

2019

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### Recommended Citation

Charteris, J., & Smardon, D. (2019). Democratic contribution or information for reform? Prevailing and emerging discourses of student voice. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(6).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v44n6.1>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.

<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol44/iss6/1>

## Democratic Contribution or Information for Reform? Prevailing and Emerging Discourses of Student Voice

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*Abstract: While a range of typologies frame and critique the scope, purpose and power relations of different student voice approaches, it is timely to look at the direction that student voice literature has taken in recent years and map dominant discourses in the field. In the article the following questions are addressed: (a) What are the dominant discourses in student voice literature? (b) What are the ways forward, to ensure there is both systemic quality assurance and democratic (if not radical) student participation? The discourses named and interrogated in this article include: governmentality; accountability; institutional transformation and reform; learner agency; personalising learning; radical collegiality; socially critical voice; decolonising voice; and refusal. Consideration is given to the ongoing impetus to position students as consumers and resources for quality control. It is an ongoing concern that student voice projects can miss opportunities for reconfiguring the status of students within democratic schooling partnerships. There is an important role for ongoing and initial teacher education that addresses a politics of voice associated with systemic quality assurance, decolonisation and democracy.*

### Introduction

The title of this paper is a debate that has been well propagated in student voice literature (Pearce & Woods, 2019). It is acknowledged that an engagement with student contributions around what is good or problematic in schooling is still not commonplace, even after over 30 decades of research in the field (Cook-Sather & Curl, 2016). Historically there has been a pervasive conception that young people, as immature adults, are unable to articulate and advocate for their own interests and, as a result, have been excluded from schooling “debate, design and decision-making” (Nelson, 2015, p. 286). Taking the position that student voice is an ongoing and evolving concern for ongoing and initial teacher education, we view that a review of discourses in student voice literature is warranted.

Over the last few decades there has been increased recognition that teachers can improve current educational practices by acknowledging student perspectives (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004, Nelson, 2014). Yet problematically, the models of voicework that focus on the improvement of provision of services to children can still imply that young people are deficient and adults are best placed to make decisions on their behalf (Mannion, 2007). There has been growing critique of voicework that fails to enhance the status and positioning of students in schooling power relations (Mayes et al., 2017, Nelson, 2017), practices that locate students as data sources (Fielding, 2012) and quality control for teaching practices (Herriot, 2013; Lodge 2005). As teacher educators, who have worked with teachers in a coaching role

to assist them to interpret student voice data gathered in their classrooms (Charteris & Smardon, 2015), we have seen these significant shifts in the field first hand over the last two decades and in turn have altered our perceptions around the ethics of voicework.

The ‘voices’ of children and young people are widely acknowledged to be an important component with which to examine the interrelationship between teaching and learning, and the relevance of curriculum (Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills, 2016). Student voice is touted as a vehicle in assessment for learning that, as a feedback process, can assist student and teacher reflection and learning (Thomson & Gunter, 2006). Yet, from a critical sociological perspective, voicework is replete with the promise of both disrupting silenced perspectives of marginalised groups and exposing unequal power relations in schooling practices and policies (Baroutsis et al., 2016; Gonzalez, Hernandez-Saca & Artiles, 2017).

In this article we map prominent discourses from student voice literature, defining discourses as frameworks of meaning that cohere and reflect the social world, while also serving to construct it (Allred & Burman, 2005). Influential discourses, like those identified in the latter part of this paper, can influence the daily lives of students, the work of teachers and the nature of opportunities within schooling settings. Consideration is given to emerging and ongoing influences in the student voice field that address issues of systemic quality assurance, issues of decolonisation and democratic student partnerships.

## **Student Voice and Power**

Student voice research typically strives to transform traditional power hierarchies and afford K–12 students more influence over school functions. The field of student voice emerged from the recognition that “educational institutions are saturated with inequitable power structures, processes, practices and relations” and voicework has the potential to “challenge, unsettle, and/ or potentially reinforce or bolster particular power relations” (Mayes et al., 2017, pp. 2, 36). There have been initiatives to encourage agency in schooling settings in the form of student councils (Baroutsis et al., 2016) and projects where students are positioned as researchers (Thomson & Gunter, 2006). The range of approaches to student voice aligns with various conceptions of schooling politics and the corresponding roles afforded students.

Students can exercise their decision-making in regard to policy development, the school environment and facilities, pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment (Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Student voice can be seen as a vehicle for schooling improvement, targeted to enhance student outcomes and provide a catalyst for school change (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). It may include consideration of culturally safe inquiry practices (e.g. a yarning circle as a way to engage indigenous students in their schooling) (Donovan, 2016; Hornberger & Dueñas, 2017).

