. 454)

CASE STUDY 2: STUDENT RESEARCHERS AT "EAST VALLEY" COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

The Setting

The Student Voice project which this case study explores was launched in conjunction with teacher educators from the University of East London (UEL) in January 2007 at the school by members of the Senior Management Team (SMT). East Valley Comprehensive Secondary School (a pseudonym) consists of approximately 860 learners and is located in a London Borough in a predominantly white working-class semi-industrial catchment area. The school was described as "outstandingly effective" in a recent government inspection report (reference retained for ethical purposes) and many of its teachers, its students and the UEL researchers involved in the project have represented the school and university at high-profile national events showcasing the Student Voice project and its relationship to the development of teaching and learning at the school.

The Focus

The aim of the project, from the school's point of view, was to provide a method of encouraging students to become actively involved in decisions about their own learning and empowering them with appropriate ways to do so. The school set out to:

– ensure that all learners, irrespective of their class, gender, ethnicity, and ability, were involved in decisions about how, what and when they learn, with whom, and the type of environment in which this occurs.

    – ensure that students were involved in school improvement strategies and the co-construction of policy-making with teachers. (Czerniawski & Garlick, 2011)

The Strategy

In the early stages of the project, 92 pupils received school and university-based training at UEL's Docklands campus in London. Teacher educators ran a series of short lectures and workshops at the university designed to help pupils to run productive meetings, gain confidence in the variety of ways they can voice an opinion, listen to one another's point of view, and have a rudimentary understanding of research skills and ethics. Visits to the university raised the profile of the Student Voice initiative in the eyes of the pupils and potentially also their aspirations for university applications. Following training the students carried out research using a variety of methods including questionnaires, lesson observations and interviews with young learners, staff and trainee teachers. This culminated in the production of three charters (Teaching and Learning; Behaviour; The Environment) for the school that reflected the concerns of the three "voices" as directed initially from the school's SMT.

    The second year of the project involved dissemination of the findings back to trainee teachers at UEL as research-informed practice. Success of the first year was evidenced by students being asked to speak at conferences and being invited to national and regional award ceremonies. The second year was crucial in moving the project forward, maintaining momentum and enabling different students and new members of teaching staff to become involved. Further training took place at the UEL to enable the newer representatives to understand their role as student researchers and to recognise some of the issues in relation to respect and ethical working on such a project.

    In the third year of the project a variety of Student Voice initiatives have taken place, including the training of six pupils from the "Global Voice" body to become researchers and share their experiences at a school in Finland. In the words of these student researchers, the aim of their visit to Finland was:

> To take on board any beneficial ideas from the Finnish School System that we could try to introduce here at [East Valley] (Quotation taken from presentation by students to their school governors).

The volunteering students, aged between 15 and 16, were members of the executive student voice body at the school and were allowed to take part in the research based on a variety of criteria including attendance, behaviour, affordability, and the degree to which they were up-to-date with school assignments. Student researchers were prepared through training sessions addressing topics that included an introduction to the Scandinavian education system, the relationship between methodology and methods, ethics, tools of analysis and the significance of contextual sensitivity, cultural norms/values and the specificities associated with the school trip regulations. The sessions varied in

nature; some were quite didactic, whereas others involved the six students discussing, choosing and designing their research tools with the authors taking a "back seat," offering support/clarification as and when requested by the students. Two staff members of the school accompanied the six students on a 6-day visit to Finland spent at "Quiet haven School." During the visit students carried out lesson observations, held interviews with young learners and members of staff at the school, and gathered photographic documentary evidence of their trip. On their return their findings were presented to the senior management of the school and the Student Voice executive body, and the legacy of these findings is currently being explored.

Challenges Faced

We have written elsewhere (Czerniawski et al., 2010) about the degree to which all learners in this project were able to determine fully the direction of enquiry and the degree to which the three strands represented the interests of the student body and/or the senior management of the school. Similarly, we have discussed elsewhere (Czerniawski, Garlick, Hudson, & Peters, 2010) issues related to those included, empowered, marginalised and alienated from the Student Voice experience at the school. Although many teaching staff were enthusiastically involved in the Student Voice initiative, others were not. Yet, as the project developed, most members of staff became fully supportive of the project, particularly as a result of noticeable improvements in classroom behaviour.

