Whakatupuhia te reo, whakatupuhia te tamaiti

Rhode Street 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. Rhode Street 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.

Rhode Street School

In Phase Two, the principal of Rhode Street School continued as the primary participant in the student voice project. The overall goal in the school's student voice action plan was that student voice influences decision making that accelerates student progress and achievement. The plan had a particular focus on mathematics and writing by target students. Strategies focused on further embedding student voice within school systems and developing the capability of staff to collect and respond to student voice within the classroom.

Use of student voice rubric

Leaders in the school initially trialled and gave feedback on the rubric by using it to assess performance across the school on all dimensions. The rubric was also introduced to teachers in Term Two and their feedback on it was invited. In Term Three, teachers were asked to rate themselves against the teacher success indicators and to provide evidence for their ratings.

The teacher assessments above were aggregated and this analysis was used to identify areas of inconsistent practice and need for professional learning and development. The leader and aggregated teacher assessments confirmed the need to further develop the assessment capability of teachers. This evidence was used in a proposal that was successful in accessing additional Ministry of Education funding that enabled processional development in assessment.

The school's focus on student voice was also reflected in strategic planning work undertaken by the school on student agency within their Community of Learners (CoL) plan. Key areas of focus within the plan include teacher efficacy, learner agency and whānau engagement. The rubric was also introduced to all schools within the CoL and all schools were encouraged to include student voice goals within their CoL planning.

Student voice activities and developments

Student voice activities undertaken during Phase Two at Rhode Street are summarised below under each dimension in the rubric. Examples are provided of systems developed or expanded to ensure that student voice is used as an information source within decision making at the classroom or school wide level.

Supportive environment

- Through regular reporting, the Board of Trustees maintains an overview of all student voice initiatives within the school.
- Teachers have access to professional development related to student voice.

By reviewing the school's website, applicants for new teaching positions within the school were able to understand and articulate the school's use of student voice when asked about this during the application process.

Rhode Street staff have been examining the work of Washor[1] on student agency and how leaders and teachers can enable learning opportunities identified through student voice. Staff are also attending to the flow-up impacts of responding to student voice and how to account for these in planning and decision making.

Teaching and learning

- Collection and use of student voice across school with a focus in mathematics and writing (e.g. through learner progress meetings, leadership walkthroughs (twice a term), student-led conferencing (Term Two and Four), modern learning environments digital capture devices (e.g. "swivel", webcams) and student focus groups.
- A principal lead initiative involves working with four teams of students on student lead music initiatives.
- Teacher inquiry focuses on student voice over two terms.
- Literacy and numeracy leaders attend the student voice workshop at Cognition, Term Three, 2015.
- Student voice is being increasingly used to drive topic choice, particularly for boys.
- Teacher led work on social media, student voice and whānau voice.

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[1] Washor, E., & Mojkowski, C (2013). Leaving to Learn: How Out-of-School Learning Increases Student Engagement. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.

- Increasing student engagement in student voice (e.g. enhanced ability to identify evidence of good student voice in practice).
- Development of online capability that enables parents to access student voice.

The collection of voice on what students wanted and needed in mathematics identified gaps in teachers' practice in knowledge based strategies. Targeted PLD followed and built teachers' ownership over their learning needs and teaching responsibilities, including the need to address some deficit thinking. Regular reflective sessions with leaders helped to monitor the implementation of practice changes. The intervention overall was attributed to progress well beyond expected gains.

In another example, students identified that sharing their learning (strategy or knowledge) with their peers could help their peers to learn and requested more time allow this sharing to occur. Sharing strategies using IPads and available apps were developed and implemented into the maths programme.

Assessment

- Regular learning conversations built into the OTJ process (numeracy leader).
- Teacher performance around student voice is included in teacher appraisals.
- Teacher reflection on their collection and use of student voice informs the identification of professional development goals.
- Year 8 students wrote accounts of their learning history and current and future learning needs to inform their next school.

Evidence and evidence collection examples

The evidence below provided by Rhode St 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 Rhode St 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:

- Classroom evidence - Real-time videoing of teacher and student voice in context with assessment focus.
- Teacher appraisal documentation and walkthroughs
- Strategic planning.

Enablers and challenges

Enablers and barriers to the collection and use of student voice identified through Rhode Street school's involvement in the project follow.

Enablers

- Identifying and communicating where student voice is already part of routine practice - so student voice is not perceived something 'new' or 'additional' but more of an encompassing process.
- 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.
- Articulation of student voice goals and objectives in the school charter, strategic plan and annual plan builds buy in across the school and helps to facilitate the planning and budgeting necessary for implementation.
- Whānau voice is captured throughout the year to evaluate the effectiveness of planning processes and where changes in process will support whānau to take an active role in supporting learning at school and home.
- Facilitated a pedagogical shift to collaborative teaching and inquiry across the school, enabling the establishment of flexible learning environments in 2016.

Challenges

- Consistency of practice across the school with a range of assessment capabilities and understanding of how student voice enables meaningful learning.
- The resources required to establish e-learning and digital technology systems that help to facilitate school wide collection, storage and use of student voice data.
- The time and resourcing required to upskill staff in the effective use of e-learning and digital systems established.

Key learning

- It is critical to student voice goals and objectives are embedded within annual and strategic plans as enablers to action are driven from this level (e.g. release time and other resourcing).
- The integration of student voice at a school system and process level is essential for setting expectations and maintaining momentum and consistent practice in the face to common obstacles (e.g. staff and student turnover).
- Teachers resist unnecessary duplication of actions and effort. Schools should identify opportunities where the requirement to collect and use student voice fulfils multiple, related requirements (e.g. student voice within appraisals may also provide evidence for performance portfolios).
- Student voice should ultimately be understood as an evidence source that informs cycles of self-reflective practice and deliberate acts of teaching. While accountability is a goal, processes should not be overly prescriptive or imposing as this may lead to student voice being collected for compliance only. There may need to be higher levels of prescription at the start of any new practice, however, this should be released over time as teachers refine their practice.
- Student voice is a powerful mechanism through which schools can take control of their teacher professional development by ensuring development is guided by what students are saying will make a difference to their learning.

- Student voice provides teachers with an additional source of evidence about what students can and can't do. When teachers start to listen and teach in response to student voice, progress can be accelerated.
- Student agency develops when through the collection and use of student voice, students understand they are listened to and that what they say has an influence on what they do and how they do it.