Executive Summary

Student voice and the international curriculum: Connections, contexts and spaces

Rohan Skene

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There are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together. Until and unless such spaces emerge transformation will remain rhetorical rather than real

(Hargreaves, 2004: 309)

Abstract

This study explores the significance of student voice in two international curricula, the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP). Framed within a social realist epistemology and employing individual and focus group interviews to gather teacher and student perspectives, this work is 'in the style' of a grounded research approach, underpinned by established work on student participation and wider concepts of curriculum and curriculum design. Three European international schools are included in this study, each one distinctly offering a linear, constructivist or mixed approach to delivering the IGCSE or MYP international middle year's curriculums. The emergent research perspectives suggest that a constructivist approach to curricular design, as represented by the MYP, may positively promote student voice due to its less prescribed nature. The study also finds that the encouragement of 'teacher voice' through an understanding and negotiation of the overt power imbalances inherent in schools will assist in the establishment and sustainability of teacher-student learning collaborations. This study advances the notion that student voice conversations need to be pedagogical rather than content-based in order to successfully support learning.

Purpose and Context

This research investigation is based on the understanding that benefits to learning can be gained from student voice activities, and that sustained, shared conversations about learning can lead to improved classroom experiences. This work is also grounded in the belief that student voice activities suffer from an image problem where the envisaged beneficial results of such initiatives often, either fall

short, or fail to make any significant impact in secondary schools. I suggest that there exists a disconnection between ideal and action. My intention is to explore the dynamic between these two fundamental understandings using the research context of international schools and differing curriculum designs. I use an interpretive methodology to explore the perceptions of teachers and grade ten students in three international schools in southern Germany through the use of teacher interviews and student focus groups. My two research questions are:

1. *What are student and teacher perceptions about student voice engagement in the context of three European International Schools with differing curriculum designs?*

2. *What connections, if any exist between student voice engagement and curriculum design in these schools?*

In situating my study in international schools I can make comparisons with established research, predominantly from North American, UK and Australasian education systems and explore differing middle school curriculums. I aim to come to some conclusion about how student voice can be theorised in a way in which its purpose and outcome is more grounded so that the student and teacher participants are more able and motivated to make meaning together.

In terms of curriculum design, my interest lies particularly in the contrast between curriculums as 'aims and objectives' based (Tyler, 1949) and those that are process or constructivist based (Stenhouse, 1975). The two main curricular systems that I explore are the secondary school International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IBMYP or MYP) and the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), which are prevalent in international schools and are relatively representative of the two forms of curriculum design that I am interested in.

In each of the three schools, I interviewed one focus group of six to seven students and conducted individual interviews with teachers, though the number of teachers varied between each of the schools.

Literature Review

Student Voice

Student voice is an idea embedded within the wider concepts of student participation and student consultation, and thus it is open to different interpretations (Flutter, 2007, Lodge, 2008). However, by its very nature it is integral to consultative notions of student involvement and fundamental to student-as-researchers (SaR) and other consultative student projects; much like the metaphorical egg in a soufflé mix, it binds the rest together to give a truly meaningful experience of student consultation. Without true and authentic student voices, the attempted process of pupil consultation is flat and dull; it fails to be transformative and may do little more than become a form of instrumentalism (Fielding, 2001). Pupil voice is an essential ingredient giving a sense of form and direction to the practical notions of student consultation. Student voice in its most simplistic form can mean the process of allowing young people to speak about their school with the expectation or hope that someone is listening. Hargreaves (2004) takes this further by adding that those who are speaking need to be actively listened to otherwise the purpose of 'having spoken' is defeated; that is, the voices are authorised in sustained, meaningful ways and that tangible evidence, not just promises, result from it. Cook-Sather (2006) opines that students have a legitimate perspective and thus have the right to have their opinions respected and listened to and condenses this thought with the words '*rights, respect, listening'*. Quaglia and Corso (2014) add an interesting facet to our definition of

student voice by stating that student voice is not about actively opposing something (sit-ins, walk-outs) but instead is about proactively advocating through participation the greater good of learning and that this collaboration has a longer term impact on student aspirations and achievement.

My definition of the term student voice is nestled within the understanding that such activities are both beneficial to and misunderstood by schools. Student voice implies that sustained conversations about learning take place between the two parties that have a shared but differing interior experiential authenticity in education, namely the students and the teachers. That these activities if sustained should lead to some transformation in the pedagogy of the classroom so that new experiences in learning emerge for both student and teacher. The significance of this definition can be directly linked to my research questions in that power differentials need to be navigated and common ground created before pupil voice activities take place, so that such undertakings are entered into with the best chance of a positive outcome.

Teacher-Student Power Relations

Contemporary research into student voice activities in schools, despite being of varying focus, depth and international context, has two commonalities. The first is the realised value that is inherent in the process of dialogue among students, teachers and the school; the second is the overarching difficulty with the processes that accrue due to the historical imbalances in the enduring, complex power relationships inhabiting the connection between students and teachers. The pivotal role of teachers as political figures and the notion of dialogue between teacher and student, central to student voice conceptions, was initially theorised by Freire (1968). He viewed the importance of dialogue not in the technique itself but in the

empowering and transformational possibilities it offers to the participants both teacher and student. Key to this is that each player brings differing and valuable identities, experiences and voices to a 'space' that has been influenced by social, economic and historical contexts and that recognition of these contexts, in this 'space' makes social transformation possible. Critical pedagogy has emerged from Freire's social justice pedagogy incorporating student voices as part of teacher's critical awareness of their agency and that of the students' within the societal strictures in which they operate and consciously or unwittingly enforce. The curriculum is viewed as an important conduit for critical pedagogy when opportunities for interdisciplinary knowledge and multiple literacies are developed (Giroux, 1999). If student empowerment is a key aspiration of pupil voice it is important to look at the impact of power imbalances on student voice projects.