Students can be positioned as ‘expert witnesses’ to schooling practices (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). In this instance, voice is a contribution from learners that can enable teachers to analyse their practice and plan for further student (and teacher) learning (Rudduck, 2006). Hargreaves (2004) observes that young people are able to take “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 pupils say about their experience of learning and of school life” (Hargreaves, 2004, p.7). It is widely acknowledged that it is the right of young people to have their views heard on matters that they consider are important. In particular, methods of engaging students “as important ‘influencers’ of policy and decision-making in schools need to be considered” (Leach & Crisp, 2016, p. 55). However, engagement with student voice in

schools is heavily charged with an adult schooling improvement agenda and linked with a neoliberal focus on accountability (Riddle, 2017).

While gathering student voice has been heralded as a process through which students can be repositioned in ways that enhance engagement with teachers and schools (Fleming, 2015), it has been strongly critiqued as an instrumentalist technology and a device associated with increased compliance and productivity (Bragg, 2007). It can reify existing technologies of power and reinforce the status quo to support tokenism and capitalistic relations (Groundwater-Smith, 2011). Schooling spaces are dominated by power relations that are circumscribed by adult structures associated with classroom rules and curriculum requirements. Therefore “[w]hat is sayable, and crucially, what is heard, are circumscribed by teachers and hence ‘[student] voice’ becomes a means by which [students] may be effectively silenced within schools” (Watson, 2014, p. 26).

### **‘Dialogue’ and ‘Voice’**

Dialogue has been fundamental to student voicework in schools that value and build on students’ perspectives (Rudduck, 2006; Fielding 2012; Lodge 2005). It is often located in a binary that valorises it as a student voice approach as Taylor and Robinson (2009) point out. “The hierarchical, one-way, teacher-centred, anti-dialogical approach of traditional education is contrasted with the mutuality, co-operation, trust and ‘acceptance of interchangeability’ of teacher and student roles made possible by the dialogical approach” (p. 168). The theoretical inheritance and contribution of the dialogic approach to enhancing the status of students in schooling relationships has been well critiqued.

While a dialogic approach can seem inclusive in that there is some engagement with students’ perspectives, its capacity in itself to dismantle power structures that locate students passively in schooling hierarchies is in question. Like the problematic notion of empowerment, where power is seen simplistically as something possessed by someone to hand over to redress an imbalance, the concept of dialogue incorporates difference into existing power relations, while leaving the original relations untouched (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Power relations can work subtly in schools with student voice “reproducing, rather than unsettling or transforming, the hegemonic-normative... practices it sought to contest” (Taylor & Robinson, 2009, p. 169). Historically it has been predicated on sustaining power relations that privilege adults’ rather than students’ voices (Leach & Crisp, 2016). At their most conservative, student voice initiatives tend to be “symbolic” and have little impact on the transformation of schooling practices (Keddie, 2015, p. 227).

Voice is often used a lever, where young people report on their experience of schooling with a view to leverage schooling transformation and reform (Lodge, 2005). While this positioning exists, there has also been traction gained in the research field to consider what matters to children, rather than simply consulting them on what things (e.g. policies, pedagogies) mean (Rautio & Jokinen, 2016). Hearteningly, Blackmore et al (2013) have noted key shifts in the student voice field beyond simplistic conceptions of essentialist reporting practices. “Creative approaches that position children or young people as experts or gatekeepers of particular bodies of knowledge contribute to methodological integrity through collaborative generation and collection of data” (Blackmore et al., 2013, p. 11).

Although Blackmore and colleagues (2013) observe that the research community has shifted in its attitudes, voicework in the literature and schooling contexts retain an emphasis on representational approaches (Bills & Giles, 2016). A range of representational methods have been advocated for children to produce data through practical activities. These include child-led tours, role play exercises, child-led photography, collage, model-making, story-

telling, print journalism and electronic publishing, radio production, drama, puppetry, music, dance, worksheets, diaries, story-writing and spider diagrams (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008).

In her critique of participatory research with children, Rautio (2013) argues against methods like those above that are based on the premise that children's voices need to be elicited and supported through child friendly methods and means. She proposes that children do not necessarily need "support in encountering the world" where they are provided with special equipment (e.g. cameras, pens and paper, puppets etc.) and "allocate[d] special spaces and time for participation" (Rautio, 2013, p. 396). She argues that children may "need an adult to take the things and actions" that that inform their encounters in their worlds seriously, for instance "things called toys... or stones" (p. 396).