   Additional changes to the school include revised timetabling arrangements of certain lessons in response to student feedback, the redecoration of areas of the school, the introduction of student-led observations of teaching staff, student involvement in teacher recruitment, and the widening of pedagogic strategies of all members of staff. The students involved have brought about tangible differences in the school they attend and also within the community in which the school is located. Since the introduction of the project back in 2007, relationships between neighbours, the local police and staff and students at the school have improved as a result of a number of initiatives initiated by the Student Voice body. One such project has involved students working closely with the police to identify troublesome local areas where high rates of bullying have taken place. In feedback from the police it was remarked how "articulate," "confident" and "well-informed" students were when dealing community police officers.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

In the separate but related practices of the two case studies, we have positioned Student Voice as a powerful ingredient to inform a wider PBE. In this way, Student Voice informs the initial development (Case Study 1) and continued articulation and settlement (Case Study 2) of a professional self and a "professional identity." Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) have described this as (learning) "*how to be*,"

"*how to act*," and "*how to understand*." Constructing a teacher self is a learning process, one informed by both the academy and experience in the field.

In the two case studies presented above, we enable teachers to explore their "teacher (or teaching) selves," essentially through storytelling practices bound up with the adoption of learner voice. Thus, (trainee) teachers are not just listening to learners, but are encouraged to speak *with* (not *to*) learners as a means to develop their professional identities and craft practices. This is an essential voice by which to inform PBE.

Yet it is not a simple process: it is true that student voice initiatives are performed, grappled with and mediated in hectic institutions where learners and teachers have competing commitments, priorities and values. It is also true that, taking an historical perspective, the Student Voice movement is contested, tentative, embryonic and culturally situated. Yet most Student Voice initiatives are also collaborative and involve the integrity and passion that young learners and teachers bring to their work. If PBE really is a pedagogy of professional learning then this passion needs to be harnessed, appropriated and positioned as one of its cornerstones. One starting point is to authentically trust young people, as has been the experience of these student researchers at their school and within the local community. Embedding Student Voice in the recruitment and preparation of those entering the teaching profession would be one tangible acknowledgement of that trust. While many schools (in England) involve students in recruitment procedures (e.g. young people on interview panels; observing micro-teaching), this practice is not widespread. Neither is there evidence to show that university schools of education involve pupils during student recruitment interviews for teacher education courses. Ensuring that school and college students are prominent at the start of teacher preparation courses would raise the importance of young people in the eyes of future cohorts of trainee teachers and enhance their professional development.

LESSONS LEARNED: THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT VOICE FOR PBE

In answering the question *how do teachers learn*? Malderez and Wedell (2007) suggested that, through practice-based reflective action and evidence, teachers "pull together" experience. In that activity, teacher knowledge is formed by knowing *about*, *how* and *to*. Teachers are thus learners too – as are all practitioners. Practice itself is conceptualised here as a social endeavour whereby complex skill and tacit knowledge, although heavily situated, are also informed by theory and theorising. In this way, it is identity forming. As Danielewicz (2001) positioned it, teacher education pedagogy must be "insisting on identity," and in constructing practice, "becoming a teacher means that an individual must adopt an identity as such" (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 9). Thus PBE for teachers is not a mundane practice transformation but rather a pedagogy of identity transformation. Yet all too often we see in work-based professional learning, particularly in education and nursing, a gulf between practitioners and the academy. This is where the role of Student Voice can be enacted. Fully-realised practice, moving on from mere tacit

knowledge, embraces a critical reflection both situated by the surroundings of practice and moving beyond it. As our two case studies have demonstrated, Student Voice can provide a deep and rich context for professional learning.

CONCLUSION

The escalation of market forces in education means that both learners and teachers are "now working within a new value context in which image and impression management … are becoming as important as the educational process" (Ball, 2001, p. 13). It would be a tragedy, therefore, if the zeitgeist devotion to student voice is reduced to a "rhetoric of agency" (Gunter & Thomson, 2007) associated with student voice narratives that embody tokenism, instrumentalism and the enhanced competitive positioning of the school. The socially reproduced sites we know as schools need to be sites where all forms of symbolic communication used are non-threatening, where learners and teachers feel valued and comfortable in their learning environments and are equally comfortable to change, experiment and take risks. Schools are sites in which trust and respect should form the cornerstones of all teacher–student interactions. Without this, any claim that formal education is in some way, a preparation, enactment and rehearsal for democratic citizenship is disingenuous.

Within this tentative democratic model, teachers and trainee teachers – professional learners – are conceived as active, as are the learners they work with. To engage the Student Voice within any PBE pedagogy, we maintain that it is vital to see teachers (in training or established) as work-based learners who are in need of developing successful mutual cooperation. Authentic Student Voice enables a true PBE, based upon mutual support and understanding. Teachers need to work with each other; but they need to work with learners too. Only by engaging with the Student Voice can PBE be fully situated and realised.

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Warren Kidd BSc, PGCE
Cass School of Education and Communities
University of East London, UK

Gerry Czerniawski PhD
Cass School of Education and Communities
University of East London, UK