

Student Voice as Regimes of Truth: Troubling Authenticity

Emily Nelson, *Eastern Institute of Technology*

Abstract

Student voice: authentic or contrived? In this essay I argue that authenticity in student voice has been largely conflated with a notion of objective truth. I trouble this view for the ways in which it masks power dynamics in student voice in a quest for truth. Instead I proffer a view of student voice as socially constructed through discourses that act as regimes of truth to open up but also discipline and constrain possibilities for action and identity within student voice initiatives. I 'plug in' this 'student voice as regimes of truth' concept to think with data from a recent collaborative action research project and turn a critically reflexive gaze on the influences dominant discourses of student voice exerted on the practice of participating students and teachers. I argue that this socially constructed view of authenticity offers a generative starting point to open up more socially just possibilities for student voice practice in the middle years

Introduction

The focus of this *Middle Grades Review* issue is 'student voice: authentic or contrived?' It encourages reflection on the kinds of research and pedagogical practice in the middle years that we recognise as 'authentic student voice'. Setting 'authentic' up as a binary with 'contrived' implies that authentic student voice is possible, that with attention to our research methods and the ways in which we engage with students to elicit their unique experiences, and promote their active participation in educational matters pertinent to their interests we will achieve authenticity. I argue that this quest for authenticity assumes an objective notion of truth and contend that this quest for 'objective authenticity' has focused the evolution of the student voice field over the past 30 years. This quest has brought the field temporarily to a point of prizing active and ongoing student participation in youth-adult partnerships focused around educational debate, design and decision-making. Despite many inspiring examples of such active and influential student inclusion, especially in the middle years (i.e., Vermont *UP for Learning Network* and *University of Vermont Middle Grades Institute*), in this essay I trouble an objective notion of

authenticity as a core criterion for student voice. Most specifically I want to divorce authenticity from a notion of objective truth and draw on post-structural theorising (Foucault, 1977) to re-frame it as socially constructed within discourses and saturated with power (Vagle, 2012). The evolution of authenticity has contributed to the development of stabilized prevalent discourses and social practices of student voice that produce what counts as authentic student voice but can function also as 'regimes' that set up certain ideas and practices over other possibilities. The regimes produced 'discipline' what educators, researchers and students recognise and can do as student voice activity. A socially constructed view of authenticity foregrounds issues of power embedded within the 'machinery' of empowerment and promotes a contingent and reflexive approach to student voice. By machinery of empowerment I mean the methods and practices that we design to enact student voice initiatives in schools and in classrooms. By contingent I mean highly context-dependent and emergent through interaction. By reflexive I mean turning our analysis back on the discourses and research and

pedagogical methods we use to problematize how these define what student voice means in practice, constrain what can be practiced as student voice and challenge ongoing power dynamics that might work against the influential positioning for students that we are working to achieve in middle years student voice practice.

The essay is in four parts: firstly, I trace the evolution of authenticity in the student voice field generally, focusing on how the positioning of students has changed over time from subject and objects of research through to actors and contemporarily, influencers with educators. This evolution has constructed what is recognized as 'true' and 'authentic' in contemporary student voice largely within and across five major discourses which will be introduced briefly because these major discourses shape how student voice is conceptualized, recognized and justified. I also show how student voice in the middle years links to the broader student voice field. Secondly, the 'regimes of truth' notion (Foucault, 1977) are introduced in more detail and explore what it offers as a generative notion to promote reflexive thinking about student voice as contingent and socially constructed. Thirdly, I highlight the usefulness of the 'student voice as regimes of truth' concept by 'plugging in' to this concept to think with data from my recent middle grades student voice research (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The research that I draw on brought middle years teachers and their students together in a collaborative action research design to explore what effective pedagogy for the age group might look like from the perspective of students as a starting point for teachers to partner with students in pedagogical decision-making. Finally, I consider implications of the 'student voice as regimes of truth' concept for middle grades pedagogy, linking particularly to the recent critical turn in conceptualising middle schooling beyond the dominance of developmentalism (Vagle, 2012, 2015).

An Evolution of Authenticity in Student Voice

In the first section of this essay I trace the evolution of authenticity as a search for objective truth over time. Within the evolution of authenticity students have been positioned variously as objects, subjects, actors and influencers in student voice initiatives. Authenticity largely has been underpinned by an assumption that "voice can speak the truth of consciousness and experience" (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012, p. 745) if freed "from whatever restrains it from coming into being" (p. 745). In the student voice context the evolution of student voice seems to rest on a view that authentic student voice will emerge if we get student positioning 'right' or if we get our methods 'right', freeing the voicing process from restraints to facilitate an unfettered and ideal expression of student experience and perception.

