THE LIMITATIONS, PRACTICAL REALITIES AND CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR STAKEHOLDER VOICE IN SCHOOL SELF EVALUATION

Abstract

The purpose of this working paper is to investigate varying perspectives on the limitations of and practical realities of Stakeholder voice in education and from this, to describe the conditions necessary for stakeholder voice to be more usefully accepted and subsequently applied in schools. As a starting point, the paper deconstructs the often-contradictory concepts of quality in education and how these concepts have managed to influence conceived notions of quality and the development of evaluation frameworks that exist. Leading on from this, the paper provides a review of research relating to the limitations of student and parent voice in education. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion on factors relating to the conditions necessary for stakeholder voice in schools.

Introduction and Background

Parents and students according to Hooge et al. (2012) are the primary stakeholders in education and have been constructed as customers through the advancement of school autonomy and the decentralisation of decision-making to schools in many parts of the world. In fact, stakeholder voice has become an integral aspect of school improvement as schools and teachers are required to for example, raise standards (i.e., student performances/grades), often with the input of key stakeholders (i.e., students and parents). In England for example, there has been a rise in student voice with schools legally required to engage in consultation with pupils (Hall 2017a), and 'parent power' through new governance structures and complaint mechanisms (Ball 2017). In the USA, Ni *et al.* (2017, 4) state:

> With increased pressure on accountability and student achievement, the policy and professional environments of schools have changed dramatically in the past few decades. While a school principal is designated as the formal school leader, other organizational members and external stakeholders also play a significant role in influencing school decisions

There are many positive aspects to stakeholder voice and participatory decision making as reported in the literature. For example, Mitra (2006) suggests that student voice could be another way of not only improving student outcomes but also building bridges between families for school improvement. Student voice and choice also has the potential to prepare students for active citizenship. According to Lightfoot (1986),

> the earlier one begins to practice empowerment the better; it is a good idea to give young people the opportunity for choice, power and autonomy early in their lives to enable them to become increasingly comfortable, wise and sophisticated in its practices (9).

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On the other hand, while stakeholder voice is often promoted as being an empowering process that can enhance the quality of education in schools; in the case of parent voice, Harris and Goodall (2008) state that 'most schools are involving parents in school-based activities in a variety of ways, but the evidence shows that this has little, if any, impact on subsequent learning and achievement of young people' (277). Indeed, the literature on parent and student voice is not uniformly positive (Anderson and Minke 2007) and the inculcation of student voice in aspects of school evaluation such as teacher performance are somewhat contentious (Flutter 2007). In fact, according to Fielding (2001), very often, teachers and other members of a school community do not believe that student voice is important, relevant or appropriate to long held beliefs on the primary purpose of education; that is, to facilitate the attainment of new knowledge and skills required to achieve maximum outputs derived from standardised test scores. This point is starkly illustrated by an interview participant in Brown (2012)

Let me tell you, this thing here in the North they have this thing called *Student Voice*. Well in England, they've even got kids on interview panels…which is absolutely ridiculous, but again a lot of it is politically correct, Ms. Marple. And there's also a lot of people in jobs which are not really jobs, but you know the thing...Oh we could dream this one up or we could dream that one up. I mean, at the end of the day, what do you want schools to do? I mean, schools, like hospitals, should be concerned with either curing the people or educating them, instead of, you know, thinking of Mickey Mouse ideals. The average teacher didn't go in to sit there and think up great thoughts. You went in there to teach children…and that's, I think, a lot of it in the last 20 or 30 years has been lost. The enactment of stakeholder voice not only involves changing fundamental norms, values and practices for teachers (Beattie 2012). It also involves a reconceptualization of apodictic conceptions of quality and the shift towards other conceptions of quality such as *quality as fitness for purpose* and *quality as transformation* (Harvey 1997, Harvey and Green 1993, Harvey and Knight 1996).

