Chapter 3
Why Listen? Student Voice Work Defended: Students as 'Expert Witnesses' to Their Experiences in Schools and Other Sites of Learning

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Abstract This chapter makes the case for educative practice in which teachers and learners unite in a form of participative inquiry with an emphasis upon inclusion and social justice. It will demonstrate that taking this stance acts as an interruption to pedagogical power relations and hierarchical governance leading to a reconsideration of the typical assemblages of engagement on the part of all participating in the dance of education. The chapter honours the capability of young people to witness the manner in which educative practices can and should take place in a world worth living in. It will illuminate its assertions by offering a range of examples varying in levels of participation and the scale of the engagement in participative inquiry with a focus upon mutual learning that attends to a variety of voices including those often marginalised, even silenced.

Keywords Participative inquiry · Student voice · Student agency · Social inclusion · Educative practice

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> In writing of his prison guards "If we speak they will not listen to us and if they listen they will not understand" (Levi, 1959, p. 21)
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> Driven by thirst he spied a fine icicle outside the window which he seized, but it was snatched from him by a large, heavy guard 'Warum?' Levi asked in his poor German, the reply came at once 'Hier ist kein warum' There is no why here. (p. 24)

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Introduction

To eliminate voice and agency in a totalitarian regime is no accident. The elision of 'why' effectively silences dissent. There may seem a great distance between a repressive, cruel and immensely hostile system and learning sites of today but all too often student questioning of educational practices, what they mean in their lives and why they are as they are, exist as no more than whispers in the corner. More often than not such questioning is considered 'unsayable' (Butler, 1997; Teague, 2017). The uncovering of 'unwelcome' truths is not 'welcomed' (Charteris & Thomas, 2017); such uncovering may be perceived as 'nettlesome' knowledge, that is those 'elements of knowledge that are deemed taboo in that they are defended against, repressed or ignored because if they were grasped they might "sting" and thus evoke a feared intense emotional and *embodied* response' (Groundwater-Smith, 2014, p. 123).

Voice in this chapter is taken to signify a means for learners to be included as active agents in the processes of educative practices, particularly in relation to a substantive engagement in research and inquiry. Having a voice is essentially seen as an enabling factor, having a value in participatory processes in a world worth living in wherein students may act with authenticity and confidence (Couldry, 2010).

This chapter will argue for a form of 'educative practice' in which teachers and learners unite in the development of participative inquiry whose objective it is to inform just and equitable pedagogical and curriculum processes—to make visible the otherwise unsayable. It will recognise the contested matter of affording young people greater agency but will take a transformative rather than adversarial stance. It will remark upon that which is problematic in practice but argue that those people, in this case, young people, 'closest to the problem should be part of the solution for that problem' (Christens et al., 2014, p. 156).

The chapter will explore the critical matter of context when engaged in research and inquiry with students. It will, in particular, refute misunderstandings that have arisen from the dominance of psycho-statistical discourses that have underpinned much of what is represented as educational research. It will seek to illuminate the ways in which those who participate in schooling, and adjunct sites, such as cultural institutions, as teachers and learners, have an ambition to know and understand the conditions under which productive learning for well-lived and inclusive lives can and should occur.

'Ambition' is not a word that has been chosen lightly. Too often it is associated with having an ardent desire for achievement in terms of wealth and fame, capital 'A' Ambition; less often does it align with something that is earnestly sought for—having *an* ambition to engage in the good work of contributing to *Yindyamarra Winhanganha,* a Wiradjuri phrase meaning 'the wisdom of knowing how to live well in a world worth living in'.[1] The sentiment can be viewed in the light of MacIntyre's means-ends discussion where he asserts that 'ends [wishing to achieve such wisdom] have to be discovered and re-discovered and means devised to pursue them' (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 317).

[1] This phrase is to be found on a number of public sites, including Charles Sturt University.

In making the case for student voice and agency the chapter will draw upon a number of studies in which young people have been participative, both as individuals and groups. The settings range from schools to systems and cultural institutions that have a commitment to social justice and inclusion. These studies will explore *why* it is that both individuals and groups of young people may feel disengaged from what it is that is being taught within a competitive academic curriculum, or perhaps, *how* it is taught; and they will propose the benefits of listening and acting upon student voice.