It is worthwhile therefore to continue to discuss the debates and illustrate shifts in the field. We now map out dominant discourses that we have discerned from literature in the field. These discourses are identified as: governmentality, accountability, institutional transformation and reform, learner agency, personalising learning, radical collegiality, socially critical voice, decolonising voice, and refusal.

### **Discourses of Student Voice**

A discourse is "a set of consumptive, productive, distributive, and reproductive processes that exist in relation to the social world" (Rogers, 2011, p. 6). Recognising the workings of various student voice discourses assists us to better understand the associated politics of schooling power relations. A literature review approach, as described by Hogg (2011), is used here in an attempt to examine salient and emerging discourses of student voice. Like Hogg, we used an "organic review process" by commencing with particular objectives and guiding questions, yet remained open to issues that become apparent through our reading (p. 668). For the purposes of the literature review, the initial search was implemented on May 17, 2016, in the EBSCOhost database through the University of New England library. Peer reviewed journal articles were searched using the terms 'student voice', 'teacher' and 'education'

There is a growing amount of literature on voice in research work and in the tertiary sector. We determined to limit the review to student voice in the K-12 schooling sector and found that 1,267 came up in the database. The articles were initially skimmed for their references to student voice. Many of them alluded to student voice, yet did not explicitly discuss the philosophical and ethical implications of its use. The search was further refined to 83 articles. The articles were then each analysed and mapped for their contribution to the topic (Machi & McEvoy, 2016) and categorised into a table according to the discourses they covered. This was a process of organising the data into relevant discourse categories rather than reducing it (Urquhart, 2012). This grid template was used to collect data from the texts, including how student voice was defined and any salient critiques. There is a growing amount of literature on voice in research work and in the tertiary sector, yet these texts were excluded as they either did not meet our selection criteria, or related to aspects of voice research beyond the scope of this review.

A brief account is provided below (Table 1.) for each of nine discourses and their associated nuances in relation to student voicework. In providing synopses of discourses that are apparent in the field, we do not simply mobilise arguments for the 'good' or 'bad' use of these student voice discourses. The discourses, our interpretations of purposes and positions, along with the authors who have written about them are outlined. Table 1. provides an overview of the influences and directions in the field of student voicework in schools.

<b>Discourse</b>	<b>Purpose of Voice</b>	<b>Positioning of students</b> <i>Student as...</i>	<b>Positioning of teachers</b> <i>Teacher as...</i>	<b>Prominent authors</b>
Discourse of governmentality	To ensure teacher development and assessment effectiveness	consumer-passive informant	provider-recipient of evaluation that shapes teaching practice	Anderson (2015) Fleming (2015) Gallacher & Gallagher, (2008) MacBeath, Myers and Demetriou (2001) Nelson (2014; 2015)
Discourse of accountability- (teacher and student)	Assessor of teaching effectiveness	quality assurer, rating the quality of provision	provider to be held accountable through voice	Keddie (2015) Bourke (2016) Whitty & Wisby (2007)
Discourse of institutional transformation and reform	Reporters on teaching practices as effective levers to student learning.	evaluator and consumer, providing feedback on quality of provision and schooling systems	provider, monitored by school leadership and external evaluators through voice	Bills & Giles (2016) Bragg (2007) Bourke (2016) Fielding (2001) Rudduck & Flutter (2004) Lodge (2005) Whitty & Wisby (2007)
Learner agency	For learners to take an active role in schooling relationships and activities	authoritative decision-maker or resistor	support to enable students to make pedagogical and governance decisions.	Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills (2016) Bourke & Loveridge (2014) Charteris & Trafford (2010) Rodríguez & Brown (2009).
Personalising learning	Feedback from students is used to tailor, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment to meet their needs.	expert in their own learning, undertaking bespoke curriculum and assessment.	curriculum agent, gathering voice to tailor programs.	Bourke (2016) Ferguson, Hanreddy, & Draxton (2011) Thomson & Gunter (2006) Whitty & Wisby (2007)
Discourse of radical collegiality	Democratic classroom /schooling practices. Influence on policy and higher level decision making.	partner in policy, governance, and curriculum decision making.	collaborator, honouring the power of students as active agents in schools.	Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills (2016) Cook-Sather (2007) Fielding (2001) Gallacher & Gallagher (2008) Mayes & Groundwater-Smith (2013). Nelson (2015) Rudduck (2006)
Socially critical voice	Analyses of power and emancipation	articulate and emancipated decision makers – with capacity to	reflexive practitioners who can analyse the distribution of	Gonzalez, Hernandez-Saca, & Artiles (2017) Mockler & Groundwater-Smith (2015) Mayes at al (2017) McLaren (2007)