It must be noted that teachers have an intellectual differential to students in terms of their experience and knowledge of the world and this differential is the foundation of teacher and students relationships in schools. Fielding (2001) attempted to affect this imbalance through the use of students-as-researchers (SaR) in his renowned project at Sharnbrook Upper School. Fielding (2001) advocates the need for a radical structural change in the way schools view and communicate with pupils, asking questions about how the school included or excluded student voices based on *who was asked, about what and how*? This radical approach recognised the need for a sea change in the power relationships between, teachers and pupils and required the aims of the school to transcend an atmosphere of accountability (especially the UK and USA) into that of democratic agency. Cook-Sather's (2002, 2006) work in the USA conveyed that power relationships remain a barrier to authorising student voices and that a change in the adult mindset is required. In order for schools to

create the opportunity for all students to 'have a say,' schools must develop procedures to establish sustained, routine ways to be responsive to students.

Teacher voice and student voice are closely connected concepts as the empowerment of students can be effectively achieved through teacher empowerment. However, there is fear from the teaching body that one of the voices that could be marginalised is the 'teacher voice' and that a change in the power relationships will undermine teacher authority. The pupil voice approach can be both difficult and rewarding for teachers as it is catalyst for change, encouraging teachers to explore their own practice and think about what happens in the classroom (Flutter, 2007). Teachers as social individuals are restrained by and conform to the power relations that dictate the societal ideological power structures that surround them, much akin to the students themselves, although they negotiate them in ways different to students. It would seem that student agency is linked to teacher agency as they interact and refigure in the school landscape of power relations. However, regardless of the power constructions, in terms of dialogic interaction it would seem logical that there cannot be student voice without teacher voice (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007).

The Curriculum

The idea that a curriculum is what students 'do' or maybe what is 'done to them' each day at school is common. Notions of a written syllabus plan or the content found in textbooks is another common conception of what the word curriculum represents, due probably to a nostalgic view of most people's schooling in the pre-professional age (Hargreaves, 2000). Kliebard (1996) suggests that a widely held view is that, at a fundamental level, the curriculum is what is to be taught and what

teachers do is teach the curriculum content. It is my argument that such a definition is inadequate in its usefulness and depth and to holistically answer the question a macro definition of curriculum is required. The wide definition as adopted by Kelly is: *"the curriculum is the totality of the experiences the pupil has as a result of the provision made"* (Kelly, 2009: 13). Such a definition should not be misinterpreted so that it encroaches on the very idea of 'schooling,' as it emphasizes at its core the centrality of the teacher's position to learning provision whether intended or not.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

It may not be a question of how to change and reduce the power relationships but rather of recognizing and negotiating within the existing power relationships spaces for dialogue (Fielding, 2001). This is a less radical and more pragmatic notion of power reconstitution adopted by utilising Shulman's (1986, 2004) theory of pedagogical content knowledge. The notion of a space within teacher's subject content knowledge, current class cultures and wider pedagogical wisdom could create a platform from which teachers feel confident to interact (maybe for the first time) in dynamic dialogue with students.

Shulman's idea of 'pedagogical content knowledge' (PCK) hypothesises that teaching involves a specialised kind of knowledge that exists in the center ground separate from subject content knowledge and curricular knowledge, where applications of the school curriculum are fused with professional expertise to fill a "missing paradigm" and transform subject matter knowledge for the purpose of teaching. The idea of pedagogical content knowledge can be demonstrated pictorially as a Venn diagramme with circles expanding with experience where subject matter (content) knowledge intersects with pedagogical knowledge. The

addition of a third category: knowledge of student learning creates a dynamic zone of interaction for dialogue to take place (figure one).

The notion of 'pedagogical content knowledge' signifies the dynamic zone of interaction where teacher voice and student voice can combine to create real, dynamic, dialogic impact and is similar to the decidedly teacher influenced boundary suggested by Kelly (2009) between the planned and hidden curriculum, that is the delivered curriculum inhabiting an area amidst the explicit and the implicit curriculum.

Figure One

Pedagogical Content Knowledge Shulman 1989
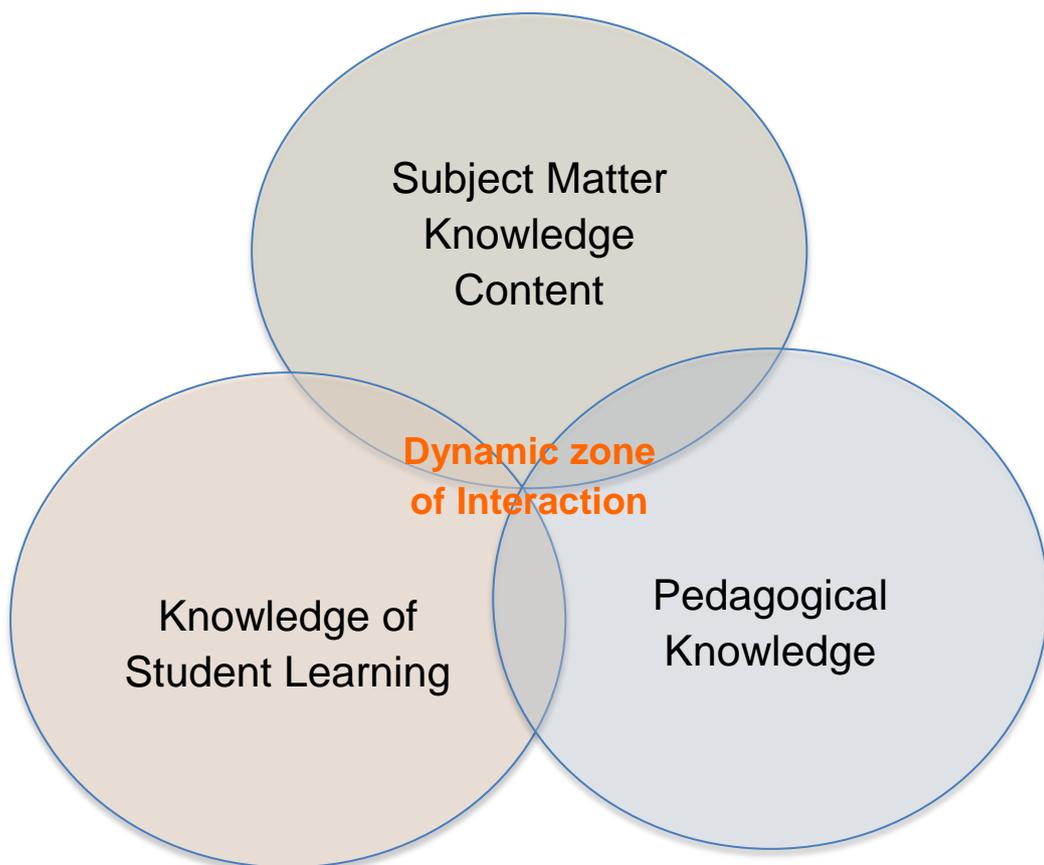
International Dimensions

