Guidelines to implement student voice so that it influences planning and teaching decisions

Student voice is defined as the intentional collection and use of student's thinking and feedback on their learning and using these voices to inform and improve teaching, learning, and school-wide decision-making.

Student voice is not an additional concept or project: it is a mechanism and source of data within existing pedagogy, systems and procedures.
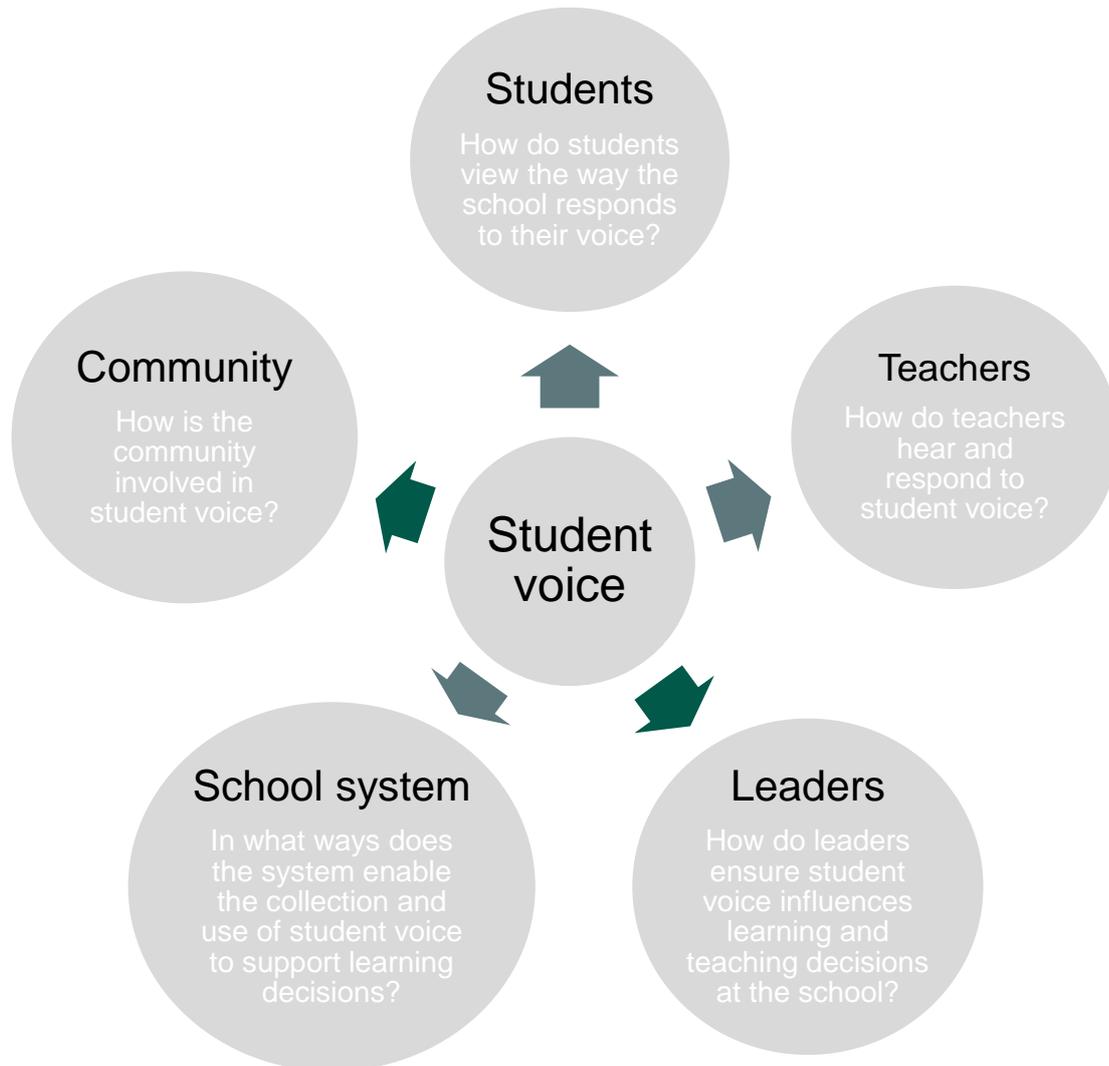
Student voice contributes to next steps of learning (content and approaches) for students, teacher, leaders and community. These decisions might be classroom based or system level where decisions contribute to changes to leadership, systems and structures that affect teachers and students across and beyond the whole school

Collection and use of student voice needs to be age appropriate – practice and procedures will look different for year levels and these are decisions that need to be made by each school.