		speaking back to power	power in their teaching contexts.	
Decolonising voice	To contribute to a decolonising project where race privilege is critiqued and unravelled	articulate story-tellers who can challenge hegemony of race privilege and practices of erasure.	reflexive practitioners open to activism to challenge racist hegemony	Bishop (2012) Berryman & Eley (2017) Delany-Barmann (2010) Donovan (2016) Madden & McGregor (2013)
Discourse of refusal  (An equity based discourse)	To trouble structures of neoliberal accountability and responsabilisation through setting up new spaces of refusal and reflexivity.	brokers of power through recognising voice and silence in adult /student relationships	brokers of power through enacting voice and silence in student /adult relationships	Mayes (2016) Nelson (2017) Pearce & Woods (2019) Rautio & Jokinen (2016). Riddle (2017)

**Table 1. Overview of Historic and Emerging Discourses of Student Voice**

The authors listed in the table above do not all necessarily support the discourses they write about, however they do discuss them in depth in relation to the politics of student voice. These discourses are defined further in the subsequent section.

Student voice is an important and well-theorised area in education research yet, there is a need for ongoing theoretical work that substantively engages with how students are positioned within schooling power structures. The discourses below have been sourced from voice literature and reflect relations of power. They are not discreet and unitary in these descriptions, rather they overlap each other and are porous. For instance, governmentality, accountability and institutional transformation and reform are all interconnected, overlapping elements that are inherent to the neoliberal tide propelling Education policy and practice. However here each discourse is discussed separately as they respectively serve to position students and teachers in particular ways within particular power relations.

### **Discourse of Governmentality**

There has been an emergence of a critical educational discourse that draws from using Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ to theorise and critically analyse student voice projects (Anderson, 2015). Governmentality discourse provides a mode of problematising power dynamics in classroom relationships and particularly student participation (Nelson, 2017). The term ‘Government’ pertains to “the indirect and heterogeneous programs, strategies and techniques that have sought to regulate the conduct of conduct, including the relation of the self to the self... [P]ower works by producing practices for acting on the self by the self, stressing the dimension of self-subjectification (the ethical practices) in any process of government” (Bragg, 2007, p. 345). In student voicework, self work is done by students who learn, and teachers who may receive solicited and unsolicited feedback on their teaching practice. (It can be unsolicited when student voice is collated and distributed by school leaders in a process undertaken for schooling improvement, thus serving to regulate the practice of teachers).

Building on Bragg's work, Nelson (2017) argues that student voicework in schools develops self-technologies, thus governing by co-opting "students as knowledge workers into regulating and policing pedagogy, teachers and themselves as learners" (p. 183). Linked with governmentality but conceptualised here as a discourse in its own right, accountability and its associated audit culture has a profound influence on the field of student voice.

### **Discourse of Accountability**

Student voice initiatives have been taken up in ways that serve the performative demands of schooling audit cultures (Keddie, 2015; Gunter & Thomson, 2007). Schools and teachers are accountable to a wide range of external judgments and comparisons. It is therefore unsurprising that there is a focus on powerful modes of regulation, incentive and sanction that define and encapsulate the productivity and value of teachers and schools" (Keddie, 2015, p. 225). A discourse of teacher accountability positions student voice as a process that serves the audit culture and validates school effectiveness. Keddie (2015) describes this discourse as "highly problematic" in that it undermines teacher professionalism and is "yet another means of disciplining teachers in a broader climate of hyperaccountability" (p. 229).

Children are 'responsibilised' when they are positioned as consumers of education, with their teachers and leaders held accountable for classroom practice. It is no wonder that much student voicework is conducted with individuals or groups specifically chosen by their teachers in order to fit a particular ideal of a 'good student' (Keddie, 2015). Yet student voice is also used in 'quality assurance' processes that are conducted by reviewers external to schools. For instance, in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, the School Evaluation indicators make specific reference to student voice.

*Student voice is a crucial source of information about the quality and effectiveness of the learning opportunities provided by the school or an individual teacher. Students' insights and perspectives are an important tool for supporting evaluative thinking and determining priorities for action. (New Zealand Government, 2016, p. 16).*

Furthermore, the authors have experienced focus groups of students being canvassed by school reviewers for their perceptions on teaching and learning in their schooling contexts. Accountability is a powerful panoptic discourse. For students - accountable for learning, teachers - accountable for the quality of teaching, and schools – accountable for the quality of programs offered in the schools as determined by student outcomes – often published in the media with the voices of students captured and evaluated. Thus, voice becomes aligned with institutional transformation and reform.