Early student voice research and pedagogy focused predominantly on consulting students to elicit their perspectives on schooling and learning and authorise these as a contribution to school improvement and reform initiatives (Cook-Sather, 2002) and democratic pedagogies (Fielding, 2004). Students were positioned as 'expert witnesses' of schooling given their unique position as learners (Fielding; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Lincoln, 1995; Mitra, 2009b; Smyth, 2006b). In practice though, despite these democratic and empowerment intentions, consultation practice all too often left students positioned passively as objects and subjects of research (Rudduck, 2007) with little involvement beyond initial consultation (Lundy, 2007). Students were involved in decision-making largely once significant decisions had been made by adults (Brooker & MacDonald, 1999). Positioning students as actors in follow up action beyond initial consultation emerged as an important criterion of authenticity in student voice.

This shift saw increased active student participation in student voice projects to address issues raised as a result of consultation (Cook-

Sather, 2010; Cowie, Otrrel-Cass, & Moreland, 2010; Fielding, 2010). The 'students as researchers' movement, represents perhaps the strongest research practice in this active participation orientation to authenticity in student voice. Student researchers have been involved actively in classroom and school-wide curriculum design (Brough, 2008; Tait & Martin, 2007) pre-service teacher development (Youens & Hall, 2006), improving teaching practice (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014; Nelson & Christensen, 2009) and community-based projects in youth-adult partnerships (Mitra, 2009a).

Despite a proliferation of student voice work where students were positioned as actors beyond consultation, issues of agenda control, or what agendas students were invited to contribute to persisted. Student involvement in decision-making remains constrained largely to safe topics such as toilets and rubbish bins, away from substantive policy decisions on learning and teaching (Lodge, 2008). Greater awareness of power in agenda control has expanded notions of 'authenticity' in student voice to include positioning students as influencers in ongoing educational decision-making in substantive matters with educators that elevate their status in the educative process (Lundy, 2007) and position them as partners with educators. Student/teacher partnerships are promoted as vehicles for 'power sharing' (Mitra, 2008). Where students are afforded such influence, student voice becomes a joint enterprise with "youth and adults contributing to decision making processes, learning from one another, and promoting change" (Mitra, p. 221).

Frameworks to guide student positioning as influencers in partnership with educators have emerged (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Hart, 1992; Shier, 2006). Many of these heuristics privilege student initiation at the pinnacle of various ladders as a way to maximise student influence but others such as Wong, Zimmerman, and Parker (2010) argue for shared student/teacher control. Through the students as researchers movement and an awareness of how decision-

making agendas have been constrained, students have increasingly been invited to participate in 'governance-level' decision-making with educators (Thomson & Gunter, 2007).

Governance-level participation broadens the scope of student influence to include input into and responsibility for decisions in the collective educational interests of peers, beyond influence over their own learning. However, despite increased student participation in 'governance-level' decision-making student participation in matters of pedagogy remain rare (Thomson, 2011).

This evolution of what counts as authentic student positioning in student voice practice has occurred within and across influential student voice discourses that primarily describe and justify the benefits of student voice in distinctive ways. It is to the influence of these discourses and how they make certain activity possible, and 'true' in student voice that I now turn.

Discourses of Student Voice – What Counts as 'Truth' in Student Voice

Discourses consist of statements promoting certain norms (messages about how things should be) and practices that taken together present a constellation of possibilities for how a social practice such as student voice or middle schooling can be talked about and practiced (Foucault, 2002). These constellations form a grid of intelligibility (Foucault, 1980) allowing social actors to recognise and participate in doing, in this case, student voice, in authorized ways. For example in middle schooling developmentalism is a prevalent discourse that foregrounds the unique developmental needs of students who are transitioning to adulthood as a defining reference point for pedagogy. This discourse positions students as 'transitioning' between childhood and adult-hood, coming to terms with physiological changes and developing identity. This discourse of middle schooling makes possible certain ways of being and responding to young adolescent students, but as the recent critical turn in middle schooling counters (Vagle, 2012), developmentalism

precludes or masks other potentially more agentic positioning for young adolescent students and generative approaches to pedagogy.