The three secondary schools investigated in this study, not only purport to be international in nature but also adhere to an international curriculum, providing either the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) or the International Baccalaureate Middle Year Programme (MYP) as part of the middle school programme of study.

International Schools

Given the growing number and range of international schools (recently estimated at 4000 with 50% in Northern America) attempts to categorise them using static characteristics has its limitations (Hayden and Thompson, 2008). As such, a school should not necessarily be deemed 'international' due to its international student population or location, as there needs to be a more fundamental attachment to international principles and philosophies in the make-up of the school before the term 'international' is bestowed. Dower (in Abdi and Schultz, 2008: 39) states that global awareness, as global citizens should be one of these guiding principles, whilst Hill (2000) suggests that the term 'internationally minded' should be employed to describe a school instead of 'international' as it is rooted in the philosophy of international understanding rather than reliant on the composition of the pupil or teacher base. Walker (2004) argues that international mindedness is at the heart of international education by advancing the idea that globalisation creates tension between human diversity and human unity.

However, the view that international mindedness must be the remit of the international sphere exclusively is being eroded by the advent of national systems taking on international curriculums like the IB or aspects of them (English

Baccalaureate). In global cities such as London and Hong Kong the need for professional teacher competencies to include global perspectives is important (Steiner, 1996). Half of the 5000 entries for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education made in 2013-2014 were from within the UK (Cambridge International Examinations, 2014).

International Curriculums

The rapid growth in international education has been a major driver in the development of international programmes of secondary school study that are available to international schools. An area of unprecedented growth exists in the provision of curriculums available to students in the middle years of secondary schooling. The International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) developed the Middle Years Programme (IBMYP) for 11 to 16 year old students in 1994 aiming (like all IB programmes) to encourage personal and academic achievement and has at its core the aspirational notion of creating a more peaceful world by means of intercultural understanding and respect (IBO, 2014). It is an enquiry-based curriculum having more in common with the constructivist ideas of Dewey and Bruner than the content and assessment model of Tyler.

The IGCSE is a two-year programme traditionally viewed as a linear curriculum with links to both the UK's General Certificate of Education (GCSE) and A-level programmes of study (Ellwood, 1999). It attracts over 750 000 entries each year from 140 countries and over 5000 schools including 2500 in the UK; only eleven schools in the UK offer the IBMYP (Cambridge International Examinations, 2014). The IGCSE has prescribed syllabus content where assessments take place at the end of each course based upon assessment criteria with most of the subjects

obtaining the majority of these marks from external examinations and externally moderated coursework (Cambridge International Examinations, 2014).

Previous Research on Student Voice and the Curriculum

Research on initiatives that explore the connections between student consultation and the curriculum tends to be rare. Brooker and Macdonald's (1999) study and the CIDREE report (2006) both found that student feedback on curriculum design although implemented had been marginalised due to its positioning both in terms of the way student voice was framed conceptually (a homogenised/single entity voice) and systemically (at the end of the process when significant decisions had already been made). Many of the early forms of student involvement in curricular consultation are nestled within a standards and improvement discourse, thus underpinning the effort as tokenistic (Hart, 1997, Thompson and Gunter, 2006, Flutter, 2007).

Biddulph (2011) examined the dynamic of student curriculum agency in the co-construction of a UK secondary geography curriculum among seven schools in years nine, ten and twelve. The project considered Arnot and Reay's (2007) pedagogic voice types where "voices created by the pedagogies rather than the voices needed to change the pedagogy" are elicited (Biddulph, 2011: 387). The Young People's Geographies project (YPG) is significant and unique as it was in essence a curriculum-making project that directly involved students in the process, allowing them to take ownership in collaboration with others. Biddulph recognised the inequality constraints implicit in student-teacher voices and elicited the identity talk structure to overcome this. The use of pedagogic processes such as fieldwork, emotional mapping and presentations where social bonding, humour and casual talk

flourished allowed different voices to be heard and personal geographies to materialize. However Biddulph contends that though the project was a success such undertakings are still mired in the culture of performativity and institutional constraint.

Even teachers who are open and enthusiastic about student voice initiatives find that when it comes to changes in the curriculum the 'recalcitrant realities' of accountability, performativity and surveillance in most UK, North American and Australasian educational systems and the obligations imposed by centralized systems often stifle the student voice efforts (Hargreaves, 2004, Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007, Cremin, Mason, Busher, 2010). It is perhaps in this area that international schools are able to overcome to some extent this centrally imposed obsession with targets and external accountability.