The chapter will weigh and consider practical matters that govern student participation and offer a cautious brief for those who choose this path. Furthermore, it will acknowledge educative practices as being embedded within the concept of *practice architectures*; that is to say, in consideration of sayings, doings and relatings as enacted within the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements present in specific sites (Kemmis, 2018; Kemmis et al., 2014). Educative practice, then, is formed, re-formed and transformed in this case through the processes of participative inquiry that engages educators and learners. This is made possible by the various arrangements inherent in the sites within which educative practice occurs: the languages and discourses that are employed, particularly in relation to an understanding of *voice*; the varying nature of the physical context; and, the relationships that occur in consideration of power and control.

Educative Practice

It would appear to be self-evident that practices in education should be 'educative'; but the very term itself is problematic. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2019, p. 25) argue that educative practice is that which is strategic and underpinned by transformational inquiry that is inclusive of all who are participating in the educational setting, including the students themselves; it may be seen as a 'practice changing practice' (a phrase first introduced by Kemmis, 2007, with regard to the practice of action research). For the purposes of this discussion, I may go a little further and assert that being educative serves to illuminate an action in an inclusive transactional manner embodying new possibilities and alternative practices. It is a recognition of the situated knowledge of young people as they live out their lives. It alludes to a transformational process built upon dialogue and negotiation. Educative practice generates knowledge that goes beyond the promulgation of practical skills and training by aligning practice with that which contributes both intrinsically and extrinsically to the public good (Freire, 1998). It could be said to address a question that Biesta (2019) puts to his readers in the title of his paper, 'What kind of society does the school need? Redefining the democratic work of education in impatient times'. In creating this title he is turning around the question normally considered which asks 'what can the school do for society', emphasising the policies that governments and more broadly society itself want of schools. By moving away from practices

established by outsiders Biesta makes a plea for a more responsive and dynamic alliance that approaches education from the inside.

While we generally imagine that *educative practice* can be manifest in schools it is also the case that it can take place within cultural institutions that offer learning services. Natural history and science museums, art galleries, libraries, historic houses and the like all employ educators who have a desire to enliven and enrich the understanding of their visitors. They are also motivated to engage in research and enquiry with those audiences (Kelly & Fitzgerald, 2011). They can be seen to have the capacity to 'point things out'—Biesta (2022) sees this as 'gesturing'.

Educative practice flies in the face of Hammersley (2003) when he argues that educational research itself cannot be educative, only informative. He sees research in education as informative, designed to provide knowledge of practice that is useful, but scarcely enlightening. By way of contrast, this chapter exhibits a concern for forms of inquiry that illuminate value and complexity and inform a more progressive and risky trajectory. In effect, it argues for a mode of participative inquiry. It recognises heterogeneity in relation to young people's experiences that are various and contingent upon such variables as status, race and gender (Cook-Sather, 2007).

The Case for Teachers and Students Uniting in the Conduct of Participative Inquiry

Let's begin with a thought experiment. Sullivan (2020, p. 18) illustrates one of his poignant short stories regarding discipline with a photograph of two crew-cut youngsters seated at a shared desk in a one-room school. Behind them, on a chair, sits a 'dunce's cap' used as a device to humiliate those students who could not meet their teacher's expectations. The photo is a mock up designed to draw attention to the ways in which externally imposed discipline is essentially ineffective. But the dunce's cap was still employed right up until the mid-twentieth century as a means to impose discipline upon those who could not, or would not, bend to the teacher's will. Now, imagine this. The student and teacher engage in an authentic conversation regarding the difficulties being experienced. Each, in this 'ideal speech situation', is entitled to believe that the other speak what they believe to be the 'truth' of the encounter. They are engaged in an act of social validity whereby their exchange is comprehensible, truthful, sincere, and appropriate (Habermas, 1987). The youngster explains that he does not understand the teacher's question and so cannot answer it; he was sitting at the back of the class and cannot hear very well. The teacher speaks of her frustration that whenever she addresses a question to the student, he looks at her blankly. Of course, this scenario could be further elaborated but it serves to demonstrate how respectful listening on the part of both protagonists could serve to better inform practices in classrooms and other sites for student learning as an authentic dialogic encounter.