With the rise of stakeholder voice that can reside on both sides of the accountability and improvement fault line, the purpose of this paper is to investigate varying perspectives on the limitations of and practical realities of stakeholder voice and from this, to discuss the conditions necessary for stakeholder voice to be more usefully applied in schools. As a starting point, the paper deconstructs the often-contradictory concepts of quality in education and how these concepts have managed to influence conceived and at times, contradictory notions of quality and how they influenced the various modes of stakeholder evaluations that exist. Next, the paper provides a review of research relating to the limitations of student and parent voice in education. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion on factors relating to the conditions necessary for stakeholder voice in schools.

Methodology

Document analysis was used as the research method for this study. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis can be utilized as a stand-alone method and can serve varying purposes such as providing background information and historical understandings. It can also be used for the purpose of 'tracking change and development, and verification of findings from other sources' (30). Atkinson and Coffey (2009) also states that 'we have to approach documents for what they are and what they are used to accomplish' (79). This study included an analysis of

documents on varying concepts of quality as well as research relating to stakeholders voice in Europe and elsewhere. Inclusion of documents was limited to peer-reviewed literature that has been published since the 1990's. However, to triangulate results and to form an overall interpretation of the study, the inclusion of documents was also extended to official government policies and publications produced by international organizations. Documents were initially selected based on the author's prior knowledge of the field. Following on from this, key terms were identified for the search strategy. Using these terms, databases were searched for relevant literature. The initial search resulted in the collation of approximately 200 articles. Thematic analysis was then used to identify patterns (Bowen, 2009) emerging in the literature. Documents were then coded using a data extraction form. This involved the production of a summary outline detailing the purpose, method, conclusion and key themes emerging for each document contained in the sample. This process of analysis allowed the researchers to form an overall interpretation of the study.

Changing Conceptions of quality in education

According to Leu (2005, 4), 'the argument can be made that education systems are always structured around a vision of quality', resulting in the need for a description of quality as it applies to educational evaluation. If quality is acknowledged as a pre–intellectual, abstract idea, by deconstructing the varying concepts of quality that exist among stakeholders, we have a better chance of understanding the meaning of the word and how it applies to evaluation, we have chance of finding a foundation for the best way to blend the determinants of quality as conceived by stakeholders and we have a better understanding of how tension between the various educational stakeholding groups might arise.

Watty (2003, 217) states that 'deconstructing the abstract concept of quality helps to reveal its dimensions and we may better understand how different stakeholders think about quality' (Watty 2003, 217). Moreover, although most parents or guardians want to send their children to a school where the quality of education is good, Macbeath poses the following questions on quality as it applies to education.

> What lies beneath the comment, 'It's a good school'? What meanings are
> attached to the judgement, and what differing forms do meanings take when
> pronounced by a politician, a journalist, an inspector, a pupil, a researcher,
> or a parent recommending their child's school to a neighbour? (2002, 1)

Harvey and Green (1993) and later Harvey and Knight (1996) provide a basis for understanding various judgments relating to comments such as 'It's a good school' by describing five discrete but overlapping conceptions of quality as they apply to education (quality as exceptional, quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformational).

Quality as exceptional
Quality as exceptional is absolute in that quality is achieved if a minimum set of standards are obtained. In theory therefore, a product (school or education system) that has higher sets of

standards quite naturally has a higher quality product. Criticisms relating to quality as exceptional are based on the belief that if standards are set too high, they lead to exclusivity in education. MacNair (1994, 4) states, 'traditional British education treats "quality" as exceptional, with testing and selection systems designed, at each stage, to weed out a majority in order to identify the exceptional minority'.

In relation to the various methodologies ascribed to quality as excellence as it applies to evaluation policy and practice, certain questions arise. Does student performance increase as a result of stakeholder voice? Does school improvement in the form of high-stakes test scores improve as a result of stakeholder voice and what effect do high stakes examinations have on the creation of distributed evaluation in schools? Does examination performance have anything to do with the distributed evaluation and planning culture of a school but rather, other contextual factors in and outside of the confines of the school grounds?

Quality as perfection

For quality as perfection the focus shifts away from input/output to the process and specifications required to meet the desired outcomes and customer needs. Quality as perfection seeks to continually ensure that there are zero defects, i.e. there are no faults by involving all those who have a vested interest in the product or service such as students. Related to the role of students in evaluation and planning, a key construct of quality as perfection is the belief that quality is not a top-down process in which the final output is analysed to identify faults. Rather, quality as perfection embraces the concept of distributed decision making and distributes responsibility in organisations where 'the emphasis is on "democratising" quality by making everyone involved in a product or process responsible for quality at each stage' (Harvey and Green 1993, 16).