Discourses also set up the boundaries for what is possible and what is excluded explicitly, or by omission. Perhaps more importantly in relation to the effects of different views of authenticity on student voice, discourses also set up what is possible in certain subject positions; that is how you can be, talk and act as, say, in a particular identity. For example within the subject position of 'student' certain ways of talking, acting and being are acceptable and others are excluded. You can only act within the possible discursive moves open to your subject position; just as in a game of chess a Knight can only make Knight moves, not Queen moves. Student voice exists to challenge and extend the discursive moves for the subject position of 'student' to counter pedagogical traditions that exclude, marginalise and silence students and their perspectives from educational debate, design and decision-making.

Student voice is conceptualized through five main discourses which each conceptualize and justify certain norms and practices in particular ways: (1) student voice as a unique standpoint that only students can generate, based on their direct experience of education as students (as introduced earlier in this essay); (2) student voice as a vehicle to enhance learning and engagement (Ferguson, Hanreddy, & Draxton, 2011) – linked to constructivist theories of learning and findings that show a positive correlation between feelings of identification with and belonging at school through active participation and engagement (Finn & Rock, 1997; Smyth, 2007); (3) student voice as a missing ingredient in effective school improvement and reform (Beattie, 2012; Mitra & Serriere, 2012) given students' positioning as primary stakeholders of schooling; (4) student voice as a vehicle for social justice through preparation for, and participation in democratic pedagogy (Smyth, 2006a) and as addressing international participation rights of childhood (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011) afforded by the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); and (5) student voice as a consumer right to choice and representation (Brennan & Ritters, 2004) linked to current neo-liberal political ideology. These five discourses conceptualize and justify what counts as 'authentic' student voice practices providing discursive possibilities for student and teacher subject positions and design boundaries for research.

Student voice is an integral notion within the middle schooling concept (National Middle Schooling Association, 2010) also and has been promoted with reference to the general discourses of student voice but also in relation to the middle school concept. In the middle years students are identified as ready to "play a major role in their education" with middle grades pedagogy "purposefully empower[ing] young adolescents to assume this role, one that includes self-advocacy" (National Middle Schooling Association, p. 16). Student voice in middle grades pedagogy has been promoted as a way to: construct relevant curriculum through negotiated and integrative curriculum design, inquiry and democratic approaches (Beane, 1993, 1997, 2004; Hyde, 1992). Recent work has linked student voice in the middle years as a way to inform teacher' professional development as middle years' practitioners (Downes, Nagle, & Bishop, 2010; Downes & Toolin, 2009), generate student engagement and promote belonging as well as identification with school (Beattie, 2012; Bishop & Downes, 2008; Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Downes & Bishop, 2008), and as a way to reform schools and address student disengagement in the middle years (Smyth, 2006b, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2001). Cook-Sather and Shultz writing in an adolescent education context set up student voice as a way for teachers to listen to students so that when their concerns change, pedagogy and schooling can change also (Cook-Sather & Shultz, 2001).

In this first part of the essay I have traced the evolution of what has come to count as authentic student voice in terms of important shifts in student positioning over time and the emergence

of five dominant discourses that conceptualize and justify student voice in distinct ways. I have also explored how student voice links to aspects of the middle school concept and purposes of positioning students agentially within their education the middle years.

Student Voice as a Regime of Truth

In the second part of this essay I critique an objective notion of authenticity that appears to have underpinned the evolution of authenticity in student voice by offering Foucault's notion of 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1977) as a generative alternative. Viewing truth as socially constructed foregrounds discourses as socially constructed and power-laden, that promote but also constrain possibilities for being and acting within student voice as a social practice. The discourses constitute, or make, a 'subject' from the possibilities they provide as well as proscribing 'margins of liberty', or the discursive moves available to subjects, such as students in student voice initiatives.

One of the ways in which individuals govern themselves and others is through "the production of truth" (Foucault, 1991, p. 79) through discourses. Certain socially constructed norms, knowledge, and practices become authorized and acceptable, linking truth, and therefore authenticity, with power. These norms and practices within discourses form 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1977), a constellation of statements that define what is true and acceptable within a given social space or activity. Put another way, the discourses communicate what observers would expect to see in relation to certain social practices. Regimes of truth promote certain practices and positioning as intelligible, recognisable and authorized.

