

Learner Voice and Education Policy Research and Practice

Domnall Fleming
School of Education UCC
June 2019

Presentation Outline

- 1: Understandings and definitions and motivation
- 2: Policy, curriculum and participation
- 3: Student voice in the classroom

Learning intentions

- An **understanding** of the complexity of student / learner voice
- Reflection on the **motivation** for engagement with student / learner voice
- An understanding of the **policy and curriculum underpinnings** of student / learner voice
- An insight into the **potential of** student / learner voice for engagement, participation and learning

1: Understandings and definitions

For Starters

- Multi-faceted and complex
- Positioning of students and their voices in schooling and education
- Voice? who speaks who has the right to speak, who is listening
- What is heard, by whom, and the actions arise (Fielding, 2001)

For Starters

Students'

- participation
- engagement
- agency
- consultation
- involvement
- dialogue

.....on their experiences of schools and pedagogy

- Talking with pupils about things **that matter** in school
- Conversations about **teaching and learning**
- Seeking **advice from pupils** about new initiatives
- **Inviting comment on ways of solving problems** that are affecting the teacher's right to teach and the pupil's right to learn
- **Inviting evaluative comment** on recent developments in school or classroom policy and practice.

Towards Definition

Student voice refers to the process through which children and young people, individually and collectively **are able to speak up** about their education

(Thomson, 2011, p. 24)

Towards Definition

Meaningful acknowledged presence.....

the **power** to influence analyses of,
decisions about, and practices in schools'

(Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363)

Towards Definition (Thiessen, 2007, p. 579).

‘Initiatives that strive to **elicit and respond to student perspectives** on their educational experiences, **to consult students** and to **include them as active participants** in critical analysis and reform of schools, and to give **students greater agency** in researching educational issues and contexts’

Positioning student voice

- Rights-based position
- Personalised learning
- Democracy and active-citizenship
- Inclusion and retention

Student voice Contested!!

- A neo-liberal tool to further drive **performativity**
- A tool of **external accountability**
- A **tokenistic** concept and construct in schools

Arnot and Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007, Fielding, 1997, 2004b, 2011; Gunther and Thomson, 2006, 2007

Contested...

- Within **existing power discourses** in schools
- Within discourses of **gender, race and class**
- As a singular authentic student voice
- As a moment – ‘**done student voice!**’

‘We have a student council’

Authenticity:

- Who is elected or selected?
- What questions are being asked, whose issues are raised, what are the values and assumptions of those engaged?

Authenticity:

- Who sets the **boundaries**?
- What about the voices of the **silent and silenced**?
- Who is **privileged** to speak, who is listening, who is heard?
- Do we hear the **voices we want to hear**?

Two roads in student voice

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Robert Frost (The road not taken)

Two roads in student voice (for me!)

1: **Student voice in pedagogy** – in the classroom both as dialogic teaching and consultation, and active and participative engagement in co-constructing learning in the classroom – *good teaching*

2: Student voice from a rights-based perspective, as prefigurative democracy, promoting active citizenship – *whole-school perspectives – student council*

Student Voice

- As a concept, student voice is set within a **social-constructivist** and **social constructionist** theoretical framing.
- It positions the child / student / pupil as **agentic** in a learning setting that fosters dialogue and co-construction

Student Voice

- It is bounded by children's **rights**, participatory **democracy** and active **citizenship**
- It is challenged by discourses of **power**, performativity and accountability

My positioning of student voice

- Student voice as dialogue and consultation primarily situated in the pedagogical and relational classroom space

Let's talk about Agency:

Leech and Moon, The Power of Pedagogy (2008)

Agency

- Pedagogical approaches that enable students to take charge of their own learning.....not to discover in an unstructured environment but within one that is highly structured in supporting student agency and sustained and thoughtful engagement

Agency

- The capacity to act independently and make choices....
- The level of control, autonomy and power that a student experiences in an educational situation

- An unfolding process of knowing, acting and being in the world.
- **Enabling** learners to feel they have **a genuine voice** in the learning process is a key aspect of developing agency and, hence, identity and self-esteem

A student voice in the classroom

Agency is how children express
their voice.