### **Discourse of Institutional Transformation and Reform**

A powerful antecedent for change in practitioner and organisational practice, student voice has been a cornerstone of schooling reform over the last two decades (Macbeath, 2006; Leach & Crisp, 2016). Students are asked about their experiences of teaching (Whitty & Wisby, 2007) and school leadership (Damiani, 2016). Working with teachers and administrators, student can "co-create the path of reform" and, in the process, meet their own developmental needs and strengthen "student ownership of the educational reform process" (Mitra, 2008a, p. 7). However, when located as data sources serving adult purposes of compliance and improvement (Fielding, 2001), their voices are aligned with more "pragmatic



goals of school effectiveness” (Bragg, 2007, p. 349). As Riddle (2017) points out, in the “complex arrangement of policies, politics, philosophies, pedagogies, practices and people that form the pedagogic encounters of the classroom... student voice has taken hold as a cornerstone of education reform and school improvement” (p. 2).

It has been noted that senior policy makers use student voice as a means of achieving school improvement and increased attainment, rather than prioritising the citizenship and rights of young people (Thomson & Gunter, 2006). With the pressure to improve results in standardised assessments, students are given passive and receptive positions “relative to teachers and assessment tools, which become the primary legitimators of knowledge and understanding” (Pearce & Wood, 2019, p. 115).

### **Personalised Learning**

Personalised learning came into vogue in the early 2000s, not as child-centred approach to learning, rather as a diagnostic approach where teachers gather information about learners in order to target teaching, to enhance student learning. This is where teachers know “the strengths and weaknesses of individual students” with “assessment for learning and the use of data and dialogue to diagnose every student’s learning needs” used as a primary vehicle for personalisation (Milliband, 2006, p. 24). Curriculum choice is also offered that has “clear pathways” through the system. Linked with governmentality, with the shaping of students through pathways, this “choice and voice” (Milliband, 2006, p. 26) closely targets systemic goals.

This gift of voice is apparent in the term ‘giving’. Ferguson, Hanreddy and Draxton (2011) clearly articulate a ‘personalised learning’ discourse. “Giving students a ‘voice’ for active participation in decision-making about their learning environment has great potential for increased engagement and motivation for learning” (p. 55). The notion of the teacher giving students voice has been critiqued as a low level act of ventriloquism, where students enact the will of teachers (Bragg & Manchester, 2012; Mayes, 2016; Nelson, 2014). ‘Giving’ students a ‘voice’ for active participation in classroom decision-making appears inclusive on the surface. However, as Bourke (2016) notes, “pre-determined criteria have the potential to stifle learners, orientate them towards a pre-determined end, and subsequently influence how they conceptualise their learning” (p. 108). Therefore ‘choice and voice’ here are provided within a very narrow frame of reference.

### **Learner Agency**

Techniques of self-government associated with student voice may not lead to the prioritising of individual autonomy or agency. Learner agency “involves both compliance with and resistance to classroom norms and therefore is far more sophisticated than acting in acquiescence to expectations” (Charteris & Sardon, 2018, p. 51). Learner agency in student voice initiatives is theorised by Nelson (2017) as deployed “strategically and influentially”, depending “on the perceived rules and norms” that operate within a particular schooling space (p. 184). Rather than silent witnesses, young people are positioned as active agents with something to say about their schooling and what could make learning more exciting and relevant to their lives (Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills, 2016).

Charteris and Trafford (2010) described a schooling context where learners could be agentic, determining where they are at in their own learning as “active participants in a tripartite relationship with their teacher and parents/ whānau” (family) (p. 38). These students

were able to lead student led conferences after “selecting, interpreting, analysing, evaluating, reflecting, discussing and using quality information to enhance their learning” (p. 41).

Agency, in this instance, aligns with the teacher’s goals and is not indicative of agency as resistance to schooling practices.

Bourke and Loveridge (2014) observe that there can be an “uneasy tension” between voicework that influences system-wide educational achievement” and the “laudable desire to promote greater learner agency and autonomy within educational settings” (p. 126).

Furthermore, in their critique Rodríguez and Brown (2009) note that student voice research customarily aims to transform traditional power hierarchies, however they found “few analyses of how institutional biases like racism, classism, and language bias shape students’ experiences and the distribution of power within schools” (p. 22). Agency to affect change is therefore an ongoing issue in student voicework.