In education, quality as perfection is typically associated with benchmarks in which, 'The ISO8402 definition of quality is, "The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs". This view sees quality as satisfying implicit needs and shifts the emphasis back to the producer' (Harvey 2006, 10).

Total Quality Management (TQM) is an example of a benchmark created using quality as perfection. However, contrary to the views of many teachers, TQM philosophies emanate from the belief that introducing TQM philosophy in the education sector 'implies an economisation of that sector and at the same time an introduction of a new set of values that challenge the traditional educational ones' (Bergquist et al. 2005,315). Nonetheless and causing consternation among many teachers, the TQM philosophy might be argued to apply if we accept the contention that the learner is the 'customer' and is a significant part of the process. In this regard, the organisation achieves quality if its products are developed to meet customer/learner needs and as a result, the voice of the customer to improve the product is essential. However, this underlying assumption questions the concept of the learner as a customer and has not gone without criticism in its application to education.

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From an educational perspective, customers are not always students. Other stakeholders, such as parents, inspectors, future educational providers and employers, are also inextricably linked to the process of satisfying educational outcomes in schools. Based on this expansion of the definition of customer in an education system, Bergquist et al. (2005, 316) asks 'whose expectations, demands or needs should be fulfilled? The reality might look that way and, therefore, require a broader overview of which customer needs should be prioritised and which should not'. Indeed, according to Pearce and Wood (2016), due to the pressures that schools themselves are facing, it is important to acknowledge that schools and teachers are significantly limited in their capacity to enact such transformative voice initiatives but rather to that which is most important to various internal and external stakeholding groups such as inspectorates and future education providers.

Quality as fitness for purpose

Whereas quality as excellence is concerned with inputs and outputs, quality as perfection is concerned more with *doing the right things well.* Quality as fitness for purpose can be viewed from two varying perspectives: satisfying customer/leaner needs and realising provider goals. From the perspective of satisfying customer/learner needs, a quality product or service is one that conforms to customer-determined specifications while its providers recognise that purposes may change over time and subsequently require the re-evaluation of the specification. In education, it is used in various ways. For example, if one of the purposes of compulsory education is to prepare students for active citizenship, the question one then asks is: is secondary education providing enough training for students to recognise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities in a balanced manner? According to Harvey and Greene (1993, 18), although requirements may appear to originate with the customer, 'customer requirements or needs are determined by the producer or provider'. Therefore, the concept of the learner as a customer is contested. Harvey and Greene (1993, 18) pose the following question: 'Is the customer the service user (the students) or those who pay for the service (the government, the employers)?' In addition, is the question, 'Is the student the customer, the product, or both?' (Collins, Cockburn and MacRobert 1990 cited in Harvey and Green 1993) pertinent to neoliberal ideologies of wealth derived from knowledge?

In theory, because students are also consumers of education, it is reasonable to suggest that they have some influence in determining the services offered. In reality, however, and in compulsory-level education systems in which the curriculum is primarily determined by external agencies, students and parents have very little say in determining the shape of the final product as it filters through the agents of educational change in the form of policy makers and curriculum specialists. Students do not typically specify the product. The product is specified by the producer, and the student's role as a customer has only a tokenistic nature. In addition, students 'may not have enough knowledge and experience to know what they need in the long term. Thus, they may not be in a position to judge whether their needs are being met' (Harvey and Green 1993, 21).

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Although studies on evaluation policy and practice have found students to be valuable in conducting evaluations, in the case of Ireland, Dillon (2012) found that students did not have the required capacity to be of any significant value to the evaluation process.