(Harris and Manakis, 2013)

Let's talk about classroom learning:

A student voice in the classroom

- Children learn developmentally by doing what they don't know how to do
- They benefit from being viewed as competent learners and given the opportunity to learn in partnership with others. (Holzman, 1995)

A student voice in the classroom

Involvement with others in challenging learning activities, feeling comfortable, accepted and tuned in to the other participants in a group is likely to contribute to effective participation.

(Smith, 2007)

A student voice in the classroom

There has to be social engagement before children can learn and gradually take on more responsibility.

(Smith, 2007)

A student voice in the classroom

- Children construct their social worlds; that they have agency; that they are participants in social processes....that they constitute multiple voices rather than a collective and undifferentiated class...

(Smith, 2007)

Let's talk about participation!

The lens of participation: Hart's Ladder

8. Student initiated shared decision making
 7. Student initiated and directed action
 6. Adult initiated, shared decision making
 5. Students informed and consulted
 4. Students informed and assigned actions
 3. Tokenism
 2. Decoration
 1. Manipulation
- (Hart, 1992)

The lens of participation: Shier (2001)

1. Children are listened to.
2. Children are supported in expressing their views.
3. Children's views are taken into account.
4. Children are involved in decision-making processes.
5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.

The lens of participation: Fielding (2012)

1. Students as a data source
2. Students as active respondents
3. Students as co-enquirers
4. Students as knowledge creators
5. Students as joint authors
6. Intergenerational learning as lived democracy

Student voice in the whole school

- STOP!

- 3 questions?

STOP!

- So what nudges / drives student / learner voice in your school?
- What is your disposition towards learner voice in your school?
- What is the current position of student voice in your school?

5 minutes for discussion and
feedback

Policy, curriculum and evaluation

Student Voice:

UNCRC

States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views **the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child**, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(UNCRC Article 12:1, 1992)

Student Voice Policy in Ireland

- UNCRC (1992)
- White paper (1995) to Education Act (1998)
- National Children's Strategy (2000)
- Ombudsman for Children Act (2002)
- Aistear (2009)
- Children Referendum (2012)
- Better outcomes Brighter Futures (2014)
- Policy research that engages the voices of students (NCCA...DCYA.....)
- DES – student and parent charter (2019 / 2020)

UNCRC

- Article 12 required children to be provided with: the right to express a view; and the right to have the view given due weight.

UNCRC

- **Four conditions or structures** were identified to fully realise the potential of article 12 as the foundation for deep and meaningful student voice

(Lundy, 2007)

UNCRC

- **space** within which children can express a view
- **voice** to allow them to express their views
- an **audience** that will listen
- that their expressed views will stimulate a **response and action**

(Lundy, 2007)

- Lundy strongly **questions** the **motivation**, beyond the rhetoric, of policy makers and schools to provide these four identified conditions for the development of a **meaningful student voice** within this rights-based framework.

Key Questions:

Do you provide space, voice, audience, and response and action to / for student voice in your school or in classrooms in your school?

Do you want to?

Why do you want to?

To trace the policy script....

The White Paper on Education in 1995

- *Likewise, school policies should be developed in close **consultation with parents, and with students**, where appropriate. In order to facilitate this **consultation**, the board of management of each second-level school will be encouraged to promote the formation of a students' council, which will work in **collaboration** with the staff and the parents' association*

(Government of Ireland, 1995, p. 181).