I contend that the discourses of student voice function as a regime of truth that promotes certain practices as 'authentic' student voice that can be read through a grid of intelligibility (Foucault, 1980) that the discourses of student voice set up. For example, we recognise adult educators partnering with students to improve

school culture as an authentic student voice practice. Partnering with students challenges their traditional exclusion from educational decision-making and accords them influence with educators. Linking student voice to regime may seem a strange move when the discourses of the field promote increased student influence in educational conversations and decisions with educators as an aspiration would be difficult to reject. Regime is often used pejoratively to indicate something you do not prefer or something powerful that constrains how you can think and act. The norms of the student voice discourse introduced earlier influence how student voice is enacted or practiced (Bragg & Manchester, 2012) and what is viewed as authentic. We recognise student voice when we see it because of what we are told student voice looks like.

However, increasingly student voice commentators call for the need to critique conditions for student voice, examining who is allowed to speak, when, on what topics and where within the broader institutional cultures in which student voice is practiced (Fielding, 2001). Although quests for authenticity have produced valuable and influential student positioning in educational debate, design and decision-making, the search for authenticity as an objective notion masks how power relations operate in producing what counts as student voice. As Ellsworth (1992) reflected, in the title of her seminal student voice work 'Why doesn't this feel empowering?' drawing attention to the ways in which progressive pedagogies, associated with student voice, can mask continuing power dynamics.

In critiquing regimes of traditional pedagogy, student voice promotes its own regime that may become certain (Vagle, 2015) and stultifying over time, working against promoting wider margins of liberty (Foucault, 1988), or possibilities for action for students and educators, which are advocated as a core purpose of student voice. The 'student voice as regimes of truth' concept reminds us that we can shape and critique the discourses that construct us but only if we treat them as socially

constructed and turn our analytic gaze on them reflexively to examine the ways in which they configure power relations.

If an ongoing dialogic interaction (Lodge, 2005) between students and teachers that builds student influence is to succeed, the changes that are instigated as student voice, and the ongoing effects of these, must also be up for ongoing negotiation and critique. Without critical reflexivity (Bragg, 2007) these regimes of truth, enacted as student voice (Foucault, 1977) risk entrenching existing inequalities (Cook-Sather, 2007). Bragg (2007) notes a reluctance in the student voice field to “engage with the shifting power relations that have accorded students their new authority to speak, or to be critically reflexive about the means used to shape and channel what can be recognized as ‘student voice’” (p. 344). The ‘student voice as regimes of truth’ concept can help us to engage with these shifting power relations by placing the student voice discourses under a reflexive analytic gaze. As with Vagle’s (2015) compelling argument that developmental discourses of middle level education, over time have become ‘certain’ and dominant making other possible conceptualisations difficult, so too student voice discourses.

Thinking with the ‘Student Voice as Regimes of Truth’ Concept

In the third section of this essay I ‘plug in’ the ‘student voice as regimes of truth’ concept to put aspects of my own recent student voice research (Nelson, 2014) under a reflexive analytic gaze. I ‘think with’ the concept to suggest how some of the findings illustrate the constraining effects of contemporary student voice discourses. As this primarily is a conceptual piece I limit my description of the study which I have written about elsewhere (Nelson, 2015). I present this reading of data from three angles: firstly, how dominant discourses may drown out student discourses of student voice; secondly how the student voice discourses seemed to engender a vulnerability to others on the part of participating teachers; and thirdly, how

espoused co-construction discourses that characterize authenticity in student voice might also disrupt arrangements that work for students in classrooms in practice.

I drew on the student voice discourses to locate this student voice initiative in classrooms within the student/teacher pedagogical relationship in order to address the rarity of student voice initiatives that involve students in pedagogical decision-making (Thomson, 2011). The research was conceptualized as an overt political move to position students at the centre of teachers’ development as middle grades practitioners, countering generalized characterization of effective middle schooling practice, often without student involvement, as a basis for teacher professional development. Instead teacher professional development in this research was particularized through the co-construction of pedagogy by teachers with students (Vagle, 2012). Student voice was conceptualized as co-construction between teachers and students in interaction drawing on available discourses (regimes of student voice) to construct possibilities for action and enable students to engage as partners with teachers. Three teachers engaged in a collaborative action research project across three terms of a four-term school year to open up decision-making spaces for students in their classrooms and to consult students to inform their thinking around effective pedagogy in the middle years.

