Whakatupuhia te reo, whakatupuhia te tamaiti

Gladstone School student voice case study

Introduction

In 2014, the Cognition Education Trust (CET) funded Whakatupuhia te reo, Whakatupuhia te tamaiti, a project investigating how student voice could be used to influence classroom and school wide decision making that accelerates student progress. Gladstone School took part in the project and their involvement is outlined below and includes:

- the student voice initiatives undertaken and progress made
- evidence collected and methods used
- identified enablers and challenges to progress
- key learning regarding the effective collection and use of student voice
- how the school used or trialled the student voice rubric – a key project outcome.

The case study information is drawn from a variety of data sources including:

- detailed notes from all workshops
- mid-phase school visits and interviews
- review of documents and evidence from each school
- an end of project group interview.

Gladstone School

A teacher from the junior school and leader from the senior school took part in Phase Two of the project. Building from Phase One, the project team continued their focus on how student voice could influence teacher planning. Phase Two initiatives sat under the goal of raising achievement in writing through enhancing students' assessment capability and through using an integrated language of learning informed by the key competencies[1]. The project team also focused on developing the student voice knowledge and skills of teachers through staff meetings and through access to professional development.

Use of student voice rubric

School leaders initially used the rubric to undertake a whole of school performance assessment. They also provided initial feedback on how the rubric could be developed and improved. The performance

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[1] The Key Competencies are five words that the Ministry of Education has deemed, "…competences to live, learn, work, and contribute as active members of their communities." The language that is unpacked in each of the key competencies are based on two factors: What the teacher perceives as 'good learners' and the dispositions that relate to each key competency; and What school rules are that have been developed in 2015.

assessment gave direction to school wide student voice goals that were added to the strategic plan. This positioning helped to ensure the implementation of student voice activities across the school.

Teachers within the junior school also used the rubric to review their practice against indicators under the teacher strand. There are also plans for leaders to assess their practice under the leadership strand sometime in 2016.

The initial performance assessment undertaken by the leaders identified a number of positive developments under the Learning Environment dimension. However, the assessment also identified that there was room to:

- enhance the visibility of student voice in classroom
- increase access to student voice by minority learners
- embed student voice practices more firmly within school systems and documentation
- strengthen assessment capability and the ability of students to identify and articulate their next learning steps.

The performance assessment undertaken by the junior school focused on the student and teacher strands in the rubric. Staff discussed the type, quality and extent of evidence available to assess the strength of current practice. In concurrence with the senior leaders, the junior school revelled in the Learning Environment where they felt the environment catered well for student's needs. However, from this discussion, teachers questioned whether they had sufficient evidence to support this claim and examined what further evidence was needed and how to collect this. The junior school also identified there was limited evidence to guide development under Teaching and Learning and Assessment. However, it was accepted there were areas to develop under these dimensions, particularly in making student voice more visible for students.

Student voice activities and developments

Student voice activities undertaken during Phase Two at Gladstone School are summarised below under each dimension. Examples are provided of where systems were developed or expanded to facilitate the use of student voice as an information source within decision making.

Supportive environment

- Staff meetings were used to build shared vision across the staff regarding student voice and student agency. Project representatives report student voice is now being discussed within professional learning conversations.
- Strategies and actions for 2016 will include ways of making student voice more visible at a whole of school level (e.g. through what is communicated by the school's website).
- Learning language in curriculum areas is being developed through outside agencies and professional development.

Teaching and learning

- Teams constructed student voice action plans and initiatives that were appropriate to current practice, opportunities and professional development needs. Plans included a focus

on student self-assessment, peer assessment and the co-construction of writing topics. Each team shared their actions and journey with the other teams. Development of action plans ensured on-going focus and accountability to goals and objectives.