Education Act (1998)

The board....shall facilitate the **involvement** of the students in the operation of the school (27:1)

Students of a post-primary school may establish a student council (27:3)

The rules for the establishment of a student council shall be drawn up by the board (27:4)

National Children's Strategy (2000)

School councils are being established to give children at post-primary level a **direct involvement** in the running of their schools

(p.31)

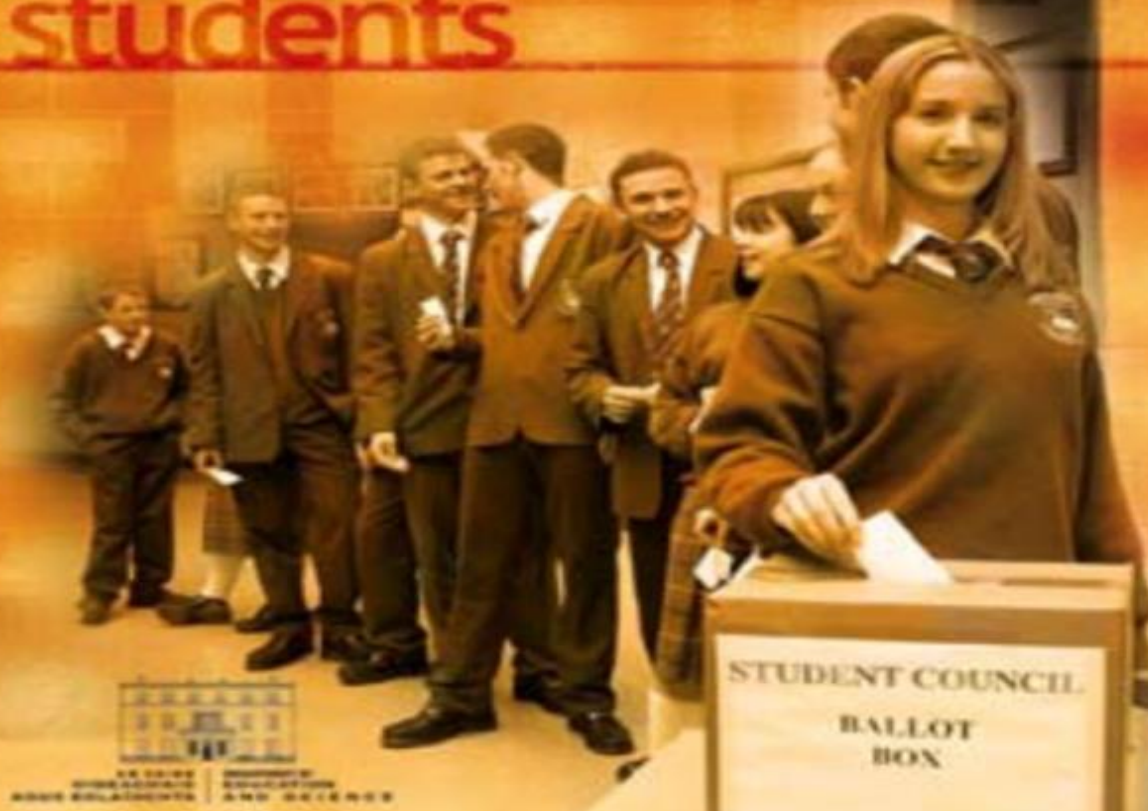
The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020 (2014)

Mechanisms to provide children and young people with the opportunity to **be heard** in primary and post-primary schools....through **Student Councils** or other age-appropriate mechanisms

(p. 32)

student
councils:

a voice for
students



Guidelines: *Student Councils: A Voice for Students*

- Rhetoric of voice as central to the student council
- Used the terms 'involvement' and 'partnership'
- No reference to consultation and dialogue, or a role for students in decision-making.

(DES, 2002 p.11)

Guidelines: *Student Councils: A Voice for Students*

- Introduced '**assisting**', envisaged as 'assisting with induction of new students, assisting with sporting and cultural activities, and assisting with fundraising events for charity'
(DES, 2002 p.11)

A student voice in the classroom

- No reference to a student or a learner voice in the classroom

Inspectorate Initiatives

- WSE – consultation with student council
- WSE-MLL: Student questionnaires
- SSE: Embedding student voice in schools?
- Looking at our School (LAOS, 2016) raising the volume!