### **Discourse of Radical Collegiality**

Student voice has been linked with notions of youth participation, active learning, active citizenship, youth leadership, and youth empowerment (Mitra, 2008b). When there is radical collegiality (Fielding, 1999) the experiences of students are re-presented through their own voices in order to trouble the status quo (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). Radical collegiality involves mutual learning between adults and students in ways that transform the boundaries of traditional roles (Fielding, 2001). An example of latter work in this vein involves teacher education programs where capacity is developed among newly graduated teachers in schools to learn with students in order improve practice (Cook-Sather & Curl, 2016). Students are positioned as co-researchers and joint constructors of knowledge in active student–teacher partnerships (Thomson, & Gunter, 2006) where pedagogical research is a “collaborative teacher–student venture” (Leach & Crisp, 2016, p. 61).

Importance is placed on collaboration and dialogic partnerships (Nelson, 2015). There is impetus to act and interact differently in research relationships particularly when the power relations that influence students to “tell teachers what they want to hear” (Leach & Crisp, 2016, p. 59) are destabilised. Positioning students efficaciously in relationships of radical collegiality can be problematic when “ideal student subject position[s]” are evoked. This positioning ignores “students’ interests and abilities [and privileges] particular gendered, raced, and classed identities” (Mayes, Mitra & Serriere, 2016, p. 634).

### **Discourse of Socially Critical Voice**

A socially critical position rejects the positioning of voicework as a mode of reproducing class privilege and the “dominance of the managerial middle class” (Pearce & Wood, 2019, p. 115). McLaren (2007) illustrates this position in describing how voice is produced within historically constituted power relations. He writes, “[a] student’s voice is not a reflection of the world as much as it is a constitutive force that both mediates and shapes reality within historically constructed practices and relationships shaped by the rule of capital” (p. 180). Socially critical voicework rejects power structures that normalise education processes associated with standardization. For example, Pearce and Wood (2019) provocatively argue that the push for standardisation by “conservative modernisers” for “rigorous control and assessment... is tantamount to intellectual fraud” (Pearce & Wood, 2019, p. 127).

The corpus of voice literature linked with the socially critical position, addresses the silencing of marginalised voices. Baroutsis et al (2016) observe that “[o]pportunities for students to speak and to be heard are important elements of democratic schooling processes but research into student voice has shown that a culture of silence is a more common feature of schooling (p. 438). Linked with socially critical voice, but warranting recognition as a discourse on its own terms, is decolonising voicework.

### **Decolonising Voice**

Decolonising voice speaks back to practices of institutionalised racism and normative conditions that marginalise or silence indigenous students. It also targets the cultural appropriateness of curriculum and pedagogy in order to address the achievement of indigenous students. It speaks to the complexity of creating and changing schooling conditions so that indigenous students can flourish. It also recognises that success in achieving qualifications can enhance the life chances of indigenous students and therefore credentialing to be eligible to access societal resources is of importance. Decolonising voicework has been undertaken around the world (e.g. Canada (Madden & McGregor, 2013), Australia (Donovan, 2016), Bolivia (Delany-Barmann, 2010)). As writers from Aotearoa/New Zealand who have worked as teacher educators with teachers and school leaders on decolonising projects, we draw from the decolonising voicework undertaken by indigenous researchers in that context.

There has been sustained work to address colonising practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand schools (See Te Kotahitanga project (Bishop, 2012) and evaluating the New Zealand government’s Māori education strategy, *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success* (Ministry of Education, 2008)). The Te Kotahitanga initiative, a widely implemented teacher professional development program, sought to include the perspective of rangatahi Māori (youth), so they could speak back to their institutional circumstances (Bishop, 2012). “The students interviewed were quite clear -Let us speak, listen to our ways of knowing, let us bring ourselves to the learning conversation” (Bishop, 2012, p. 44, italics in original).

*Ka Hikitia* is a framework to assist educators in improving educational outcomes with and for Māori, in order to address under-performance in Education. Students were asked in Berryman and Eley’s (2017) research to comment on their schooling experiences to evaluate the effectiveness of *Ka Hikitia* policy measures that aimed to impact on student perceptions of being Māori in schools. The consultation was culturally appropriate with students attending a hui (meeting) at a marae (meeting ground). The students knew the interview questions ahead of time and could consult with peers and whānau (family) if they wished. Voice in these two examples was collected as means to speak back to power, to enable teachers to see how “power works in relation to culture in classrooms” (Bishop, 2012, p. 44), and at policy level to illustrate students’ experiences of negative stereotyping in order to make a case for the urgency of decolonising practices in the Aotearoa/New Zealand Education system (Berryman & Eley, 2017). The stories of indigenous students, particularly when they speak back to hegemonic classroom practices and are embedded in a respectful process of reform, have influence. Voice here is not quantified or decontextualised, rather it is located and political.