How could such an exchange be made possible? Recognising, of course, that in some circumstances listening to the voices of students has been long observed. For example, progressive education at schools such as Summerhill, led by A.S. Neill, are renowned for their participative inclusion of teachers and students in school meetings (Neill, 1960). But it can be argued that the greatest and widest change to enhancing student agency came about as a result of the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Particular attention has been given to Article 12 which states that young persons should be provided with the right to be heard in any judicial, and administrative proceedings affecting them, either directly or through a representative or appropriate body (Nieml et al., 2016, p. 81). There is here an implicit distinction between listening and hearing; as Fielding (2004) reminds us it is the difference between speaking with rather than speaking *for* others and thus 'rupturing the ordinary' (p. 296). What is required is a relational ecology that builds upon trust and mutual regard, thus breaking traditional pedagogical boundaries that normally elevate the teacher and diminish the students in terms of their capacity for agency (Lundy, 2007).

Not only do we need to make a distinction between listening and hearing we must also move from voice to agency. It is also essential that we consider the matter of acting by asking ourselves 'what is to be done?' In this case we are considering the voices of the range of participants in the matter of education. Clearly teachers have a voice (although their voice is increasingly constrained by government policies, see for example Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2018). Through the work of participatory inquiry students, also, are being accorded an authority to speak and act regarding issues that have an impact on their lives (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). An emergent understanding sees them 'engaging in a process that positions them as agents of inquiry and experts in their own lives' (McIntyre, 2000, p. 126) in a form of youth participatory action research (YPAR) (Fine et al., 2007):

> The glue to YPAR is the centering of the wisdom of those who are most affected by the issues that are being addressed. Young people design, implement, and disseminate the research, as well as the actions or social movements that both motivate and extend from the research. Inclusive modes of performance, presentation, and writing tend to be used to share findings with diverse audiences and to activate these audiences to action (Silver, 2019, p. 12 on-line).

Engaging in YPAR is arguably a radical action for it works against the grain of current policy formulation. Many education policies are driven, not by those upon whom they impact, but by specific and preferred forms of academic research, often characterised as 'evidence-based practice' with little questioning of the nature of evidence itself (Biesta, 2014). Indeed, there is now a trend for social policies such as education to be strongly influenced by quantifiable factors adopted from elite networks based on business and commerce (Exley, 2019; Hendrickson et al., 2016).

Refuting 'WEIRD' Psychology

A world worth living in is a world that puts traditional research under the microscope. This has been undertaken most successfully by Henrich (2020) in his extended narrative on the evolution of Western psychology that has persistently espoused the specific cultural practices, not only of one nation, but of a sub-group: Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) with the research derived from studies of mainly male undergraduates. The underpinning belief is that matters of interest and concern to that group may be readily applied to others that have evolved in a very different fashion.

Globalisation has tended to lead us to believe that cultural difference is of little consequence when it comes to pedagogical practices and values. But we have only to explore approaches to teaching and learning, within what is known as Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) to be found across Asia, to bely that belief (Nguyen et al., 2006; Tran, 2013). The dangers of over-generalisation can lead to over-simplification when attempts to implement specific practices are made. For example, CHC places an emphasis on interpersonal relationship and in-group cohesion and an avoidance of confrontation and conflict in nuanced and complex ways. These emphases do not lead inexorably to Western models of group learning, cooperation, and even competition.

Australian concerns with identifying appropriate pedagogical practices when providing education for Indigenous people have decried the homogenisation of culture and argued that the what, how and why of learning must be appropriately considered and strengthened through an understanding of cultural identity (Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2011). This requires drawing upon family, Country, and story that may in turn draw upon thinking, acting, making, and sharing that may or may not be captured by words (Bat et al., 2014). The impetus is to seek for cultural interfaces that can inform two-way teaching and learning whereby students are not expected to leave their cultural knowledge at the school gate. All of this is to caution those wishing to engage in participative inquiry with students to be mindful of the cultural context from macro to micro levels, best achieved through authentic interaction preceding action, building trust and genuine relationships.