Methodology

Theoretical Perspective

I have reached my theoretical perspective through a reflective process of consideration and dismissal of positivist, empirical approaches and a consideration and rejection of purely interperativist methods. A social realist approach provides an attractive alternative to the extremes of both positivism and relativism and in its approach the possibility of understanding and then modifying mechanisms gives it an emancipatory dimension. Realist thinking views social research as a combination of actions and outcomes within contexts that relate to the mechanisms involved. This approach is concerned with the actions and reactions by humans in terms of their embedded existence in the layers of social reality (Robson, 2010).

Young (2008) constructs and defends a social realist position in the sociology of education and in seeking a middle-ground, proposes that knowledge be accepted for what it is: a social and historical construct without sliding into the excesses of relativism. I am in accord with this view of knowledge being constructed and given meaning through the subtle and complex processes within the structures of society, such as gender groups, social classes, professional communities and specialists. That this refined and complicated process creates the foundations of what can be called the delicate interpretation of truth, gives social realism some basis for claims to objectivity. Knowledge has properties that transcend its producers thus providing erudite insights on the world even if it is branded by the marks of those who produced it (Wheelahan, 2008).

It is the social realist view that has implications for the curriculum and my research into it, as this approach is a way of negotiating the competing ideological views of what knowledge the school curriculum should be comprised of and puts knowledge at the centre of the debate as the "historically located collective achievement of human creativity" (Young, 2008: 36). This idea leads me to appreciate that knowledge is continually being socially constructed and exists in some formal, pure state beyond social awareness. I feel reassured in the understanding that knowledge is in a constant state of over-layering and re-invention and much like sediment on a riverbed settles at some stage as a layer of stability until the next paradigm-shifting event muddies the waters, creating a new layer.

Research Method Rationale and the Three Phases

This study utilises a naturalistic research design to gather and explore teacher and grade ten student perceptions of student voice and the curriculum in three

international secondary schools in southern Germany. For confidentiality reasons I have labeled the three schools A, B and C. The data gathered is qualitative in kind due to the interpretive and subjective nature of the methods engaged. I employed a combination of individual teacher interviews, and student focus groups to gather the field data. The use of open, semi-structured interview questions allowed flexibility in my data gathering especially within the focus group dynamic where the emphasis was on the sharing of views and experiences between the participants to create insightful, rich data (Miller and Brewer, 2003).

In terms of analysis, this study employs an axial coding method where key themes develop from the student and teacher perspectives recorded in the primary research transcripts and I call these 'emergent ideas' or level one codes. The transcripts were analysed for key related themes using colour coding and then summarised in a research analysis summary table (Appendix one). The key themes or codes assist in creating second level two codes that I call the wider concepts representing more conceptual notions. It is from a comparison and synthesis of these second codes or wider concepts and the key findings from the literature review that I perform two-way deductions about the connections and disconnections between student voice and curricular forms and trace the generic relationships back to the key phenomena (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, Robson, 2010). The contrast between my approach and a purely grounded theory approach is the emergence of the key themes through the construction of my semi-structured questions in the focus groups and the interviews, rather than a purely emergent method.

The common themes within the teacher questions and within the student questions (Appendix two), assist in data breakdown and coding and support the information analysis. These are: perceptions of a good school and what makes a good teacher;

experience with student voice; experience with the incorporation of student voice at the school in question; the curricular design in the school with an emphasis on the middle years; the role of the student council; learning conversations and the impact of student consultation on the curriculum.

In phase one, I decided that a total sample of three schools would suit my time frame, resource base and research objectives. School A and School C were chosen due mainly to the significance of their differing curricular combinations. School B has the MYP implemented in grades 6 to 10, school A has been delivering the IGCSE for some time and school B delivers a combination of both (a hybrid MYP-IGCSE). This hybrid mix in school C was important as it enabled greater curricular comparisons to be made and linked directly with the focus of my study. These schools also shared status as IBO world schools having the IB Learner profile at the heart of their programmes, an embedded Creativity, Action and Service programme (CAS and AS), shared missions of international mindedness and a commitment to the needs of an international community.

Phase two consisted of conducting interviews with the teachers in each school to gather some data about the nature of student voice at each institution and to find out more about how the grade 10 curriculum is designed and implemented. I interviewed five teachers at school A, two teachers at school C and one teacher at school B. For phase three, students were sampled for the student focus groups using a strategic sampling method, the aim being to gather a range of opinions and experiences represented rather than just a representative sample of grade ten secondary students. I had successfully used focus groups in previous research and found that the advantage of student empowerment, enjoyment and the gains from group dynamics complemented and re-enforced the benefits of student voice itself.

Participation in the focus group was voluntary with students given an opt-out letter to be read and then returned by parents if they did not wish for their son or daughter to take part in the focus group. The interviewees are not identified in the transcripts and are denoted as AT1 for teacher 1 at school A and BT1 for teacher 1 at school B and so forth. The students involved in the focus groups are represented in the transcripts as AS1, AS2, and AS3 etcetera for students 1, 2 and 3 at school A and BS1, BS2, BS3 for students 1, 2 and 3 at school B and so on for school C.

Research Results

The Field Research

A Good School

The students responded to the questions 'Is this a good school and what makes it a good school' with enthusiasm. Having a good relationship with the teacher was the most common response to 'what makes this a good school?' among the students and was viewed as the prime reason for the school being regarded as such. Not all teachers touched directly upon what makes a good school, although when they did, it was focussed upon the quality of the school leadership and the learning relationship with the students. I find it interesting that a question where the answers could have been very broad converged on the common idea that a good relationship between teachers and students was the most cited characteristic of making a school 'good'. This is an important outcome as it highlights the magnitude of the interaction of the student with the teacher as a prime reason for a student's feeling of belonging at a school and is a similar finding in established student voice research (Quaglia and Corso, 2014).