Q: I have a say in how things are done in this school

On average 70% either disagree, strongly disagree or don't know

A Student voice in classroom learning

A recent WSE-MLL report (2018)

- **Student leadership** is promoted through the **student council**.
- The council is a well-organised group with regular meetings, and is actively involved in the review of relevant policies.
- The importance of student leadership is recognised by those in management roles, and it is very positive that the student council **meets annually with the board** of management. (WSEMLL report published 2018)

- In interviews with the inspectors, as well as in their responses to the questionnaire, students strongly supported the importance of a focus on student voice, and **this should be pursued so as to ensure their greater involvement in the operation of the school.** (WSEMLL report published 2018)

- **Recommendations**
- The Board of Management and senior management must ensure full compliance with the mandatory requirement for provision of the SPHE programme and its RSE component.
- Timetabling for PE should be reviewed to ensure that all students have access to the subject.
- The further development of student voice within the school should be pursued.

School Response:

- The curriculum plan for September 2018 ensures full compliance with mandatory provision for the SPHE/RSE programme.
- Access to physical education will be enhanced in line with recent recommendations and the school's wellbeing policy.
- XXXXXX will continue to develop initiatives which provide an opportunity for student voice.

So what should they do and what could they do?

If this was your school what would you do?

A Student voice in classroom learning

- It's a school culture to be developed – in the whole school and in the classroom
- From a student perspective you need to make it obvious

- Dialogic consultation in the classroom
- A meaningful student council
- A culture of whole-school dialogic consultation and **action!**
- A meaningful involvement for students in SSE
- Consultation process with students on all appropriate areas of school life (only excluding teacher / personnel issues)

Inspectorate Initiatives impacting on student voice

Whole School Evaluation (WSE) 2004 onwards

- Consultation with student council
- Student questionnaires (2009)

School Self Evaluation : (SSE) 2012 onwards

- 'the inclusion of the **voice of students** (and parents) in school self-evaluation processes'

(SSE Guidelines. Inspectorate, 2012. p. 9).

Looking at our School (2016)

Looking at our School (2016)

– a significant driver of student voice???

Back to motivation?????

- Accountability and school improvement? – the inspectorate agenda
- Student learning and progression? – agency and personalised learning
- Children's rights
- Pre-figurative democracy and active citizenship?



PUPILS COLLABORATIVE
LEARNING
FUTURE
MANAGEMENT
LEADERSHIP SKILLS

LOOKING AT OUR SCHOOL 2016
A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools



EDUCATION FOR LIFE
TECHNOLOGIES
CURRICULUM
OPERATION
LEARNING
FIELDWORK
PROJECT
TEACHING
SKILLS AND ATTITUDES



Developing leadership
capacity

School leaders:

critique their practice as leaders and develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership

empower staff to take on and carry out leadership roles

promote and facilitate the development of student voice, student participation, and student leadership

build professional networks with other school leaders

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
Promote and facilitate the development of student voice, student participation, and student leadership	Those in leadership and management roles value students' views, and support students' involvement in the operation of the school. They ensure that the student council is democratically elected, and that it is included in decision-making. They offer students opportunities to take leadership roles. Those leading the SSE process recognise the need to listen to students and are increasingly consulting students on their own learning.	Those in leadership and management roles recognise students as stakeholders, value their views, and ensure their involvement in the operation of the school. They ensure that the student council is democratically elected and representative, and is a catalyst for change, with an active role in decision-making and policy development. They support students in taking leadership roles by facilitating relevant training and providing opportunities to lead school initiatives. Those leading the SSE process actively consult and engage with students to review and improve teaching, learning and assessment practices.