This chapter will now outline three examples of the ways in which young people have acted as witnesses to their own experience and learning such that they have been able to make a contribution to the enhancement of educative practice within systems, cultural institutions and schools. Participation itself is complex, ranging from consultation to full involvement in the design, engagement and enactment of research contributing to policies and practices (Hart, 1992, 2008). Hart's ladder of participation (1992) building upon Arnstein (1969) refers to an eight-step continuum. The first three steps are virtually non-participation, i.e. manipulation; decoration; and tokenism. Level 4 is assigned, but informed; Level 5, consulted and informed; Level 6, adult-initiated shared decisions with young people; Level 7, child-initiated and directed; and Level 8, child-initiated, shared decisions with adults.

It is incumbent upon us to be alert to the working of metaphors such as the notion of a 'ladder of participation' that suggests a rigid process. Hart himself has become increasingly cautious of organisations that believe that they can plan for inexorable progress up the ladder, arguing instead that development comes about as a result of innovation and collaboration (Hart, 2008). As well, we need to be wary that educators and learners, in their engagement in participative inquiry, are not aiming at a discourse of 'sameness'; that is, 'thinking alike'. In seeking to bond unity and diversity it is vital to first establish a more nuanced sense of unity and avoid conflating the term with uniformity. Rather they might be seen as seeking to find unity in diversity, where difference is recognised and explained. As such, inclusive, participative inquiry is a generative, transformative form of collaboration that is always a complicated conversation, even at times, given the legacy of power relations, a *liaison dangerous* (Rudduck, 1999, p. 41).

Even so, each example offered here is illustrative of a different step on the ladder; acknowledging that the steps are not entirely discrete. The first case exemplifies Level 4 in that the participants were given opportunities to set out their experiences in relation to a changing state-wide policy but there was no evidence that they contributed to any changes in policy; the second example reflects Level 6 wherein the participants responded to an adult initiative, and also contributed to decision making in a large and influential cultural institution; while the final case can be identified as a Level 8 example in which a reference group of students investigated practices leading to the assessment of learning in an Independent Girls School.

Listening to Student Voice Can Inform Policy

This study, as a demonstration of Level 4, was devised to seek the views of a range of young people across the state of New South Wales (NSW), Australia, regarding the impact of the changes to the school leaving age upon their experiences, choices, and decisions. By raising the school leaving age by one year it ensured that young people would stay on at school for further study; the senior curriculum, however, was unchanged. There was a concern that those who would have preferred to leave school might feel that they were required to continue under duress, while more academically oriented students might view the retention of disengaged learners as a distraction (further information regarding this policy change may be found in Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2015). It followed a sequential mixed methods approach in which there was a qualitative phase (focus group discussions) that was succeeded by the quantitative phase (online survey). Each phase was designed to elicit student feedback regarding the changes to the school leaving age in New South Wales. It was desired that the investigators 'represent the multiple layers of human experience (that is) fraught with challenge, alternative and limitation' and 'is not merely a matter of opinion' (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 31).

This was not a study that enabled the young people to be active designers and researchers, rather it was one that enabled their voices to be heard.

The qualitative component of the study, excerpts from which are reported here, relates to the concept of symbolic interaction—the premise that human beings will act towards things on the basis of the meaning that those things have for them; the meaning then is derived from or arises out of the social interaction that one has within a given world. These meanings are themselves modifiable as experiences grow and change. Thus, the study was interested in the ways in which the young people who participated in the focus groups perceived their experiences of schooling in the senior years and the value and significance of their experiences. Both students who had intended to stay on and those who had anticipated leaving school at the end of Year 10 were included in the focus groups. The purpose was not to change the policy, but to anticipate the impact of the policy upon the ways in which the senior years of schooling might be best managed.

It was determined that students from 12 NSW High Schools, one from each of the ten regions of the state and two from the more populous regions, would participate in the focus group discussions and a following online survey. Given that the study explored the participants' experiences of the senior years of secondary schooling, criterion-based selection of sites and participants was warranted to ensure that some, but not all schools, catered for students from challenging socio-economic backgrounds. Schools were requested to select students for the focus group discussion to represent a range of ability and academic engagement—thus allowing for both 'convenient' and 'inconvenient' voices (Fletcher, 2013).

The selection of a focus group discussion, rather than individual interviews, arose from the understanding that by providing for the generation and analysis of interactions a more comprehensive range of perspectives could be revealed. The moderation of the focus group was such that the facilitator was not seeking for consensus but created conditions that allowed for multiple perspectives to emerge. It was seen as a participatory process designed to maximise the input of all members of the group (Barbour, 2007).