> *In my old school teachers and students were enemies but here they are more like friends as most teachers take account of your personal life as well and that you have different interests and things and ways to spend your time, it is a good school*

<div align="right">(CS3)</div>

Two key ideas emerge from this data that form the initial first level codes:

 1. The significance of school climate or culture

2. The impact of student and teacher relationships on school culture

Both teachers and students agree that a student-centred, individual learning focus appears to create a relationship between the teacher and the student that is positive and significant.

A Good Teacher

The theme 'a good relationship' bridges both the 'good school' and 'good teacher' fields and is the most popular reason for a student to consider an individual to be a "good teacher". The qualities that the student and teacher participants attached to a good relationship in this study were both emotional and professional. The 'emotional' included attributes such as caring, friendly and approachable, and the 'professional' related very specifically to the act of learning and similar pedagogical concerns. The attribute: 'teachers who are passionate about their subject' was mentioned in the student focus groups repeatedly as a significant factor in influencing whether a student is engaged in a subject or not.

> *And also the opposite can happen if you have a really good teacher you can suddenly like a subject that the year before you really hated*

<div align="right">*(BS2)*</div>

From teacher passion appeared the attributes of: dedication to the pupils, having a very good subject knowledge, having high expectations and working above and

beyond e.g. giving up a lunch hour to help with mathematics. The good relationship with the teacher was tempered by the student's firm conviction that there is definitely an imbalance in the power relationship between students and teachers but that this was deemed as not necessarily a bad thing in terms of the professional learning relationship. Students in all three schools expressed the need to trust knowledgeable teachers who had authority and control in order to advance the classroom learning. They wanted the power imbalance to exist for positive learning purposes and outcomes and felt that this added to a good relationship. The possible upside to having a power disparity was mentioned by the teacher interviewed at school B and touches upon the idea that teachers have a greater degree of experiential capital and acquired expertise than the students.

> *As a student you have someone who is there to look after you and is concerned about making you a better learner and is going to manage you and guide you that is one of the good things and as you get older those supports that you get are gradually taken away every year...Yeah it is important, it is like a nurturing role that's what a teacher has and you can't say we are even because you're not. How can you manage a class of 25 kids when you are all even*

(BT1)

The level one ideas that emerge from the research gathered on the second theme of 'a good teacher' are:

1. Strong student-teacher relationships are fundamental building blocks for fostering a positive school environment

2. The teacher-student relationship is given meaning through personal and professional attributes that are linked to learning

3. The inevitable existence of power imbalances and the awareness that these need to be navigated within the learning relationship

The Student Council

Generally the effect of the student council on learning is not profound although this forum does provide a platform for student voices. Issues may still centre on the relationship that a class has with a teacher rather than specific outcomes of pedagogy. Whilst the perception of the student council among students and teachers varied in the three schools a common characteristic was that the school (student) council was mainly involved in 'comfort' issues based around matters such as school spirit, food, lockers and dress code.

> *It seems that it is more about school spirit and events like St Valentine's Day and not about the actual learning*

> (BS3)

'Active spirit' and teacher agency are characteristics that are key to gauging the success and effectiveness of student councils. The need for a school to have student participation activities that mean something to the lives of the students is an important aspect that has emerged from this student council research.

> *The whole school going out and helping the community and things like that so we try and make something happen and be a school where everyone can work*

> (AS6)

The key level one codes that were developed from this data are:

1. The student belief that the student council has an impact on 'comfort' matters but little to negligible impact on student learning

2. The sense of 'active spirit' being a factor in student council success

3. For student council effectiveness: the need for systemic support from a guiding teacher and training

4. The existence of student council-student power imbalances

The Curriculum

Students in schools B and C had a keen sense of the difference between a curriculum based around the MYP constructivist model with one based on the IGCSE content model. The general feeling was that the over-riding difference with students doing the IGCSE was that they had a lot more content (stuff) to learn and that they were examined on their understanding of this content. School B students also commented on the greater emphasis of research and reflection in the MYP rather than being "spoon fed". At school C with the IGCSE-MYP combination, students who were MYP students only (the vast majority of the grade 10 population) seemed relieved that they were not 'burdened' with the extra amounts of work.

> *It is different as they do different tests and teaching is exactly the same*
>
> (CS5)
>
> *They get different packets and material in general. I'm glad I am not doing the IGCSE*
>
> (CS3)

This view was supported by the teachers in school C who agreed that a system with IGCSE content in an MYP philosophical framework was inevitably driven by the content and that the issue of the need for 'more time to cover content' was key.

> *When I ask the kids what they would like to cover content wise I get a whole load of ideas. I would like to teach more conceptually as is the MYP philosophy but the content is dictated. There needs to be a culture shift for this to happen the teacher needs to have the confidence to let go. The teacher may feel threatened to cover all of the content*
>
> (CT1)

In school B students were reflective about the differences between the two programmes revealing that whilst appreciating the flexibility and other aspects of the MYP (e.g. research, teamwork and discussions), the IGCSE enabled a broader understanding of content rather than the deeper MYP approach.

> *We are taught less factually and less in a "this is what you need for the test" type of way, it is closer to real life and real world… I think that we could focus a little bit more on some factual knowledge once in a while and I do think that we are a little bit behind in that area*

<div align="right">(BS5)</div>

Teacher views at school B stressed that there was too much emphasis on recall and content in the IGCSE and that the MYP assisted students in developing higher order thinking skills which are assessed in a number of ways.

> *I've worked a little bit with IGCSE at this school when I first started…they are too content heavy in science and there is too much emphasis on recall and not enough emphasis on problem solving, so for example a question that would be worth a level one or two in the MYP would be worth an A grade question in the IGCSE's which I think is just amazing (laughs)*

<div align="right">(BT1)</div>

Students in school A stressed the importance of 'getting through' content and on examination performance and grades as a measure of success in the IGCSE in preparing them for the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP). For them the end goal was seen to be important and certainly coloured the types of learning that they valued, e.g. practice examination papers. There was an undeniable feeling that the students and teachers were under pressure to digest the IGCSE prescribed curriculum.