### Discourse of Refusal

Talking up a post-qualitative approach to voice research in education (see Lather and St. Pierre, 2013), Riddle (2017, p. 2) “seeks to establish a refusal space against the neoliberal and neoconservative forces acting upon education policy, practice and research”. A discourse of refusal recognises that knowledge is located, contested, and politicised. Riddle (2017) observes that schooling practices can silence, discard or erase certain voices. Educators can trouble the voices and accountabilities in neoliberal politics, yet as Riddle points out, this requires “setting up new spaces of refusal” (p. 3). Power is a recurrent theme among voicework theorists (Mayes et al., 2017). Taylor and Robinson (2009) problematise the notion that “power is a possession” that can be “wielded ‘over’ others in more, rather than less, conscious ways” (p. 166). This view of empowerment uncritically negates the “entrenched, hierarchical power relations in schools and reinscribes “hegemonic power relations” reducing student voice “to tokenistic intervention” (p. 166). In their consideration of what power “makes visible and what it masks” (Mayes et al., 2017, p. 3), extend the literature on radical collegiality through inviting their readers to respond to the following provocations:

- How do you understand the role of ‘student voice’ in power relations in schools? Does student voice challenge, unsettle, and/ or potentially reinforce or bolster particular power relations?
- Who is included and who is excluded when we have discussions about power relations and theories of power in schools? (Mayes et al., 2017, p. 35)

A discourse of refusal that engages with voice to ‘unsettle’ and challenge particular power relations is illustrated in researcher Emily Nelson’s (2017) account below. This reflexive research experience illustrates how silence was acknowledged and valued as important during a voice encounter.

*I returned to Flippinschnip [self-selected pseudonym] to take one final opportunity to elicit his understanding of power in the student/teacher relationship ... Flippinschnip responded to my question with a long pause followed up by a weary request to re-state the question. Although I do not claim or entertain a definitive explanation of this pause, I know how it felt to receive the pause; the pause felt like a ‘loaded silence’ (Boler 1997). This silence functioned as a ‘refusal’ card available to Flippinschnip to deploy, as a student participant, to signal to me that I had asked him to clarify his view too many times and that he would not be answering. The pause was a tactic that required no words. I felt disciplined... The pause influenced my behaviour; I moved on and did not return to Flippinschnip. (Nelson, 2017, p. 90)*

Inherent in Nelson’s (2017) refusal is an acknowledgement of the positioning of the researcher/practitioner. Consideration is given, as illustrated above, to the nuances of power in voicework. As Mayes et al (2016) point out, careful attention needs to be given to student “resistances, doubts, and skepticism” (p. 634).

Recently theorists have advocated that voicework should be decentred from its humanist origins. Mazzei (2013, p. 734) writes that voice “cannot be thought as emanating ‘from’ an individual person. There is no separate, individual person, no participant in an interview study to which a single voice can be linked – all are entangled.” For Mayes (2016), a discourse of refusal is enacted by “shifting [the] gaze from trying to capture the ‘voice’ of the child in isolation, to examine “the assemblages of the research encounter” and produce “other forms of knowledge” (Mayes, 2016, p. 118). Like Mayes, Pearce and Wood (2019) critique voicework that lacks “the will, ambition or impetus to achieve transformation”,

advocating for a 'transgressive' approach that provides "students with the tools or medium to resist, escape or transform systems that promote inequality" (p. 11)

As highlighted above, consulting children or taking a position of 'learning with' them in a partnership of radical collegiality is interested in determining what things 'mean' to them. Recent moves in the voicework field, reject developmental approaches to childhood, instead prioritising what matters or does not matter to children without ascribing interpretivist meaning to voice (Rautio, 2013; Rautio & Jokinen, 2016).