- Recognise students as **stakeholders**
- **Active role** in decision-making and policy development
- Opportunities (for students) **to lead school initiatives**
- **Engage with students to review and improve** teaching learning and assessment practices

The policy script.....LAOS

- Where the school curriculum provides opportunities to do so, **students negotiate their learning** thereby increasing their autonomy and effectiveness as learners.
- Teachers **engage with students' opinions, dispositions, and contexts, and modify their teaching practice to build on opportunities and address any limitations that they present.**
- Teachers **empower** students to exploit these opportunities and overcome their limitations.

Learner experiences

Students:

engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities

grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive

reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning

experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning

The teacher responds to individual learning needs and differentiates teaching and learning activities as necessary	Teachers are aware of students' individual learning needs, and adapt teaching and learning practices to help students overcome challenges. Teachers engage with students' opinions, dispositions, and contexts, and modify their teaching practice to build on opportunities and address any limitations that they present.	Teachers are aware of students' individual learning needs, and design and implement personalised interventions to help students overcome challenges. Teachers engage with students' opinions, dispositions, and contexts, and modify their teaching practice to build on opportunities and address any limitations that they present. Teachers empower students to exploit these opportunities and overcome their limitations.
---	---	--

Teachers regularly provide students with constructive, developmental oral and written feedback on their work.

Teachers share success criteria with students so that they can assess their own learning through self-assessment and peer assessment.

Teachers regularly provide students with constructive, developmental oral and written feedback. **Teachers use feedback to work with students on clear strategies for improvement.**

Teachers share and **co-create** success criteria with students so that they can assess their own learning through self-assessment and peer assessment, and **identify areas for improvement and strategies to achieve improvement.**

Students feel able to contribute their opinions and experiences to class discussion. They listen respectfully to the opinions and experiences of their classmates.

They ask questions and suggest possible solutions confidently. They are willing to risk incorrect responses, and accept that mistakes are part of the learning process.

They demonstrate a sufficient level of motivation to engage and persist with increasingly challenging work.

Students contribute their opinions and experiences to class discussion **with confidence. They are respectful of and interested in** the opinions and experiences of their classmates.

They ask questions and suggest possible solutions **very confidently.** They are willing to risk incorrect responses, **and understand the value of making mistakes, using them as learning opportunities.**

They demonstrate a **high level** of motivation, and **enjoy engaging and persisting with** increasingly challenging work.

Student voice in the whole school

Student and (parent) charter (2019?)

Student and (parent) charter

- The Minister proposes
 - Placing the student at the centre of school life and securing optimum outcomes for each student in relation to the student's learning and holistic development, through the student's experiences in the school
 - Consulting students and parents and encouraging their engagement and full participation in relation to school policies and plans

Student and (parent) charter

- Providing students and parents with information, including accountability for provision and **information on school performance**
- Consulting students and parents regularly in relation to school costs and working to avoid costs acting as a barrier to participation
- Inviting **feedback, comment and observations** from students and parents and developing a listening culture in the school

Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016.

- How schools will **engage with students** and parents, collectively and individually.
- **How students and parents will be consulted** and invited to participate meaningfully in matters relating to the student's experiences in the school.

Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016.

- How students and parents can be empowered by the provision of information.
- How the school will be accountable to students and parents.
- How specific Information on school performance in teaching and learning will be provided.

(Developing a parent and student charter: Briefing note)

Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016.

- How **feedback will be invited** and how student and parent concerns will be identified.
- How the school will seek to be **responsive**.
- How **grievances and complaints** will be handled.