> *I personally would always refer how and what part of the class, how this is related to the test we will write in March…. because that whole process that is very important, because that's what counts*

<div align="right">(AS1)</div>

Students in school A and C regarded the courses they were doing as fundamental in preparing them for the next step, the IB Diploma Programme. The use of formal testing and the ability to choose subjects based on their interests were given as key factors to prepare them for a programme that is viewed as more rigorous when compared to the current middle year's programmes. Teachers in the same schools had mixed views on this issue with most agreeing that the examination skills gained,

helped students with the IB Diploma Programme but that the need to be on the '*content treadmill*' was restrictive and isolating.

> *I think that the IGCSE prepares students better for the DP, the main obstacles are the gap between grade 10 and grade 11 content and the expectation gap between 10 and 11. Exam writing skills are a major issue as well. Students who purely do the MYP, which is the majority of them, are not great at formal examinations*

(CT2)

> *I think that MYP students do better at DP. The step up demands that they are producing quality work and that they are not just kept working in the content, assessment treadmill. Besides the IBDP is changing and becoming more conceptual which feeds from the PYP and MYP. So the emphasis becomes 'do you understand' rather than 'have you learnt?'*

(CT1)

Students and teachers have very clear perspectives on the concept of a content/linear curriculum and a constructivist/process curriculum and their place within it. They have distinct views on what constitutes the positive and less positive aspects of each type of curriculum and how these transform into the local school contexts. A key finding from this data is that there seems to be a yearning from the schools to move from a more content–driven to a more process-driven curriculum but that the internal and external constraints are complicated, creating an open but conservative approach to change.

> *When we started off we were a really small school and we had to prove ourselves to the community…So IGCSE was one way in which we could say 'we can prepare your sons and daughters as well as any other school'. That became a focus we had to make sure that they passed or they got grades that were of use to them and that we got to develop a culture of trust with the parents and this was a focus and this is now an issue because exam preparation does clash with other ways of seeing curriculum…now that we are strong enough we can move away from it and be confident*

(AT3)

When looking at the key phenomena of the curriculum it is evident that three important level one codes emerge from of this data:

1. There is an appeal in all three schools to imbue a constructivist style curricular approach to learning
2. An understanding of the fundamental importance of the teacher in the success of the learning regardless of the curriculum being attempted
3. The impact of external factors on decisions about the curriculum is dependent on the individual school's vision, culture and external considerations

Student Voice

School A students were keen to take part in student voice type conversations with their teachers and gave the example of how formal surveys had been positively received and had made a difference in some classes. Students found it difficult to be completely open to the idea of commenting on lessons and had some difficulty believing that it is acceptable to comment on teaching and learning when the idea of the responsible, professional teacher is the traditional view.

The research from school B shows that the students welcomed student voice initiatives, but that they would like the opportunity for greater collaboration with teachers. This collaboration was viewed as more effective if done collectively or via a student voice group. There was the view that formal student voice activities need to be actively promoted and 'kept alive' in the culture of the school and that there was a psychological benefit from engaging in student voice even if the impact was not overtly evident. Thus being engaged in student voice activities was seen as important regardless of any impact from the delivered curriculum.

> *BS5: and even if our suggestions are not implemented it gives us the feeling of having an impact which I think for young people is quite important, as we often feel like we don't have any say in what goes on*
>
> *BS1: we need that psychological effect even if it is nothing*

The student and teacher responses from school C suggest that any student consultation that takes place is done on an individual teacher, informal basis and that such activities are viewed as worthwhile by the students, although these conversations may not necessarily be about learning activities that students find motivating or productive. Students expressed the view that conversations centred on the issue of content change rather than pedagogy seemed unrealistic and were sceptical about the success of such conversations given their traditional experience of the "teacher in charge". Despite this understanding among teachers and students about the possible benefits of student voice activities there was the view that a cultural shift was required at the school for greater collaboration to ensue.

> *I doubt that the students could engage in student voice activities for example researching and presenting about teaching and learning. We could still do student voice in either the curriculum evaluation process or as part of the 'reflective practitioner' process. This would be good practice and why should we not ask the kids to reflect on the teaching and to reflect on 'how do you assess your own learning'*

(CT1)

The Wider Notions

The first level codes emerging from the research data provide me a fertile source of material and upon analysis lead to the creation of three wider notions for consideration. These are outlined below and in appendix one, table one, in the form of a coding tree.

1. School Cultural Reciprocity- the reciprocal nature of the relationship between school culture and a school's openness to student voice. The field research points to the idea that a school that values the impact that student

consultation has on learning will be a school where student voice undertakings will eventually thrive

2. Student and Teacher Relationships- the profound importance of the student teacher relationship and the negotiating of power imbalances in terms of its impact on:

   a) School culture: It seems clear from the teacher, and especially the student responses, that passionate teachers who have a mutually respectful relationship with their students are fundamental in ensuring the success of curriculum delivery regardless of the type of curriculum prescribed and are a driving factor for a positive school culture.

   b) Teacher advocacy of student voices: If teacher agency is important how do teachers become agents for student voice? Given that teachers are almost always going to be older and have greater intellectual capital than their students, it is unreasonable to expect the power differential to ever be equal.

   c) The curriculum implemented: curricular design overridden by teacher and student relationships.

3. A Pedagogical Focus for Student Voice- giving meaning to student and teacher interactions. Rather than participate in dialogue centred on changing the core content, the conversations should focus on where teaching and learning and the delivered content fuse in the classroom that is to say, the idea of a pedagogically focused approach.

Meta-Analysis

Six key understandings emerge from the comparison of the literature review data and the three wider notions from the primary research data.

