



Identifying the Effectiveness of Student Voice in Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

International Baccalaureate World Schools are in constant development on how to enhance the teaching and learning. One of the strategies they employ is to get the students voice to examine if the pedagogical approaches of the teachers were appropriate in bringing the desired learning outcome from the intended students. The results of this study constituted an initial step towards the development and improvement of the teaching and learning processes in the Middle Years Programme of International Baccalaureate World Schools. Student's comments were captured on how they were impacted by teaching and learning and in turn teachers reflection were also captured based on the comments received from students. Data collection also involved teacher interviews and testing of the procedure. Evidence revealed the importance of utilization of student voice in improving teaching and learning. Further, student voice promoted self-assessment of teachers' practice and that student voice perceived to be a transformational experience for teachers, students and the whole school community. Thus, this study attempted to identify the effectiveness student voice in teaching and learning.

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Introduction

Past literature has suggested that consulting students regarding issues on teaching and learning are beneficial to both teachers and students. Rudduck (2006, p.14) affirmed that consultation has the potential for re-defining the status of students in school and for creating a more collaborative teacher-student relationship where learning is accepted as a joint responsibility. "When students are given a voice, they become more engaged with learning. Moreover, teachers gain insight into how to support student engagement and build more positive and collaborative relationships with students" (Australia. Department of Education, 2007, p.13). Wein (2008) deduced that as educators become more open to student voice, they are finding that they are learning about their own learning as well. They are adopting "a learning stance" that affirms "the image of children and teachers as capable, resourceful, powerful protagonists of their own experiences" (in Ontario. Student Achievement Division, 2013, p.4). Nevertheless, despite these strong points, we should understand that "engaging in student voice work in the realms of educational research and reform and will not release us from the problems and constraints under which we currently labor, but it can help us deal with them in a more mature, thoughtful, and life affirming manner" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p.27). Since the institution under study implements IB programmes, consulting students is strongly encouraged to aid in the development of student learning and improvement in teaching. The institution regards student' voice as crucial in the teaching and learning process, hence the development of the student to reflect on their learning. Reflection, as viewed by the IB, is central to building a deep and rich experience in creativity, activity and service guide (CAS). Developing a culture of reflection helps students recognize

and understand how to be reflective as well as deciding the best methods in the delivery of instruction.

Background

The IB learner profile (IBO, 2014) represents 10 attributes valued by International Baccalaureate World Schools, one of which is being reflective. The IB programme intends to produce reflective students who are inquirers and thinkers – who are able to reflect on how, why, and what they are learning; and are actively responsible for their own learning (IBO, 2014, p.12-13). The IB programme addresses the competencies, experiences, learning needs and styles of students in order to achieve this objective. Further in one of the study by Sargeant (2010), he emphasized that engaging student voice to participate in decision making, planning, and conveying what they think and how they could learn best, would support the development of an effective, pertinent and effective learning environment. The institution under study strongly encourages students to participate actively in the implementation of the International Baccalaureate Programme Standards and Practices in accordance to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As such, this research is conducted to explore into the effectiveness of student voice in Teaching and Learning.

It is interesting to note that emphasis on student engagement is evident in what the IBO and the institution under study adheres to establish. I believe that students' views about the teaching and learning process are important. In the course of designing a learning session, all components of lesson plans, such as objectives, learning activities and assessments are centered towards the advancement of students for they are the heart and soul of education. Students are the main recipients of the planned curriculum. To be able to recognize and meet students' needs to enhance their learning is the primary goal of every educational institution.

Literature Review

The origin of the phrase student voice is difficult to ascertain, however, in recent years, it has often been used in education literature and is generally applied to strategies in which students are invited to discuss their views on school matters (Arnot et al, 2004). The reason being, the student voice seem to have important role in the effectiveness of teaching and learning process by capturing the student perspective with respect to their learning needs. This can be viewed by the statement of Bahou (2011, who claimed that student voice has emerged as a single term in educational research to encompass a spectrum of initiatives that advocate the redefinition of the role of students in research and educational change. So, we could see that the student voice in important for an educational change and these educational changes could be in the teaching and learning process within a classroom context.

Schartel (2012) defined student voice as feedback that is an integral part of the educational process, which allows students and teachers to develop and implement improvement plans. In his study, he presented the concept of student feedback extended to different disciplines and different areas of learning, from science to humanities, such as psychology, education, management and literature. This confirms the usefulness of student voice across different disciplines in education. As substantial evidences of the impact of student voice in education increased, more research about student voice dealing with specific fields or areas were conducted. In recent years, the term student voice increasingly has been discussed in the school reform literature as a potential avenue for improving student outcomes and facilitating school change (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). Many studies have indicated that promoting student voice has contributed to the improvement of teaching and learning, teacher-student relationships and productive learning experiences. Mitra (2009), used the term student voice activities to refer to those pedagogies in which students have the opportunity to influence decisions that will shape their lives and those of their peers, either in or outside of school.

Problem Statement

This study is designed to investigate the extent to which the students seeks to understand the impact of engaging student voice to improve teaching and learning. The results of this study constitutes as an initial step towards the development and improvement of the teaching and learning processes of the institution under study. Thus, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

To what extent can student voice be used as an effective tool in the teaching and learning?