The discussions were designed to set the participants at ease. For example, an icebreaking activity required participants to relate to a series of images that could be understood as metaphors for 'how things were going for them at school'. Using a projective technique in this way is one that is greatly familiar to the conductors of this study whose work is reported in Colucci (2007).

As stated earlier in this chapter the purpose of this study was to widely consult with young people themselves as the consequential stakeholders most affected by the changes to the school leaving age. Focus group questions variously addressed issues in relation to student plans, their knowledge of the changes to the school leaving age, the difference that the policy might have made to their planning, and the various programmes and pathways offered to them. In the case of the latter, the questioning broadened to consider current strategies, their overall interest and engagement with school, and what was required to further demonstrate to them that school was the place for them. The following brief discussion was based upon extracts presented

at an equity conference (Groundwater-Smith, 2011[2]) and focused upon aspects of student plans, the ways in which their plans had changed, and their interest and engagement with learning in school.

Student Plans

In accordance with their school histories and academic potential, student plans varied considerably both within and between groups. Year 12 students clearly felt the heat of the Higher School Certificate at their backs and wished to 'stay focused and organized'. This group had already made a commitment to senior studies and had not been caught in the newly mandated school leaving age net. They were intent on continuing with their education by one means or another.

The plans for Years 10 and 11 students, however, were mixed. A number were interested in pursuing a range of careers that would be enabled by TAFE (Technical and Further Education) courses in areas such as tourism, hairdressing, carpentry, real estate, hospitality, child care, music and the like. Others hoped to progress to tertiary courses in teaching, nursing and business studies while some nominated the Australian Defense Forces as a career objective. Where there was less of a commitment to senior studies, students expressed their frustration at the way in which they had been caught by the new policy.

One wanted to find a job: 'I'm over it, I don't like it (school) I'm sick of people telling me what to do'. He had work experience in the automotive industry but teachers still 'talked down to me'. Another would like to finish the HSC and gain a university entrance score (ATAR) that he might not use. He wanted to do something involving carpentry and would not seek for any kind of work that put him in an office.

For some students, traineeships and work experience opened doors for them. A student spoke of finishing school, then undertaking training at age 18 to be a flight attendant. She wanted to travel, but in the longer term was interested in joining some aspect of the marine industry. She has undergone work experience and now had a weekend job on a whale-watching vessel and would like to have her dive licence.

For most students staying on at school had not interrupted their plans. In several groups it was indicated that parents believed the policy to be a good idea and that it gave young people greater opportunities to develop and mature.

Looking back several of the students saw that the changes allowed them to 'get on track'. One pointed out that his mother wished that the regulation had been in place when she was at school, since she regretted leaving early. He saw that the policy allowed him to aim for 'a decent education, have decent goals, have a go'.

While there was some agreement that most students' plans were not interrupted, the question regarding changes to plans did seem to evoke a series of responses: Students spoke of dealing with unmotivated young people in their classes which have increased in size, 'half of them don't want to be there'. They believed it was

[2] The conference proceedings were not published.

difficult for teachers to 'nurture teaching and learning' and give full attention to everyone but that the effect was for the more competent students to just be 'treading water'. They saw that they were 'warehoused' in their chosen subjects.

The changes had not made an impact on student plans, but had made an impact on the learning environment. Some of the young people caught in the net were 'creating havoc and that affects other people's learning'. They saw that some teachers were finding resistant students very difficult to manage and resorted to yelling at them and this was a distraction for others. They saw that those who were staying on against their will chose classes that were perceived to take the least amount of work.

Interest and Engagement

The matter of student engagement was of considerable interest. It may be that alienated young people, who would have preferred to leave school, lose motivation. Schools would need to anticipate ways in which they might ensure students would find their classrooms stimulating and absorbing. Students were asked to consider the ways in which their schools interested and engaged them in their learning. In the main their responses related to the social milieu of the classroom and school.

Learning was seen as enjoyable when it was in a good social context, 'when the teachers get along with the kids'. Younger teachers seemed to relate better to young people and did not talk down to them. They liked the teaching and learning in the TAFE setting. 'It's more show and tell, more hands on'. For example, in woodwork or photography or construction, the teacher would be demonstrating and explaining at the same time.