The first understanding is that the relationship between the teacher and the student is of prime importance for student voice and that the utility of this relationship is based on improving the capacity to promote learning rather than one based on performance and/or congeniality (Fielding, 2001, Rudduck and McIntrye, 2007, Stoll and Seashore Lewis, 2007, Brighouse and Woods, 2013, Quaglia and Corso, 2014). Therefore student and teacher dialogue can only occur in that space that promotes sustained conversations about real learning where teachers feel confirmed and students feel affirmed.

The second area of significance is that teacher advocacy is needed to support and drive student voice and this relies on a teacher's critical willingness to be open to learning conversations with students. This is also dependent on a supportive school culture and visionary leadership (Fielding, 2001, Lodge, 2005, Flutter, 2007, Bragg, 2007, Trippestad, 2011). This area of interaction must recognise the power differentials that exist and overcome the explicit imbalances by promoting a space were teachers are fortified by their pedagogical and content understandings and are thus encouraged by this to sustain pupil collaboration.

Thirdly, the existence of teacher-student power differentials is inevitable in educational institutions; these can be hidden (covert) within the school culture or revealed (overt). Hidden power structures are ambiguous, difficult to identify, change and may create voices that are a result of the pedagogical culture rather than being the voices needed to change pedagogies (Fielding, 2001, Cook-Sather, 2002, Hargreaves, 2004, Thomson and Gunter, 2006, Lodge, 2008, Arnot and Reay, 2007, Taylor and Robinson, 2009, Robinson and Taylor, 2013). The overt unequal power relationships can be alleviated to some extent when the learning conversations centre on pedagogical discussions rather than content discussions.

The fourth key understanding is that whilst student councils are a common feature of international schools, the role of them in teaching and learning dialogue seems to be minimal (Lodge, 2005, 2008, Whitty and Wisby, 2007a). Reliance on them as the sole agent of student voice in a school may have minimal consequences and consideration of separate student voice constructions is worth contemplating. For student voice to overcome its 'image problem', school wide and sustained conversations need to take place where teachers know and understand their classes and students have good relationships with their teachers.

Fifth, the relationship between student voice engagement and curriculum design has two layers. On one level in terms of a two-way relationship there is little evidence that student voice dialogue impacts upon the written curriculum in any significant way (Brooker and Macdonald, 1999, CIDREE 2006, Thompson and Gunter, 2006, Bragg, 2007, Biddulph, 2011). Where there has been some evidence of this namely in school B such an impact can be classed as pedagogical where short term subject topics are melded and adopted to suit a particular group of learners rather than the longer term content knowledge and concepts being transformed (Young 2015). On a second level, content coverage and examination pressures are perceived by teachers and students as major barriers to starting and sustaining student voice initiatives in schools where linear, content-based curriculums such as the IGCSE are being delivered in the middle secondary years. This key understanding suggests that in international schools, where there is arguably greater freedom to develop middle year's curriculums than in national systems, the opportunity for student voice conversations increases where the limitations of content heavy linear curriculums are absent. However, the impact that a curriculum type has on successful student voice engagement is secondary to the other major impacts on student voice namely,

student-teacher learning relationships, teacher advocacy, overt and covert power variances and a pedagogically directed dialogic grounding.

A final key area of significance is that rich and deep student voice connections can be made in the area where core curriculum knowledge and teacher expertise (pedagogy) connect and fuse. This finding is fundamental, as it serves as a firmament to most of the other major meta-analysis findings and significantly contributes to answering the student voice 'image problem' conundrum. This reactive space created by the 'pedagogical content knowledge' brings teaching and knowledge together with student voice as a catalyst to create a different awareness of learning (Shulman 1986, 2004). This implies that any curriculum form can be implemented that encourages (or stifles) student consultation, however, the research indicates that such interactions are more likely to have some impact when nestled in a process curriculum structure where individual learning journeys are nurtured.

Conclusion

The contribution to knowledge that this study makes is a theory about a space defined by knowledge, pedagogy and the wider curriculum where teachers and students can bring their interior authenticities in order to make new meanings about learning. The significance of this is that international school environments face the same issues as non-international schools when attempting to launch or perpetuate student voice projects. Obstacles and drivers that impact student voice initiatives in non-international school cultures have practical applicability to international ones.

There is a reticence in schools to fully embrace student voice endeavors due to the perceived upset that it can cause to the school's status quo. These can manifest in the forces impacting each school's unique culture and vision and the ever-present

power imbalances. The prospect, implementation and sustaining of student voice activities in a school can seem risky, uncomfortable and difficult and this view was apparent in all three schools. A new way of approaching student voice that positions it in a way that limits risk and uncertainty can be achieved by re-defining a pedagogical zone of collaboration where teacher voice is integral and there is an understanding that overt power variances can be identified and negotiated.

Student voice activities that are nestled within a pedagogical framework will be viewed as achievable because of the clear links between ideal and action. There is little evidence from my research that student collaboration efforts have had a major impact on the written curriculum and the 'powerful knowledge' it encapsulates in the middle years of secondary schooling. Where influences have occurred these have been pedagogical in nature, impacting short term teaching strategies and on topics that assist in the movement towards the overarching concepts and knowledges.

The zone of interaction, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) identified by Shulman (1986, 2004), where teaching expertise and knowledge merge to feed learning conversations, lays the foundation for an idea about a dynamic space for new meanings to be co-constructed (figure one). Teaching styles, class topics, use of technology and pedagogical experimentation can all make up this rich area of interaction, as long as the focus is on issues that are directly related to learning and student learning needs. In this zone of dynamic interaction, core content knowledges that exist as fundamental curriculum truths should not be molded by student voice as espoused by Young (2013, 2015), but rather the delivered and experienced curriculum can be transformed by dialogue through its pedagogic and osmotic nature. Teachers operate in this space where their professional expertise is being recognised and celebrated rather than being viewed critically or threatened and

teacher advocacy for student voice dialogue can be sustained. This new zone of dynamic integration will help to close the gap between student voice ideals and student voice realisations.