- The focus on student voice in writing (senior school) is reportedly spreading to other curriculum areas. The decision to expand student voice into other curriculum areas was essential for classroom teachers, as they saw different avenues into student voice within the curriculum.
- Project participants report examples of teachers starting to collect and use student voice at the classroom level. The observation is also made that students are developing the ability to articulate their learning across a range of curriculum (e.g. reading, writing, maths, science).
- Professional development in literacy is focused on enhancing the visible learning skills of students and is therefore fundamentally focused on student voice and how student voice can accelerate progress and achievement.

Assessment

- The project team plan to examine how student voice can be made more visible in tools such as student reports and OTJs. Consideration is also being given to how student voice can be embedded within the school's quality assurance checklist which is part of the appraisal process.
- Teachers that have visible displays on writing skills use these to judge students' goals and progress towards a writing skill and use this information to inform the next weeks planning.

Evidence and evidence collection methods

- Project participants undertook a school wide survey that collected student voice on their teaching and learning experiences, needs and aspirations. An important finding was a lack of student engagement and motivation in the literacy programme and changes were subsequently made to the programme. The information gathered from the students allowed the leaders in the school to make a decision on the professional development needed in the literacy programme (motivating boys in writing).
- Project participants intend to survey teachers and students in 2016 on their understanding of what makes an effective learner. The survey will also capture student voice on how the learning environment is operating. The data will be used to generate further conversations within the school about appropriate practice developments.
- Teachers and the project team collected evidence via video. Questions asked were around students' next learning steps and engagement in the classroom. This was time consuming but it allowed the opportunity for teachers to revisit, share and reflect upon the responses of the students. Done orally it was faster than written responses particularly with the junior school.
- A professional development staff meeting focused on visible assessment and gave teachers the tools and understanding to create visible goals and assessment in class. This engaged the students in their learning progress and also created a manageable system for the teacher to use student voice.

- The work of Absalom[2] was used to develop the appraisal questions for post reflection and discussion.

Evidence and evidence collection examples

The evidence below provided by Gladstone has been used to underpin the indicators in the three dimensions of the student voice rubric. The material is intended to be examples of practice and as such is often evolving in nature. The materials provided are not meant to be viewed as exemplars but are examples of how Gladstone has approached student voice in the school. The evidence can be viewed under the various indicators of the rubric see http://studentvoice.cognitioneducationtrust.org and includes:

- Video – student voice in reading
- Maths – image of a self-evaluation
- Student voice – feedback for teachers
- Video – peer assessment
- Videos – self assessment and planning.

Enablers and challenges

Enablers and barriers to the collection and use of student voice identified through Gladstone's Phase Two activities follow:

Enablers

- Identifying and communicating where student voice is already a part of routine practice - so student voice is not perceived something 'new' or 'additional'.
- Acceptance that across the school, staff will be at different levels of readiness, willingness and ability regarding student voice and being responsive to these differences.
- The development of the strategic plan in implementing student voice questions into the inquiry journals and appraisal process created non-negotiables around implementing student voice in the classroom.
- Clear understanding of the staff around the use and need for student voice particularly around assessment capability.

Challenges

- Lack of clarity and examples of what good performance would look like under the school system strand within the rubric.
- Inducting new staff so they have a shared understanding of what student voice looks like within the school.
- Maintaining progress and sustaining practice in the context of regular and sometimes high levels of staff turnover.
- The belief that year 1 and 2 students are generally only capable of behavioural dispositions and not yet ready for the language of learning.

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[2] Absolum, M (2006). Clarity in the classroom. *Hodder Education, Auckland.*

- General resistance to change within parts of the school.
- Ensuring teachers understood the questions in the inquiry journal and the purpose for these questions.

Key learning

- Resistance to change can be addressed by focusing on existing student voice practices, the efficacy of those practices and resultant benefits and outcomes.
- It is important that school wide systems and procedures describe what appropriate student voice evidence and practices will look like in different contexts (e.g. at different year levels).
- The collection and use of student voice has the potential to accelerate progress because it builds learner agency. Students' responsibility and ownership over their learning is enhanced when learning is connecting to what is real and important to them.