Where to begin

Using a cycle of inquiry investigate these five questions:

Figure 1: Finding out what you don't know

Students
How do students view the way the school responds to their voice?

Teachers
How do teachers hear and respond to student voice?

Student voice

Community
How is the community involved in student voice?

School system
In what ways does the system enable the collection and use of student voice to support learning decisions?

Leaders
How do leaders ensure student voice influences learning and teaching decisions at the school?

Considering the evidence

Use the evidence you have collected to monitor your current position against the student voice rubric (found here http://studentvoice.cognitioneducationtrust.org) consider the following questions:

- Where do you have little or no evidence to make a judgement?
- What information/data collection might you have to establish in order to fill the evidence gap in the future? Will this be regular or one-off data collection? What data will be most helpful in supporting the school to get to where you want to be?
- Where are your strengths? How reliable is your evidence?
- Where does the evidence tell you there is an area that needs development? How wide is the need?

Implementing an initiative

Once you have monitored your current state against the rubric, make a decision about where you will start to build understanding and capability. There is no hierarchy in terms of the order of you do these but there are some aspects that ideally could be discussed first. The rubric includes a key you can use, as you engage with a range of evidence, to think about how your school is progressing in relation to each of the indicators. For example:

- ensure a consistent understanding of student voice and how the collection of student voice can enhance teaching and learning
- building a shared language is useful before asking students to self-assess using a language of learning they don't understand
- ensuring teachers and students (and community) have a shared view of an effective learner before asking students to provide feedback on their next steps or interpret assessment results
- ensuring students feel safe to express their voice before asking them to do so

The student voice rubric is deliberately big picture and not ordered in priority. Reflecting against appropriate indicators can help to build shared understanding by teachers, leaders, students, and the community on how and how well student voice is being collected and used in the school. It can also help to develop shared understanding of necessary actions and to build ownership and commitment to this.

Monitoring your progress

How will you monitor your progress?

The rubric can support you to initially collect evidence to determine current practice against target practice and assist to identify the areas of priority for development. Collecting evidence against the areas of your change priority and deciding whether the change is strongly embedded or not will help you to decide what to do more of and less of. It can then support you in making progress.

There are many different types and sources of evidence that you could use to understand current practices and to monitor your progress in prioritised areas for development. These include:

- Using repeated data gathering mechanisms such as video, surveys, focus groups
- Monitoring teacher/department planning documents for evidence of modifications based on student voice
- Talking with students to see how they understand their role as learners
- Talking with teachers to see how they are utilising student voice to support planning
- Analysing student achievement data to see if there are any significant shifts in progress and achievement trends
- Classroom observations

Useful readings and resources

Bolstad, R. (2011). From 'student voice' to 'youth – adult partnerships': Lessons from working with young people as partners for educational change. Working paper from the Families and Communities Engagement in Education (FACE) project. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Earl, L. and H. Timperley (2015), "Evaluative thinking for successful educational innovation", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 122, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jrxtk1jtdwf-en

Toshalis, E. & Nakkula, Michael. J. (April 2012) Motivation, Engagement and Student voice, www.nmefoundation.org

Fox, K (January/February 2012) Student voice Getting elementary students involved in their learning produces results. http://www.qisa.org/dmsView/NAESP-StudentVoiceFox

Halbert, J & Kaser L, (2013) Spirals of Inquiry, http://noii.ca/noii/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Spiral-of-Inquiry-Guide-to-the-six-phases-2014.pdf

Cook-Sather, E. (2006). Sound, presence, and power: "Student voice" in educational research and reform. Curriculum Inquiry, 36, 4, 359-390 http://repository.brynmawr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=edu_pubs

Using Student voice in teacher appraisal http://www.educationcouncil.org.nz/sites/default/files/Using%20Student%20Voice.pdf