Elevating student status and influence *alongside educators* has become one of the dominant norms of authentic student voice within contemporary student voice regimes of truth (Rudduck, 2007) and in middle grades understandings of student voice conceptualized as students and teachers participating in “hands-joined activities, ones that teachers and students work together in developing” (National Middle Schooling Association, 2010, p. 16). This norm promotes a ‘vertical mobility’ (Philo, 2014) for students, advocating that they make educational decisions with teachers as partners, reaching into the governance level usually reserved for educators. In my research, collapsing the

student/teacher hierarchy as a way of elevating student status, in practice worked against developing the kind of influence **students** were seeking. While the teachers and I worked to open up student influence in traditionally teacher-dominated decisions around pedagogy, the students worked to develop increased influence **with each other**. We found that the students were more focused on being known by and coming to know their peers during pedagogical interactions than they were in establishing influence with their teacher.

The following student/teacher interaction illustrates this student emphasis with building student-student influence. The students and their teacher in one research class were reflecting on the efficacy of a paint splodge rating strategy to focus students' reflections on their own learning and share these reflections orally with peers.

Student 13: It's useful like because you don't have to write [reflection] down, you don't have to spend five or ten minutes writing it down and you can share it to everyone else, whereas in your book you don't really get to share it so I thought it was quite useful.

Teacher: Okay so you think it's important to share self-assessment? Why?

Student 13: Um so your class knows how you feel about yourself so um when it comes to judging yourself they can like tell you um [laughs]

Teacher: Student 7 can you add to that?

Student 7: So like your friends can like help you out around the things you said you did bad.

Teacher: Okay so they could remind you next time as well?

Student 7: Yeah.

Teacher : S14?

Student 14: Um I thought it was quite good because um if you like, people in your class can tell you or to help you to try and get a step up, like to another colour [on the paint chart].

The students emphasized how knowing their peers would help them to support each other to improve as learners and to feel they were not alone in the learning process. Time and again in the three classroom action research projects when the students were asked what further opportunities they would like for decision-making influence with their teachers, they reiterated the value of collaborative strategies that would enhance their knowledge of their peers as learners.

In this respect building spaces where students could talk and share their thinking pushed back at the regime of truth around student voice as elevated status and influence with teachers. It introduced a local, student discourse of influence between learners as a student discourse. The oral and collaborative whole class interaction provided opportunities for students to expand their margins of liberty in the subject position of student to include collaborating with peers and building student-student influence as a valued student voice activity. The students' commitment to what came to be known as 'collaborative potential' or the extent to which pedagogical strategies opened up opportunities for students to learn more about and collaborate with each other as learners emerged as an important criterion for effective pedagogy in the thinking of their teachers and in how pedagogy was co-constructed throughout the collaborative action research project.

Initially, as the project researcher, I struggled to 'read' this student collaborative potential

discourse because of the dominance of developing student/teacher influence within the established student voice discourses. I found the student voice discourses were masking my capacity to 'hear' alternatives to 'student voice as elevating student status in relation to educators' (Bragg, 2001; Kroeger et al., 2004). The student voice grid of intelligibility that this dominant discourse set up primed me to read and expect student voice as students wanting greater influence with teachers. I expected the students would be working towards this goal also and this rendered initially the students' preferences for peer influence expressed in the data unintelligible. This is not to say that students might not relish increased influence with teachers, but this research interaction between the students and their teacher, and other similar examples, challenged me to think beyond student voice as elevated student status with teachers to how students' own discourses of student voice might answer back to this dominant regime of truth. I was prompted to consider how students might come to deploy greater influence over what counts as student voice in the student voice field. It also reiterated the value of turning a reflexive gaze on my assumptions and practices within the student voice research and how the established discourses of student voice influenced researcher practice.

This is just one example. Others included the vulnerability teachers expressed in the research for how their practice might be read by other colleagues and school leaders through established discourses of what authentic student voice should look in practice. Even when they acknowledged the value of the learning they experienced with their students in the project, they still wondered how others might view it against 'established' criteria of student voice as one teacher reflects below.

If someone had come in on that [paint chart reflection session], they would have ticked, teacher-directed, because the kids were on the mat and I was there [on a

chair at the front of the class]. Even though it actually wasn't ... because the person coming in wouldn't know all the background work that we have done that was initially voted in by [the students] and all that sort of stuff. They don't know what happened before or what is going to happen next or anything ... What I was running was what the students had planned and wanted, I was just showing, 'right this is what you wanted, here it is, let's go for it', but I was, they were still there [mat] and I was still here [on chair at front of room] and that is what it would have looked like.