> Though there are a number of studies which indicate that students are effective and valuable contributors to evaluation initiatives which place them in such roles, the students participating in this study were limited by their experience of evaluation and could not be expected to imagine these possibilities. (Dillon 2012, 122)

Fitness for purpose also attempts to fulfil the stated objectives that are identified in mission statements, visions, etc. created by the organisation and the consumer/student. According to Van Berkel and Wolfhagen (2002), fitness for purpose is the most undisputed definition of quality because it allows various stakeholders such as parents, students and teachers to define their purpose in their mission statements, objectives and plans. From this perspective, quality is demonstrated by realistically attempting to achieve these objectives. Woodhouse (1999 in Van Berkel and Wolfhagen 2002, 337) states that fitness for purpose 'allows variability in institutions, rather than forcing them to be clones of one another'. Van Berkel and Wolfhagen (2002, 337) state that fitness for purpose 'can define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken'.

However, when an evaluation of quality is undertaken using fitness for purpose as a model for assessing the quality of education provided, two prevailing questions arise: what criteria is used to assess quality and to what extent is the organisation achieving its purpose? The extent to which a school is achieving its purpose normally requires elaborate evaluation frameworks and procedures to assure that quality is maintained and realised. If mechanisms exist to attain quality, then quality can be assured. However, in many jurisdictions it is still unclear who should decide what mechanisms need to be established to assure quality, whether the mechanisms used to assure quality should be internally or externally devised, and who should assess whether the processes (and in many cases, the inclusion of stakeholder voice in the process) are sufficient (or accepted by teachers) to realising the desired outcomes.

Quality as transformational

Quality as transformational seeks to develop and empower the student through the learning process. The concept of quality as transformational is based on the assertion that students are not seen as products, customers, consumers, service users, or clients. Rather, education is 'an on-going process of transformation of the participant' (Harvey, 1997, 138). According to Harvey (1997, 137), 'rather than excellence, value for money, fitness for purpose or defect-free notions of quality… at root, quality is about transformation'. Unlike other concepts of quality, quality as transformation 'arises from the process of change, with a focus on student learning' (Löfström and Nevgi 2007, 313) and 'institutional changes which might transform student learning' (Newton 2007, 15).

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Harvey (1997, 138) believes, 'parents, teachers, educationalists from primary schools to universities in a variety of countries prefer, overall, the transformation view of quality'. Despite the almost universally positive attitude towards the concept of quality as transformational, according to Harvey, when referring to the education system in the United Kingdom, a greater emphasis has been placed on quality monitoring in education through various voices, much to the detriment of the transformational process of learning.

> Quality monitoring in the UK has been beset by overlapping and burdensome processes, competing notions of quality, a failure to engage learning and transformation, and a focus on accountability and compliance. This has been compounded by a lack of trust. (Harvey 2005, 271)

In relation to the various evaluation frameworks that exist to assure and improve quality, Carmichael et al. (2001, 451) state that 'when looked at from the perspective of the individual learner, there is a strong case for student learning to be placed at the very heart of quality systems in all sectors of education, and also therefore in related sectorial quality assurance programmes and processes'. To ascertain and improve the quality of the learning experience, Chung Sea Law (2010, 65) states that 'more attention should be paid to the student experience (Tam, 2001) in general, and student learning (Richardson, 2000) in particular' and as result, quite naturally, the experience of students should be a core component of evaluation and planning initiatives.

Although the frameworks that are used to evaluate the varied concepts of quality rely heavily on quantitative data and *in camera* qualitative observations, trying to evaluate the transformational quality of student learning outcomes over time is a more complex process. Nonetheless, Carmichael et al. (2001, 451) state that 'it is not sufficient to only measure that which it is easy to measure, and that it is in fact more challenging (i.e., "harder") to try to assess the often complex factors involved in the nature of the actual learning event'.

Finally, Watty (2003, 214) asserts that 'stakeholder conceptions of quality may not "fit" only one of the five categories and the Harvey and Green (1993) categories can be viewed as a matrix of quality'. Although Harvey's (1993) concepts of quality have the potential to overlap, they do enable the understanding of how the concepts of quality have managed to influence the development of the various evaluation frameworks that exist. They also illustrate how tensions might arise when engaging various stakeholders such as parents, students and teachers in school evaluation, planning and practice. It is this issue that form the next part of the paper.