What are students-teachers' perceptions on engaging student voice in improving teaching and learning approaches?

In what ways do students perceive that they can support the improvement of teaching and learning through student voice activities?

Which method/approach to capturing and using student voice is effective in developing teaching and learning?

Research Methodology

This study consists of both quantitative and qualitative research. Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from 4 teachers and 10 students, who were given a questionnaire and interview questions to answer. Added to it, the interview was also conducted with a focus group of 10 students.

The sampling size was determined using purposeful random sampling. This is because the purpose of a small random sample is credibility, not representativeness. A small, purposeful random sample aims to reduce suspicion about why certain cases were selected for study, but such a sample still does not permit statistical generalizations. This article presents the findings based on the qualitative data gathered from the study.

Discussion and Findings

Based on the outcomes from the briefing with students that are involved in the focus group students perception about student voice and teaching and learning were shed. The following are the qualitative data captured from the student voice.

"Is crucial in improving the teaching and learning process. It is helpful for better outcome." [S1FR1]

"It is very important in creating and improving the learning process. As students are the one who learn and main audience, our opinion on how to learn would be the best way to endure success." [S2FR1]

"It is a medium in which students express our thoughts of what we feel and think." [S3FR1]

"Plays an important part in teaching and learning. Students are able to voice out his opinions and teacher will understand better the students." [S4FR1]

"Students are given the right and the opportunity to voice out their preference, making learning more enjoyable." [S5FR1]

"In teaching and learning, teachers and lecturers will be able to learn the most preferable and suitable learning style for their students through engaging student voice" [S1F2R1]

"Is a process by which teachers impart knowledge and learners acquire knowledge." [S2F2R1]

"Student voice can create good learning environment in the teaching and learning process." [S3F2R1]

"In my own opinion, student voice and teaching and learning is where students are given a right or an opportunity to voice out their preference learning style, and their likes and dislikes; making learning more enjoyable and reaching the ultimate goal of studying." [S4FR1]

"Student voice on the other hand, can be said as a medium in which we students express our thoughts of what we feel/think about anything related to education. It's also OUR voice which we use to assist our own learning means. In my opinion, I understand that teaching is the process which takes place in any form of educational institution whereby 'educators' impart knowledge and skills towards 'learners'. And learning is the process coming from the side of the 'learner' as he/she accepts and acquires those skills provided by the 'educator'." [S5FR1]

"I also believe that it is very much beneficial for the teachers as a matter of fact if students get to comment on their teaching and learning process. It would be an opportunity for teachers to rectify issues, methods and perspective that they had followed all this while for the better. Change is always consistent and necessary in order to discover new opportunities and create innovative ideas." [T1IR1]

"The institution as an IB school will surely support the principles behind it for students' voice encourages communication between teachers and students. Comments and feedbacks will serve as a reflective practice in promoting quality learning. It gives benefits not only to students and teachers but also to the whole school community.

This experience changed my perspective about student's role in developing approaches." [T2IR1]

“Student voice teaches us to learn and re-learn new approach for the betterment of the entire school community.” [T3IR1]

“Without being critiqued by others, especially students in this case, there will be no room for improvement and development as well as the ability and necessity to introduce a change”. This would be beneficial also if the comments from the students are constructively done.” [T4IR1]

“Engaging student voice in order to develop relevant approaches to teaching and learning would be a great initiative took by the school authorities as it does not only opens door for new innovative ideas but also acts an agent to understand our students better for the good. Some of us face a hard time trying to figure out why some students don’t seem show any changes despite all the effort. By engaging them in developing approaches to teaching and learning, we could somewhat know what kind of ideas, approaches and methods they are looking at when it comes to teaching and learning process. From there, we could absorb the necessary and acceptable ideas or even tweak it a little in a positive manner to help with the improvement of non-performing students. [T1IR3]

“Engaging student voice practice in evaluating approaches to learning emphasise “student-centred” approach. Student voice teaches us to take initiative through action plans for the betterment of the school community”. [T2IR3]

“Students are the recipient of the teaching and learning and listening to their voice develops student-centred approach. We can always access to students so therefore without any formal meeting, we can always ask them if they understood our lessons through questioning or comment form. [T3IR3]

“In engaging student voice one might take advantage in giving criticism against a teacher therefore, the authenticity of feedback is unreliable” [T4IR3]

“Her teaching approach was much calm and relax. She did not give a lot of work or discussion and she did not force students to learn, she makes learning seems as if something that is fun and relaxing. This approach is my favourite, as I believe we, the students are sometimes really tired of all the classes; it would be nice to have a class that is relaxing and less demanding in workload. [S1IR3]

“I think the good part about the teacher’s teaching was that she did not use the powerpoint slides throughout the entire class, she used a game which made us more interested in what she was talking about. For us being kids, we like playing games in which there are options. We like choosing the right answer and being able to answer things on our own and that is why I like this strategy. [S2IR3]

“In this observation period, I really enjoyed the interaction between the teacher and students and what was taught. I feel like I was able to learn from the video that was played. I checked my understanding through quiz and then afterwards I have discussion with the class and teachers on the activities we have done. To me, this was an efficient way of learning and I really like it. [S3IR3]

“We learned while playing games. We watched a video then answered questions. [S5IR3]

“I would like my teachers to use mostly animation to convey a certain topic and use practical study technique. This is because I am more of a visual and kinaesthetic learner. [S1FR3]

“I personally like questions and answer and having activities outside the class.