For this teacher the fact that she chaired class meetings in the action research project worried her in light of an assumption gained from the student voice discourses and related professional development messages that student voice must be seen to be student-directed at all times. What would colleagues think if they came in to sample her practice for appraisal purposes and saw her leading the student voice class discussion? The disciplinary potential of others' surveillance of her student voice work informed by a canonisation of student voice as student-directed projects kept her uncertain in her student voice work even though her pedagogy positioned students with significant influence over what counted as important in the development of the reflection on learning programme.

Given their 'gatekeeper' status (Rudduck, 2007) much student voice practice is initiated and crafted by teachers or other adult educators. In this respect the methods and ways that student voice is set up and communicated to students by teachers can come to define authenticity for students. In my research students espoused a preference for participating in decision-making with teachers but found the process of enacting

this co-constructed pedagogy in their class programme challenged their views of acceptable pace, teacher/student roles and general conditions for learning. I include some examples from students below.

When the teacher makes up the idea and does it, it doesn't take as long, you get the reflection over with.

I just don't see the point, why should the students create the home learning when teachers can make a perfectly good job of it?

They're the teachers ... because they went to university and they got their degree so they are teachers, that's their job. They come here to teach us and we come here to learn.

For some students as has been found in other research (Cremin, Mason, & Busher, 2011) pedagogical strategies for co-construction, a central norm associated with student voice as partnership, disrupts classroom norms and ways of working that suit some students. This difference between general espousal through consultation and reflection on co-construction enacted in practice raises questions around what regimes of authenticity would students promote as student voice? And whose regimes of truth should prevail in student voice work?

These three examples from teachers, students and myself as the researcher have been read through the 'student voice as regimes of truth' concept. This has enabled the identification of ways in which the dominant messages promoted as authenticity in student voice discourses can also discipline students and teachers and lead, if not challenged, to student voice being a codified set of practices 'done to' students and teachers in ways that promise influence but in practice entrench domination in new forms.

What Might a 'Student Voice as Regimes of Truth' Concept Offer Middle Grades Pedagogy?

Finally in this essay I consider what the 'student voice as regimes of truth' concept might offer middle grades pedagogy. With middle grades education increasingly adopting a critical frame through which to view and critique the tenets that have come to dominate and in some respects, calcify the field, the 'student voice as regimes of truth' concept can provide a vehicle for critical reflexivity where accepted middle grades discourses and practices are interrogated for the ways in which they discipline as well as emancipate the educational possibilities for young adolescent students. When we locate student voice in classrooms between students and teachers within the compulsory education sector of middle level education the notion of 'regime' reminds us to critique practices conducted in the name of student voice, even when on the surface these practices seem to promote influence for students in educational debate, design and decision-making. As Vagle (2012) reminds us "all perspectives (critical included) must remain doggedly committed to turning themselves on themselves" (p. 16). The reflexive potential offered by the 'student voice as regimes of truth concept' to turn student voice discourses on themselves offers the question: how do these practices construct truth and authenticity? If we can socially construct truth, how might we take up students' discourses of student voice, and adopt a recursive approach to pedagogy, making it over and over again with students but also with ongoing troubling of the discourses we draw on for possibilities.

Applying Vagle's reminder we must view authenticity as "saturated with politics, power, struggle and possibility" (2012, p. 18). Current student voice discourses can run the risk of doing student voice **to** students by conceptualising student voice predominantly from an adult perspective. Continued problematizing of voice by recognising the regimes of truth that operate even within a field devoted to dismantling subject position

limitations and practices that work against student influence can contribute to more permeable voice practice that creates space not only for students' perspectives on schooling, learning and their concerns as young people to be reported, but also for their conceptions of what counts as student voice to influence socially constructed notions of authenticity in the field. What counts as student voice to young adolescent students? What regimes of truth do they propose? What opportunities might the 'collaborative potential' criterion of effective pedagogy, central to middle grades pedagogy but subservient to the student/teacher dominant focus open up in ongoing iterations of student voice?

I remain committed to the idea that more student influence in designing and generating middle grades pedagogy is more socially just than less, but I relish the opportunity 'student voice as regimes of truth' concept offers researchers, educators and students, to trouble stable and objective notions of authenticity in favour of recognizing the ways in which these are socially constructed and therefore up for debate. I promote this joint reflexive analysis as a way to produce revitalized social agendas (Adams St. Pierre, 1997) and expanded notions of socially just student voice practice. ❖

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