Whakatupuhia te reo, whakatupuhia te tamaiti

St John's 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. St John's 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.

St John's School

The St John's representative in Phase Two of the project was previously involved in Phase One at a different school. While bringing this experience to Phase Two, her new school was at a relatively early stage of developing student voice practice. At the time of her appointment there was growing interest in student voice within the school and there was leadership support for student voice initiatives.

This project member initially built understanding of existing practice within the school as well as development needs and opportunities. She also focused on building shared understanding of student voice and how it could be used to enhance teaching and learning. Building from Phase One, she also focused on developing her personal practice, in particular by focusing on appropriate responses to what was being communicated through the student voice data.

The student voice initiatives within the school sat under an overall goal to met the learning needs of all students and more specifically to lift the achievement of priority learners in writing. A key focus was on enhancing the ability of students to evaluate and articulate their own learning needs, progress and next steps. Longer term goals include that all teachers understand student voice Mindframes and are collecting and using student voice to inform their planning.

Use of student voice rubric

Staff from St John's reviewed and provided feedback on the rubric at various points of its development throughout Phase Two. A late draft of the rubric was shared with the school principal for his initial review and feedback.

Student voice activities and developments

Key student voice activities undertaken at St John's are summarised below under each dimension within the rubric. Examples are provided of where systems have been developed or expanded to enable student voice to be used as an information source within classroom and school level decision making.

Supportive environment

- Identification of existing student voice practices and strengths within the schools (e.g. student led conferences).
- Staff meetings on student voice with a focus on existing practices and capability – this being a deliberate strategy to ensure staff did not see student voice as an extra or 'add on.'
- Individual meetings and discussion with staff to develop understanding of student voice, a shared language of learning and a shared vision of strategic direction.
- Student voice has been identified as a key strategy within St John's Community of Learners (CoL) achievement challenge. It is hoped this strategic positioning will encourage and guide other schools in the cluster to also identify student voice goals and objectives.

Teaching and learning

- The observation of staff room discussions around student voice is seen by the project member as an indicator of positive developments.
- The project member also reports that students are beginning to use the school website to provide feedback.
- A student voice teacher only day was undertaken in Term Two, 2016.

School system

- Goals, strategies and actions related to student voice are embedded within the school's professional learning programme for 2016.

Assessment

- During student led conferences students were observed initiating discussions with their parents prior to the commencement of conferences. These discussions saw students describe where they were at in literacy and numeracy, their next learning goals and next steps. A newsletter to parents prior to the conferences explained the role and purpose of student voice within conferences.

Influence over decision making

The student voice project builds from the assumption that student voice can inform decision making that will enhance teaching and learning. Learning about how student voice 'works' to do this is

presented in this section. In particular, the section identifies what has been learnt about the processes and mechanisms through which student voice works to inform decision making.

Enhances effective teaching and learning

Student voice 'works' to enhance teaching and learning as a form of assessment data that enhances practice already known to accelerate progress (e.g. quality feedback, situated learning). This understanding of student voice as integral to established pedagogy is consistent with the project's focus on embedding student voice across the whole school system and the importance of communicating that student voice is not a separate or new requirement for teachers.

Informs deliberate acts of teaching

Student voice informs teaching as inquiry and deliberate acts of teaching. It allows teachers to assess any gap between what has been taught and what has been learnt. When used as assessment data, it can inform shifts in teaching to address immediate learning needs. When student voice shows students haven't progressed as expected, it can be used to guide appropriate shifts in planning and programmes.

>*...actually my kids did not get this because there is the evidence...*

>*...gets rid of that assumption that I taught it therefore it has happened...*

>*...when SV came along we had students making huge gains – because teachers started listening to what students could and couldn't do and started teaching to that...*

>*...[using student voice] is actually quite empowering because you're seeing a direct effect between what you teach and what is learned...whether there is a gap or whether that the gap is closing..*

>*(Project school representatives)*

Countering deficit thinking

The collection and use of student voice can help to address deficit thinking by:

- making visible the level of assessment capability that students can attain and thereby challenging existing beliefs about students' capability
- helping teachers to build from what students can do rather than what they can't do
- developing shared understanding across teachers on what students need in order to progress
- the development of student engagement, agency and sense of progress through student voice can help students address their own deficit thinking.

Student engagement and agency

The collection and use of student voice builds student engagement and agency by:

- helping to connect students' learning to what is real and important to them
- reinforcing to students that what they say influences what they learn, how they learn and when they learn

- developing student's sense of responsibility and ownership over their learning.

...we are delivering reading and writing and maths in more engaging ways because students are telling us what and how they want to know... (Project school representative)

Student assessment capability

Student voice is a key mechanism through which students develop assessment capability and become active participants in their learning. In this respect, student voice is central to the process of students' becoming visible learners.

School wide supports

Requiring student voice to be collected and used within school wide practices can help schools to understand the supports that will be necessary to sustain the practice. For example, by requiring student voice as a data source in OTJs, one school was then required to identify and develop:

- the knowledge and skills needed from the leadership team so they could provide teachers with appropriate support
- tools that supported consistent practice in the collection and assessment of student voice (e.g. rubrics, progressions)
- moderation of the data collected.

...as soon as student becomes visible [for example, including it as an information source in OTJs]... it forces you to develop the systems, evidence and professional development required to make it happen... (Project school representative)

In another school, student voice was used to identify and address specific areas of required professional development for teachers.

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. In one example, students identified teachers had stopped using equipment and this was able to be addressed. The intervention overall was attributed to progress well beyond expected gains.

...it is not PD done to us but PD that we construct ourselves based directly on what the students are

Evidence and evidence collection methods

The St John's project team drew on a range of student voice data sources. These included a survey of student attitudes to writing, review of student feedback on their writing on the class website and student focus group interviews. A survey of priority learners and teachers early in 2015 identified different beliefs about what makes an effective learner. The student voice survey data also identified issues in the school's physical education and health programme and informed changes to the programme and curriculum.

Evidence and evidence collection examples

The evidence below provided by St John's 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 St John's 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:

- Professional reading – Learnings in the Driving Seat
- Strategic plan professional learning programme
- Senior team Health and PE planning
- Numeracy evidence of planning changes
- Videos – language of next steps and students giving feedback

Enablers and challenges

Enablers and barriers to the collection and use of student voice identified through St John's involvement in Phase Two follow.

Enablers

- Strategy and activities for build student voice practice within the school built from existing practice and capability. This helped to develop buy in and reinforced that student voice should be integrated within existing practice.

Challenges

- As identified throughout the project, student voice can be understood by teachers and leaders in different ways and not necessarily in relation to improving teaching and learning. The St John's project reinforces that a lack of shared understanding about student voice can be a barrier to progress.
- It took time to build shared understanding across staff of student voice and how it can be used to enhance teaching and learning. This shared understanding was needed before staff could begin to examine their own practice and could begin to interpret student voice data and to consider the implications of the data for their teaching.

Key learning

- The collection and use of student voice enhances student engagement in their learning which is likely to be a factor contributing to accelerated progress and achievement.
- Building from existing practice reinforced that student voice is a source of assessment data that is used within existing practices known to accelerate student progress. It also demonstrated trust in teachers' professional practice; that is, the assumption teachers will already be employing effective pedagogy and that the enhanced use of student voice provides an opportunity increase the efficacy of these practices.
- Building a shared understanding through professional discussion often provides learning opportunities and can identify needs and issues not previously considered.

- The establishment of wider school goals related to student voice in the school charter and strategic plan helps to provide a supportive environment within which staff can explore their own practice responses and goals.