The young people also emphasised active and practical 'hands-on' learning with teachers who were themselves professionally engaged. The students suggested that it was important that they could have more fun and practical activities at school and spend less time copying off the board (often an electronic whiteboard). They saw that copying was not learning, 'it's not sinking in—no-one goes back and reviews what they've written'. When they are just copying the teachers do not take the time to explain what is written 'they just say, "here copy this" and they don't explain what it means'. Some teachers just 'show up'. They re-cast the concept of being interested and involved as 'What it is that gets you going'. They saw that blending theory and practice was important. Doing practical work needed theory behind it.

The students were well able to contrast teaching and learning that worked for them and that which provided them with little motivation. They nominated the attributes of teaching that were interesting and engaging for them: making learning fun, being energetic, enjoying the work, asking questions, getting everyone involved, making students feel welcome, and conducting discussions. They were disengaged when students were required to copy material.

In the case of a school servicing a remote community, students also identified the role the teachers played outside the classroom. On the whole, students valued the ways in which their teachers were part of the community, 'we play footie with them'. They

thought it would be very different if they were in the city. They saw that teachers who were familiar with the local environment understood how the community functioned, but that some, coming from the city 'have no idea'. The students believed that some city-based teachers did not understand how the community functioned. This led to some interesting contrasts:

> We go shooting; they go to the movies.
>
> They catch up in the mall, we catch up on the river bank or at water skiing.
>
> They are on about technology, we are on about cars.

The students also heard from their teachers how different it was from their perspective to be teaching in a country town. They cited a teacher who had been working in an inner-city school where he had to contend with knives, "we just use fists" and with drugs "we just smoke in the toilets".

The report with its accompanying data from the online survey was well received by the government employing authority. Paradoxically, while the policy of changing the school leaving age was mandated across the state, it was a matter of individual districts and regions to develop practices that would pay attention to student voices. This process was not apparent to either the researchers or the students themselves.

Thus, the desired process may be seen as incomplete. Ideally, in a world worth living in, the young people who were consulted should know and understand how their insights may, or may not, have contributed to changes in those policies that continue to drive practice. It may not always be possible to operationalise some changes, but the 'warum' question, so poignantly raised at the beginning of this chapter remains—that is 'why' a policy is formulated and 'what' its impacts might be.

Listening to Student Voice and Cultural Institutions

Although developing and enacting policies and practices in school education may vary from region to region, as reported above, there are clearly over-arching regulatory frameworks. Cultural institutions, for example museums, art galleries, zoos, have formulated their own means of dealing with the engagement of young people in their evolving practices. They may be seen as distinctive from schools in that educators in these settings are interacting with a range of bodies including curators, exhibition designers, and school systems themselves. When speaking of their work they would characterise themselves as 'educators' freed from some of the constraints governing teachers in schools. Nevertheless, while distinctive, they hold regular forums where they share innovative practice. At one such meeting, Kelly et al. (2019) presented a discussion regarding consultation with young people as a form of audience research.

It was reported that some years ago the Australian Museum ran a series of consultations regarding upcoming exhibitions with a selection of young people from a variety

of schools.[3] Amongst the participating schools was a residential facility providing short-term programmes for young people living in troubling conditions in rural and remote parts of the state. Two young people reported that this was the first time in their short lives that anyone had thought them worthy of being asked—it was always the school captains and members of the Student Representative Council who had a say. It was a salutary and moving experience.

There are serious questions to be asked regarding which young people are enabled to contribute to a greater or lesser degree to discussions such as this (Robinson, 2014). The debates centre around the notion of 'participatory capital' (Wood, 2013). Participatory capital is seen to relate to class, race, gender, age, sexual identities and abilities; the variables that make it more or less unlikely that various young people are consulted and included. While it has become customary to engage with what are often token groups, believed to represent the views and experiences of a particular cohort, selection into those groups can often be mediated by the selection of candidates who possess particular desirable attributes in relation to their perceived abilities to communicate. Various communities of practice, including schools and cultural institutions have a number of 'gate-keeping' procedures that knowingly, or even unconsciously exclude the less articulate, the non-conforming, and the troubled young members of the community.