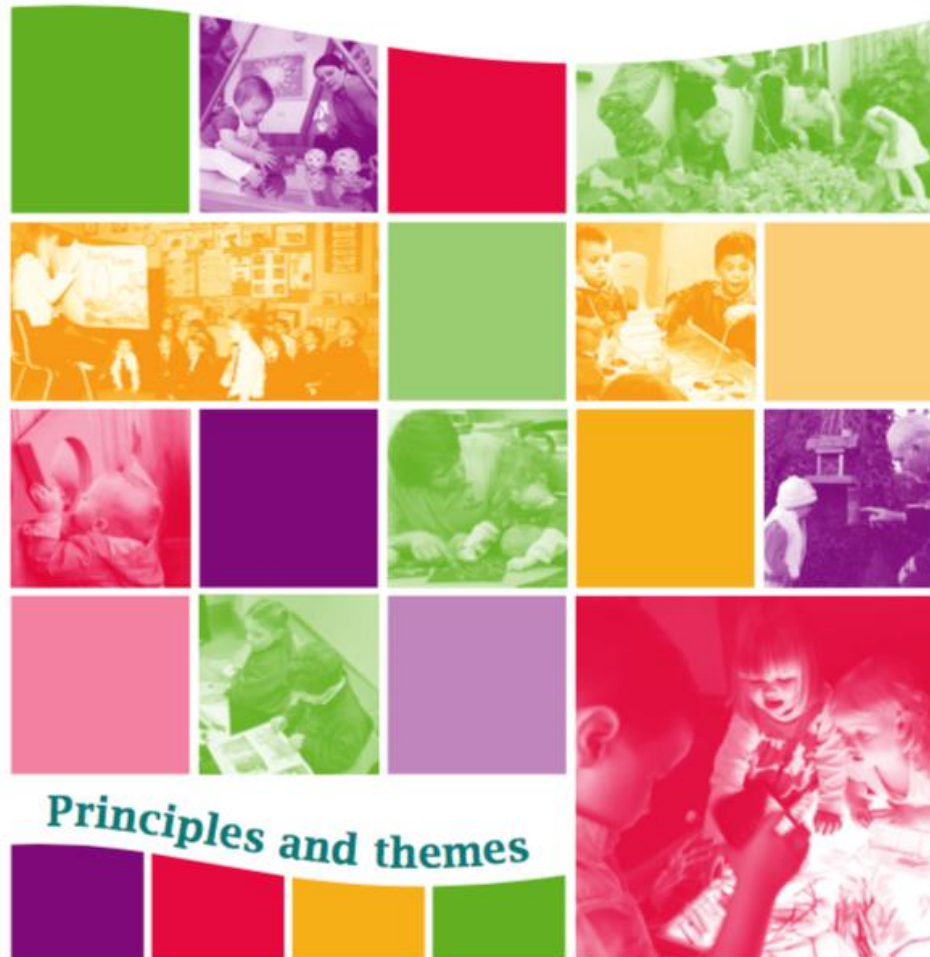
(Developing a parent and student charter: Briefing note)

The Curriculum Script



Aistear

Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework



Síolta

- Standard 1: Ensuring that each child's rights are met requires that she/he is **enabled** to exercise choice and to use initiative as an **active participant and partner** in her/his own development and learning.

síolta: Implementing the standard

- Ensuring that each **child's rights** are met involves providing the child with opportunities where she/he is **enabled** to take the lead, initiate activity, be appropriately independent and is supported to solve problems.

síolta: Implementing the standard

- Practitioners should provide each child with opportunities within the daily routine to use her/his initiative and to be appropriately independent. This could be achieved through:

Aistear – a curricular script

- A curricular framework for children from birth to six years
- 12 key principles including equality and diversity and children as citizens.
- Focus on active learning, play, language and communication.

Aistear – a curricular script

- Children are citizens with rights and responsibilities.
- They have opinions that are worth listening to, and have the right to be involved in making decisions about matters which affect them. In this way, they have a right to experience democracy. (Aistear P 8)

The primary Curriculum Script

Pre 1971....

Education [which] was ‘**curriculum-centred**’ rather than ‘**child-centred**’, and [where] the teacher’s function in many cases, was that of a medium through whom knowledge was merely **transferred** to his pupils.

(DES, 1971:15, referenced by Walsh, 2004).