### **Voice Literature -Its Nuances and Relevance to Teacher Education.**

The objective of this article has been to undertake a critical examination of student voice literature to date as a means of elaborating on dominant historical and emerging discourses. We have provided synopses of discourses framing the field, where the power imbalances associated with responsibility and authority held by adults have been extensively theorised and critiqued (Mayes et al., 2017). It appears that in many contexts, students continue to be some of the "most informed, yet marginalised witnesses of schooling" (Smyth, 2006, p. 279). It has been well acknowledged that essentialised voice is problematic in schooling contexts (Mayes et al., 2017; Nelson, 2014) and students negotiate 'good student' subject positions through masking or silencing other subject positions (Worthman & Troiano, 2016). Students undertake "constitutive work on the self" to attain [good student] reputations and take on board the 'responsibilisation' associated with neoliberal performativity (Keddie, 2016, p. 17).

As a range of authors have acknowledged, student voice holds significant promise for schooling partnerships, particularly when there is inclusion, genuine democratic motives, and a recognition of the machinations of power (Mayes, et al., 2017; Taylor & Robinson, 2009). However, as Pearce & Wood (2019) highlight, teachers and schools are challenged to take up transformative voicework "as they themselves are subject to increasing coercive forces that require regular displays of 'quality' ... creating an anxiety that leads to conformity and excludes educational goals that aren't directly performative" (p. 121).

The powerful impetus inherent in discourses that position students as consumers, data sources and resources for quality control can miss the emancipatory potential of voice. We highlight shifts in the field with voicework critiqued for producing universalising narratives that collapse race, class and gender into a single unified voice (Cook-Sather, 2007), and locate students as "a form of capital" to be exploited (Bragg & Manchester, 2012, p. 153). Unified voice that is deployed to leverage shifts in teacher practice may have no obvious benefits to the students involved and can be seen as technicist and rather exploitative (Lodge, 2005). When voices are synthesised into one voice that represent a student body, nuances are lost and only those who are most audible and privileged are most apparent.

An area for further research could be the degree to which teachers engage with student perspectives in light of various approaches to student voice and participation. What different approaches are there to teacher and student dialogic partnerships between school and national contexts? How can student collegiality be seen as a pathway to co-construct pedagogical growth, for both teachers and students, rather than a mechanism for the surveillance and monitoring of teaching staff?

In one of the most seminal pieces of work conducted in this oeuvre, Fielding (2001) raised the question whether we are "carving a new order of experience" or "presiding over the further entrenchment of existing assumptions and intentions using student voice as an additional mechanism of control?" (p. 100). Bringing this binary together, we answer 'yes'. There is still much activist work to be done in this area to challenge schooling hegemony that

universalises experience for neoliberal concerns. Gunter and Thomson (2007) provide a pithy articulation of the perils of instrumentalism in student voice:

*Student voice is used as a 'toxic makeover'... where, despite a rhetoric of agency, the reality is that students remain objects of elite adult plans, not least through how they must provide the evidence of excellent performance in the delivery of national standards. (p. 181)*

Although this critique was penned over a decade ago, it has been our experience that this 'toxicity' is still the case in some schools. Quinn and Owen (2016) also acknowledge that school student voice programs can be problematic as efforts can become reduced to tokenism without sustained commitment from school leaders and teachers (Quinn & Owen, 2016). Further research is needed in the area of decolonising student voice, so that hegemonic power relations, premised on both age, class and culture, can be surfaced and addressed in schools. We advocate for ongoing and initial teacher education that is research informed and socially critical of the ways that voice discourses cohere, reflect and construct the social world.

It is a fruitful direction to pursue methods determined by students in ways that are not contrived by researchers or practitioners in schools (Nelson, 2017). Like Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2015), we advocate for further research that extends our understandings of alternative approaches to voicework with children, with consideration given to how evolving approaches influence learning, teaching and engagement with school communities. We also acknowledge those in the field who are inclusively incorporating the voices of students in their scholarship (Mayes, et al., 2017).

## Conclusion

Although key shifts in the student voice research field have been noted, critical and politically engaged voicework is an important, ongoing project. Despite critiques in the field that castigate the use of students for quality control, the political currents of neoliberalism continue to influence how voicework is enacted in schooling settings. Nevertheless, current critiques of instrumental initiatives permit new directions into transgressive approaches that enable creative and authentic methods of engagement with young people. In both initial and on-going teacher education there can be recognition of and education about these universalising neoliberal discourses and their effects. Teacher education can provide spaces for refusals and considerations of power that evade simplistic interpretivist conventions. The wider sociology of voice, and the particulars of schooling contexts in which voice is produced, are ongoing considerations for voicework practitioners in schools as well as teacher educators and researchers of Teacher Education.

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### **Acknowledgement**

We value the input of Dr Emily Nelson from The Eastern Institute of Technology in Hawes Bay Aotearoa/New Zealand during the initial stages of this article.