One case study reported in the paper related to the State Library of NSW programme commemorating the centenary of World War 1 (WWI). The State Library holds over 1000 diaries from 550 individual diarists as well as supporting material such as maps, photographs, drawings and artefacts documenting the Australian experience of WWI. In 2014 an exhibition, *Life Interrupted: Personal Diaries from World War I,* was developed. The Library was keen to investigate the impact of this exhibition on young people and how it could enhance the study of WWI, a mandatory component of the History syllabus.

Twenty-two Year 10 (14- to 15-year-old) students from five schools[4] participated in an evaluation of the exhibition. The group was first introduced to the State Library, the collections and resources; for all the students it was their first visit to the Library. The curator of the exhibition provided background information to the collection and her framework for the development of the exhibition. Students were then invited to explore the exhibition armed with an iPad to record their responses to the following:

The most interesting section of the exhibition is…

The most surprising thing in the exhibition is…

I felt …. when I visited the exhibition.

I would like to know more about...

[3] The group of schools was known as The Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools and included both government and non-government schools, single sex and coeducational schools, primary and secondary schools who met regularly to consider a range of educational policies and practices. A number of cultural institutions were also members of the Coalition (Kelly & Fitzgerald, 2011; Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2011).

[4] All members of the aforementioned Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools.

So, What was Learned?

Students were deeply engaged with the exhibition and this engagement was primarily on an empathetic-emotional level. It was clear that the exhibition design and content allowed students to 'connect' with the diarists and to gain some insight into their lived experience. Comments of the students included:

> It brought home to me that these people once actually lived, had families and friends. They were not just some person in a history textbook.

Students were able to see the soldiers as individuals, not merely part of a battalion, participants in a battle or a statistic. Instead, they connected with them as individuals, fathers, sons, brothers, and friends, who they were before the war, what their motivations were for joining up, how they took their passion with them, their war experience, how they were changed by the war and how they emerged from the conflict. It was clear from the responses of the students that their understanding was deepened by the connection they made to the individual soldiers.

A particularly poignant moment was noted when a small group of boys drew attention to the fact that while much material addressed the outbreak and conduct of the war, not much related to how the war ended. A boy, for whom English was a second language, recently arrived in Australia, asked, 'But do wars ever really end?' and drew attention to his homeland that continued to be entangled in the aftermath of conflict.

By consulting young people, the Library was able to understand how the design and content of the exhibition facilitated their engagement and led to an enhanced understanding of this important historic event. This in turn influenced the development of further exhibitions and learning experiences around the centenary of WWI.

Listening to Student Voice Can Change the Question Being Asked

Details of the final study cited here have already been well documented (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2019). This study most approximates Level 8 on Hart's (1992) ladder, child-initiated, shared decisions with adults. This iteration concentrates upon the ways in which the engagement of students in systematic inquiry can substantially alter school-based research questions. The school, Soriah College,[5] an independent girls school, caters for students Kindergarten to Year 12. In recent years it has made a decision to pay particular attention to pedagogical practices in the middle years, i.e. 12- to 13-year-olds. Consequently, it arranged for those teachers concerned with this cohort to reimagine their approach to the assessment

[5] Name changed.

of learning. The focus was related to the matter of 'authentic and reflective assessment of learning with high expectations', in particular an exploration of formative assessment in the middle years of schooling at Soriah College and aimed to address the following two questions:

1. How can teachers, through participatory action research collect information that contributes to a better understanding of assessment for learning and assessment in learning?
2. How can the processes be sustained by busy teachers and their students so that their joint work becomes increasingly positive and enjoyable?

Following consultation with the school's academic partner (the author of this chapter), it was decided that understanding the nature of (in)formative assessment would be greatly enhanced by engaging students as active participants and researchers in the project.

As a result, a steering committee composed of twelve students and three teaching staff was formed. The student body was invited to submit expressions of interest for inclusion in the steering committee, with an understanding that they would be sacrificing time to the project from May to December. In sifting through the expressions, staff were enjoined to consider some 'outliers', students who were known to be non-conformists. Several early meetings with the steering committee and mentor teachers were devoted to participatory research methods outlined in a resource booklet devised specifically for the purpose of informing practitioner research in schools (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2003). The steering committee underwent a number of research training sessions and was familiarised with a range of data gathering methods (both qualitative and quantitative), and also the necessary ethical conditions that would be required when they were working with their peers, in particular in relation to matters of informed consent and confidentiality.