Question and answer helps me ensure that I really understand the concepts not just memorising. Having activities outside the class, helps me to pull out the boredom and also helps me understand how important is learning when it is applied to real life situation. [S2FR3]

“An excursion would be best. We need to change our environment condition sometimes our brain absorb things better, for example if we just stay for one style of teaching for too long, we start to get bored. [S3FR3]

“I prefer more on animation, we are more attracted with animations rather than slides. [S4FR3]

“I would like the teachers to integrate more games during class time to make the class more interesting. [S5FR3]

“I would prefer debates as part of the lesson whereby students can debate controversies. This is something different that can encourage students to express their own views and ideas openly and improve their public speaking skills. [S6FR3]

“The best methodology that I would choose as a student is definitely excursions and outdoor activities. [S7FR3]

The research highlighted the clear positive recognition of teachers in the advantages of engaging student voice, both for teacher development and school improvement. It was found generally that teachers perceive that the engagement of student voice promotes self-assessment on their own practice and is as a tool for improving the teaching and learning process. This signifies the possible potential of exploring student voice as a means in reflecting the effectiveness of the approaches, techniques and methods used by the teachers. . However, for some students that are not accustomed with commenting, it is recommended that training on how to give constructive feedback to utilize their comments effectively needs to be facilitated. Proper orientation and additional numbers of participants are suggested to get a wide range of feedbacks. Teachers also cited that through listening to student voice, teachers can reflect, explore and think what has transpired in the classroom and be able to come up with more comprehensive and more appropriate teaching methods that are relevant to the needs and learning styles of the students. Teacher reflection revealed that student voice is beneficial to them, as it exhibits teachers’ improvement in terms of the delivery of a lesson, creating classroom atmosphere and imparting effective strategies and methods. This finding supports teachers’ perception on student voice as an agent for monitoring progress of students where student voice can be a guide in creating practical programmes that will help students to level up their skills and understanding. Teachers specifically cited that student voice can be a springboard in planning for remedial or enrichment programme. For teachers, it is in the art of listening to student voice that some classroom issues can be addressed. As Julia Flutter (2007) mentioned that “the basic premise of ‘pupil voice’ is that listening and responding to what pupils said about their experiences as learners can be a powerful tool in helping teachers to investigate and improve their own practice” (p. 343). In this claim, it encourages the teacher to do two action words: to listen and to respond. Responding to the student voice is somewhat making action that will bring improvement to the teaching and learning.

This highlights another perception which is student voice as a transformational experience for teachers, students and the whole school community. To some teachers, they called it “life-changing discovery stage” because they see that engaging the student voice would be an avenue for them to

reflect their strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, change in their perspective and practice will occur. The study revealed that through student voice, students have realized their vital role in the teaching and learning, it was found generally that they perceive student voice as an approach that can elevate a strong sense of engagement with learning, motivation and opportunities to take part in the improvement of teaching and learning. For students, to have a voice on how teaching and learning is carried out is one way of recognizing their worth as part of the educative process and it boosts the principle of "student-centeredness". However, it is recommended that sample size should not be limited to a small group of students, engagement of a wide range of participants preferably all levels in the MYP regardless of learning performance must be involved and be heard. Some researchers reported that student evaluation can be influenced by class size, by discipline and by lesson that will affect the result of the findings. It can be said that it would be more valid if all students in the class are involved as one size does not fit all. It is also important to note that this study relies on several lines of evidence which involve students' responses to comment form, reflection form and focus group interview. In creating a student comment form, it is recommended to highlight the evidences of learning to support a comprehensive indicator of students' claims. In doing this, it will lessen the tension and apprehension of teachers who are unaccustomed in student voice approach and to address the issue of authenticity of student voice. Thus, establishing a timely and modified comment form will ease the burden of students' load, as some mentioned about the tedious work of commenting. Collaboration from the whole community is recommended to maximize the potential of engaging student voice.

Conclusion

Research has been a functional vehicle in building rapport between teachers and students in achieving a meaningful teaching and learning experiences. Research effort leads to an expansion of knowledge and realizations where it sheds lights into better understanding of current contexts, birthing of new intervention and strategies in the development of teaching and learning and improvement of current practice and policies. As educators of the 21st century learners, it is always a challenge to ensure that we are delivering relevant and meaningful learning experiences and providing opportunities for students to have active participation in the teaching and learning process. A review of the research questions conceived for this study affirmed the aims to discover how student voice may develop effective teaching and learning experiences. The study highlighted that students and teachers perceived student voice as a possible strategy in supporting and developing an approach to improve the teaching and learning process. This study is a springboard to the development of new insights and ideas that hopefully will be acknowledged and implemented in the school under study for me to execute fully the research action cycle.

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