The primary Curriculum Script- 1971

- The 1971 curriculum emphasised the development of the child
- Subjects were to be integrated to meet the needs and interests of the individual child
- Pedagogy and teacher positioning was expected to change to accommodate **child-centred activity** and discovery methods
- A shift from **teacher-directed to a student-centred pedagogy**

The primary Curriculum Script (1999)

- Emphasis on the full development of the child within a **constructivist framing**
- Pedagogy based on activity, discovery, and the environment.
- **Learning principles centred on the agency**...stressing skills, collaborative learning, higher-order thinking and problem solving
- The teacher's role as '**caring facilitator and guide**' to provide 'effective learning experiences' (DES, 1999, p. 20).

The Post Primary Script

- No overall pedagogical coherence across curriculum documents
- A **narrow technical perspective** and is 'packaged as subjects that contain unquestionable truths
- Curriculum that promotes **pedagogy as the transmission of instrumental knowledge....as product with little attention to process**

(Gleeson, 2004. p.109)

The Post Primary Script (1989)

- Fundamentally, the teacher must try **to speak less and listen more**.
- The **role of the teacher changes** from being the source of answers, information and meaning to that of facilitator and motivator of student learning.
- The students are engaged in **actively making meaning** rather than accepting received meaning from the teacher.

(Guidelines for JC English. DES, 1989, p. 24).

The Examinations Script

A narrowing of the curriculum arising from the tendency **to teach to the examination** rather than to the aims of the curriculum; and an undue focus on the attainment of examination results

(Hyland, 1999, 4:4)

Classes tend to be characterised by **teachers doing most of the talking**, by teachers reading from the book, by practising previous exam papers and being given homework'

(Smyth and Calvert, 2011, p. 224)

The Examinations Script

‘Many middle-class and high-aspiring students expressed impatience with, and were critical of, teachers who did not focus on ‘what would come up in the exam’. For them, good teaching constituted practising exam papers and focusing precisely on the kinds of knowledge and skills needed to do well in the exam’

(Smyth and Calvert, 2011, p. 225)

Positioning student voice

What **was** missing is any definite positioning of student voice in the **post-primary classroom** in teaching and in students' learning



Framework for Junior Cycle 2015



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS



Student Voice and Junior cycle reform 2012 - onwards

The Opportunity of the Framework for Junior Cycle for advancing a student voice script in post-primary schools?

A much more agentic positioning for students!

- ‘The Junior Cycle will be underpinned by the further integration of **formative assessment** as a normal part of teaching and learning in classrooms.
- Formative assessment involves teachers and students reflecting on how learning is progressing and **deciding next steps** to ensure successful outcomes’ P29

Quotations from ‘The Framework for Junior Cycle’ (2015)

- ‘Teachers will use the learning outcomes provided by the subject or short course specification as a starting point for planning a unit and to develop learning intentions and success criteria **to be shared and discussed with their students**’ p36
- Developing and **negotiating learning intentions** and success criteria **formative assessment conversations** in the classroom

- ‘Teachers will use the **learning intentions and success criteria** as a basis for providing **feedback** to help students plan their next steps in learning.
- Students will also be encouraged **to reflect on how they are progressing in their own learning and provide feedback to their teachers’** p 36

For me....the success of the Framework for Junior Cycle will depend on.....

- Accepting and rebalancing assessment between the **summative and the formative.**
- Taking the stream out of the '**final examination**' tradition
- Embracing meaningful **active and participative pedagogies**

For me....the success of the Framework for Junior cycle will depend on....

- Unpacking learning outcomes as **learning intentions and success criteria**
- Engaging in **meaningful formative assessment**, both written and oral
- Using meaningful **formative feedback**
- Fully embracing the value of the **Classroom-Based Assessment events**

For me....the success of the Framework for Junior cycle will depend on....

Embedded here is the potential for a
meaningful authentic learner voice

Comments?

Student voice

She took in what we suggested and mixed other stuff with the way we suggested and it has been unbelievably easy to understand and to learn

(3rd year student)