An important development was the re-casting of the project's key questions to:

How do I know myself and what contributes to my learning?

How do I know I am learning?

How do you know I am learning?

What do we need to do next?

In this way the investigation shifted from that which teachers do when assessing learning to that which students experience as they learn, what may be argued as 'under-represented knowledge' (Beattie, 2012; Rubin et al., 2017). While the 47-page report documented, in detail, the ways in which these questions were addressed the point here is to see the project as one that struggled with the essential balance to contribute to teacher professional learning (the original intention) and to convey the students' own witnessing to their learning. Thus, there was an intertwining of teacher learning and student voice through YPAR that created a new and exciting 'third space' as a safe context in which learning and assessment could be studied (Caraballo & Lyiscott, 2018).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for a form of 'educative practice' in which teachers and learners unite in the development of participative inquiry with an emphasis upon social justice and inclusion. It has used three examples to distinguish between using student voices to learn *about* educational phenomena, and learning *from* them as a means to inform and reform practice, as a practice changing practice (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2019). It has claimed that this can be achieved through authentic mutual learning relationships that have attended to those 'inconvenient voices' (Fletcher, 2013) that deserve a place in a world worth living in.

The three examples discussed in the chapter clearly represent varying levels of the participation of young people in a range of educational settings and the contributions that they were able to make to practice. There was also a difference in scale: the first example involved well over one hundred young people; the school example only twelve. Common to all was the effort to create a supportive, psychologically safe environment characterised by trust and a genuine curiosity about what students have to say. In each case, the selection of students was based upon a belief that less conforming students should be included, thus subverting the tradition of 'who is permitted to create knowledge in our society' and 'whose voices possess legitimacy?' (Mirra et al., 2015, p. 4).

While the first two studies were designed to elicit student responses to the circumstances in which they found themselves, the final study, representing Hart's (1992) Level 8—child-initiated, shared decisions with adults—could be seen as a more transformative kind. An intensive training programme provided the student steering committee with the tools necessary to conduct their enquiries and to consider the associated ethical implications. Participation required a significant sacrifice of time on both the students' and mentoring teachers' parts; thus there were significant opportunity costs. The adult support was such that students were assisted in the framing of their questions, but teachers refrained from imposing their own constructions. At first this proved difficult for students who were accustomed to turning to their teachers for approval and endorsement. The process of constructing the guiding questions proved to be transformative for all parties.

Pearce and Wood (2019) argue that such work as has been reported here can be seen as dialogic, intergenerational, collective and inclusive, and at times transgressive. Each of these attributes can be seen to form an integrated foundation, which, when taken together, articulates a transformative stance on a full and satisfying engagement with students in the many learning environments in which they find themselves.

The chapter has raised questions in relation to what it is for young people to 'witness' the ways in which educative practice takes place. Busher (2012) has made the case for young people to be 'expert witnesses' with respect to teaching and learning in schools. Of course, in such a context, students cannot always be *au fait* with what it is that teachers do and think; much of it is invisible. Similarly, teachers cannot fully inhabit the lives of their students. But with good will on both sides, it

is possible to have better insight into how good educational practice takes place, not only in schools but in the wider community.

Further, it must be acknowledged that these various forms of what we might call participative democracy can be seen to interrupt the norms of pedagogical relationships so embedded in educational arrangements. The cases cited here were all facilitated by partnerships between various bodies be they systems, cultural sites or individual schools and academic associates. One may speculate about the possibility of conducting participative work of this kind with young people as a practice independent of such facilitation—that working in such ways with students be seen as 'bottom-up' as a kind of 'citizen voice'. But this is difficult to accomplish in the face of entrenched power relations. It may be that a way forward will come about through the flourishing and democratisation of social media, as a form of leaderless and horizontal collective action as espoused by Dumitrica (2020), forming a bridge between students and those who teach and guide them.

Returning to our opening quote regarding 'warum'; if the question of 'why' is one that is put to all who participate in the practice of education then a significant part of the answer must lie in the capacities of all to speak openly and freely, within environments that are safe (Könings et al., 2020) and accessible. As educators we must not choose a 'widening gyre' where we can no longer hear each other and 'things fall apart'.[6] Instead we must go optimistically forward into a world worth living in.

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