The type of curriculum being taught and experienced at a school has some impact on the likelihood that student collaboration will take place, but it is not the only or deciding factor. With regard to the middle years international curriculums explored in this study, the constructivist style seemed to be more effective in promoting dialogue and allowing students to propose suggestions on the IBMYP learning topics than was the prescribed-content, linear model (IGCSE). However, it is not the form that the content takes within a curriculum that has bearing of the likely success of student and teacher collaboration, but rather the ways that the discourses that emerge from the curricular constructions enable pedagogical discussions to bourgeon between students and their teachers.

This study is significant in suggesting that a new way of approaching student voice engagement be considered by schools. The theorisation of a pedagogically grounded zone of dynamic collaboration is relevant through its acknowledgment of the practicalities, cultural contexts and power realities that secondary schools face. It is necessary as it provides a way to open and embed student voice into the culture of the school and to support those student voice initiatives already being undertaken. Students and teachers can meet in this space, not as equals necessarily, but as genuine partners in creating shared pedagogical meaning together. I would hope that this work assists in the creation of a space where student voice activities sustain, flourish and transform learning and as Hargreaves (2004) implores a space emerges that is no longer 'rhetorical' but 'real'.

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Appendices

Appendix One

Table One

<u>Coding Tree – Broad Themes- First Level Codes- Second Level Codes</u>

5 Broad Themes- phenomena under study	First Level Codes	Second Level Codes- Wider Notions
What makes a good school?	Significace of school culture on the creation of a good school	Culture and Student Voice- reciprocol Relationship
	Positive impact of positive teacher and student relationships on the school culture	Student teacher nexus- relationship
		Culture and Student Voice- reciprocol Relationship

5 Broad Themes- phenomena under study

First Level codes

Second Level codes- wider notions

What makes a good teacher?

Positive impact of positive teacher and student relationships on the school culture

Culture and Student Voice- reciprocol Relationship

Student teacher nexus- relationship

Student and teacher nexus given meaning when linked directly to learning

A pedagogical focus for sudent voice

Realisation of the power imbalnces inherent in the classroom and the need to negotiate these

Student teacher nexus- relationship

Power Imbalances

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5 Broad Themes- phenomena under study

First Level Codes

Second Level codes- wider notions

Impact of the Student Council

Student Council has little impact on classroom learning

A pedagogical focus for student voice

'Active Spirit' a factor in student council success

A pedagogical focus for student voice

Most successful student councils had strong guidance from teacher/s

Student teacher nexus- relationship

Teacher Advocacy

School council Student and non-school council student power imbalances mirror teacher to student imbalances

Student teacher nexus- relationship

Power Imbalances

5 Broad Themes- phenomena under study

First Level Codes

Second Level Codes- wider notions

Notions and impact of the Curriculum

- An appeal towards a constructivist curriculum in all three schools in study
  - Curriculum impact on student consultation/participation

- For student voice- idea that teacher advocacy and action of import regardless of type of curriculum being delievered
  - Student teacher nexus- relationship
  - Curriculum impact on student consultation/participation
  - Teacher Advocacy

- External factors particular to each school will iinfluence atitudes to the curriculum implemented
  - Culture and Student Voice- reciprocol Relationship

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5 Broad Themes- phenomena under study

First Level Codes

Second Level Codes- wider notions

Student Voice

- Conversations with teachers about learning are highly regarded by students
  - A pedagogical focus for student voice

- Prescibed content as in linear curriculum systems viewed as a barrier to student voice undertakings
  - Curriculum impact on student consultation/participation

- Power imbalances inhibit students from talking to teachers about their learning
  - Student teacher nexus- relationship
  - Power Imbalances

- Student collaboration and participation activities that are student led and have teacher support and buy-in are regarded highly
  - Student teacher nexus- relationship
  - Teacher Advocacy

Appendix Two

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Outline of major role/responsibilities

2. How long as a teacher? School X? Elsewhere?

3. What makes a good teacher?

4. In what ways do you as an educator engage with pupils about classroom practice/teaching/learning?

5. What topics are discussed?

   What benefits have you witnessed? What benefits can you foresee?

   What can have been/ could be the potential problems?

   Have you witnessed colleagues engaging in such SV activities?

6. In what ways does the school have initiatives that engage with pupils about class room practice/teaching/learning

7. What topics are discussed?

   What benefits have you witnessed? What benefits can you foresee?

   What can have been/ could be the potential problems?

   Grades 9 & 10?

8. What role does the student council play at the school?

9. Do you think that the curriculum has an influence on the ability to engage students in conversations about T&L?

   MYP/IGCSE/ DP/ other

   Why do you think that is?

9. Possibility of starting a SV project at the school?-opinions?

10. What place does student feedback have in curriculum design?

Student Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Is this a good school? How do you know? What makes a good school?

2. What makes a good teacher? What do good teachers look like at school X?

3. You are all in grade 10 doing the MYP/IGCSE/Mix What is this like? Have any of you had experience of other types of curriculum? Tell me about these- how do they compare to the MYP/IGCSE/Mix?

4. I understand that you have a student council, what impact does it have on school life? What impact does it have on your learning?

5. Do you talk to your teachers?- when you do (in class, out of class) what do you talk about?

6. Do your teachers ask you about how you would like to learn?

7. What situations might encourage you to talk to your teachers more about learning?

8. Would you like more say in what you are learning?

9. Would you like more choice in what you are learning?

10. Do you think the MYP/IGCSE/Mix helps or hinders your ability to talk to your teachers?

11. Does the MYP/IGCSE/mix give you opportunities to interact with teachers to talk about how you want to learn or how you learn best?

12. How does this differ from previous programmes/courses you have experienced?

13. If given the chance would you like to do some research about what students think about how they learn best and worst in the classroom?

14. What forms of SV are you aware of here at school X?

15. How do you learn best?