



Are you really listening? Capturing, measuring and acting on student voice – Presentation notes, QASELCON, 2022, Presenter: Jodie Davis

Why collect student voice?

Disability Standards for Education

Under the Disability Standards for Education, students with disability and their families have the right to be consulted about reasonable adjustments to enable them to participate in education on the same basis as students without disability.

Students with disability and their families have valuable knowledge and experience that can assist education staff to make good decisions. The Standards require education staff to consult with a student with disability, their parent or other associate before choosing and making reasonable adjustments.

To decide on reasonable adjustments for a student with disability, a consultation is likely to involve:

- education staff
- the student with disability
- associates, such as parents, guardians or carers
- specialists or other people with relevant expertise.

Consultation may also involve an advocate where the student or their parents, guardians or carers have sought their involvement.

Building relationships

Engaging in meaningful and effective student voice with students of all ages can contribute to many positive outcomes for schools and individual students. It has been shown to promote engagement among students, improve student wellbeing and student engagement and lead to positive changes within schools as a whole.



It:

- builds a connection and a sense of belonging;
- promotes a sense of being heard and feeling valued;
- creates authenticity – that the school or organisation genuinely want to hear their thoughts and opinions;
- creates a positive environment and a school culture that students feel they are truly reflected in;



- encourages personal and social capabilities and encourages students to become self-advocates, setting them up with skills beyond the school gate;
- increases engagement in learning because they have helped to shape their learning and support;
- creates a collaborative approach where students and teachers create solutions together.

Defining student voice

There are many definitions of student voice, but essentially it is about providing a supportive and comfortable environment in which students can openly express their opinions and beliefs, and in the case of students with disability, their thoughts about reasonable adjustments that will enable them to participate in education on the same basis as students without disability.

These are two definitions often used that clarify the purpose and definition:

- The concept of student voice refers to the expression of values, opinions, beliefs and perspectives of individuals and groups of students within a school.
- It also includes instructional approaches and techniques that are based on student choices, interests, passions and ambitions.

Benefits of increasing student voice

- Research indicates that students who believe they have a voice in school are **seven times** more likely to be academically motivated than students who do not believe they have a voice. (*Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016*)
- Student voice has a positive impact on student wellbeing.
- Feeling heard and valued empowers students and makes students feel safe, connected and supported within their school community.
- Student voice brings a different perspective and can create positive change.

Capturing student voice

When engaging in student voice activities, it is important that you are clear about the main purpose of gathering students' thoughts and opinions. This will provide a focus of how, when and why the information is collected and how the student feedback will be acted upon.

When developing the questions to be asked of students, it is important that the questions cover the full breadth that the school is interested in collecting data on and that it is also broken down into smaller more measurable components. For example, some information will be school specific, while other information may be related particularly to the individual student.

The term 'student engagement' is often used as the overarching name for collecting data, but this is very broad and includes things such as intellectual, emotional, behavioural,



physical and social factors. Therefore, it is important to determine which part of student engagement you are wanting to focus on, what you intend to gain from asking the questions and how you will implement change as a result.

Sometimes it is also important to consider what answers students may give as this will often determine whether you will gain the intended outcome of the survey.

Questions may also need to be able to differentiate responses between different students, classrooms and/or different schools as well as being adjustable to the individual student need.

Some ideas include:

- Student interviews;
- Including students in meetings about their individual plans and adjustments;
- Survey tools;
- Photo library/sound library;
- Story in a bag;
- iPad;
- Drawing;
- Observation;
- Informal conversation;

Student interviews:

- Authenticity is paramount.
- Manufacturing student voice for promotional material.... people know when it isn't real.
- Relaxed environment;
- Keep the setting intimate with only the people required in the room;
- An interviewer who knows the topic and is well researched;
- Being authentic about wanting to hear what they have to say;
- Be prepared that the interview may require additional time and patience;
- Building a rapport with the person being interviewed prior to starting;
- Being flexible in the way you allow the interview to go – be led by the person being interviewed instead of staying rigid in your questions.
- Be prepared that they may not give you the answer you are expecting





- Check in on understanding or rephrase the question as needed or discard the question if it's clear you are not going to get a response.
- Include a peer if they feel more comfortable answering questions with their friends rather than alone.
- Ensure communication needs are considered and support provided as required.

Measuring student voice:

- The question of when to measure student voice is really about how the feedback or survey is intended to be used. For example, if the survey is specific to the individual student, then it would be best to engage in student voice earlier in the school year rather than the end so that the feedback can be implemented into the students' individual plan to benefit them for the maximum amount of time in the school year.
- However, if the survey is broad and to inform changes to school policy or procedures across a longer period of time, then the survey is not as time critical.
- It may also be of benefit to consider measuring snapshots of a cohort over time as a longitudinal study. Longitudinal studies can help establish underlying links, which a one-off survey often cannot do.

Acting on student voice:

- Committing to collecting student voice isn't enough. There needs to be a commitment to act on the findings as well.
- Failure to act on the findings or not follow up with students, means that the value they felt by being asked is ultimately lost as they no longer feel heard.
- When this has happened in the past for students, their willingness to participate in future student voice activities diminishes and their level of trust in the school decline.

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