The limitations and unintended consequences of Student Voice

As previously stated, student voice has taken centre stage in many jurisdictions (e.g. England and Northern Ireland) and is used for various internal school evaluation and planning activities such as: feedback on school policies; quality assurance, and for staff appointment purposes.

However, student voice has by no means become a commonly accepted feature of School Self Evaluation, particularly among teachers.

Issues concerning the the reliability and validity of student input also exist (Burr 2015). An 'ideology of immaturity' often gets in the way of seeing students as responsible and capable (Grace in Rudduck and Fielding 2006) as their world is steeped in social practices that are labelled as 'childish' and/or 'cultish' (Gunter and Thomson 2007). Indeed, teachers, and others, often believe that they know better, or consider young people to be too immature to make a worthwhile contribution (Lodge 2005). As Comeau (in Glover 2015, 27) puts it,

> One of the difficulties that organisations face in developing children's' participation is the attitude and culture that views children as too young or vulnerable to be capable of being included in decisions making.

Bragg (2007a, 510), for example, gives some examples of some unsatisfactory answers given by primary school students when asked for their voice on what they would change about school: 'We don't like always having to do English and Maths in the mornings, why can't we do it in the afternoon?' and, 'It's too noisy in our class because the radiator makes a noise.'

Furthermore, during the recruitment process for a new teacher, Bragg (2007a, 512) highlights the unrealistic requests or judgments of students as the teacher recalls the answers she received when she asked the students what kind of teacher they wanted to be hired:

> Initially, I get all the standard answers, 'somebody with a sense of humour, kind and pretty', it is like they want a Mary Poppins!

Some students themselves acknowledge student voice as sometimes speaking unrealistically and are accepting of the traditional power structures in schools. For example, when asked about the level of input students have in to 'things like teaching and learning and the curriculum', a secondary school student in Keddie's (2015, 239) study admitted that it is probably best that students do not get much of input into certain areas:

> If we did, then we wouldn't have no lessons. So, I think it's a good idea we don't have much say into that!

For some teachers, the lack of credibility of student voice could stem from their disappointment with, and disapproval of elections to student councils. According to a teacher in PérezExpósito's (2015, 363):

> No matter how much you explain to them that it (the elections for the student representatives) has to be an electoral process, and what generates the votes are the proposals, they (the student candidates) do the same (as in politics): they give a candy (to the students), promises that are unrealistic…illogical things…we always fall in the absurd.

It is therefore unsurprising that teachers can be reluctant to engage with student voice if they are presented with unrealistic and trivial requests and suggestions, and from students that they may consider not to be taking the democratic process seriously. As Leren (2006) points out, if a student council's primary concern is for the presence of a drinks machine in the school canteen, for example, the lack of motivation among staff to facilitate a democratic school is

understandable. As stated by Devos & Verhoeven (2003) in reference to Guba and Lincoln (1981) 'human behaviour is mediated by the context in which it occurs' (406).

Further limitations of student voice also stem from the actual voice being spoken. Gunter and Thomson (2007) for example, point out that some voices speak louder than others. Some students may struggle to articulate themselves using appropriate language and may be concerned about how their 'contributions' will be perceived by teachers (Hall 2017b), and the more self-assured and articulate students may dominate consultative conversations and be more readily 'heard' (Rudduck and Fielding 2006). According to McIntyre *et al*. (2005), student voice could therefore inadvertently serve as a 'dividing practice' that segregates confident and articulate students from the rest. Keddie (2015) asserts that such 'selective listening' is because 'we wish to hear' the voices of certain students. This mediated form of selective bias is described in Robinson and Taylor (2012, 38) who found that certain groups of students are sometimes invited and/or selected to participate in projects that seek student input:

> It just came naturally to choose who to be involved, it's what we do, we use our judgment to choose who we think is the most suited (secondary school teacher).

> I suppose we didn't really question the fact that staff chose us to be involved, that's just what we're used to in school (secondary school student).

Robinson and Taylor (2012) point out the fact that neither staff or students, questioned such a selection process and a 'taken-for-granted' mode of selective bias was as cultural norm that existed between teachers and students. Keddie (2015), however, points out that it is not only teachers, or adults, who work to maintain these power relations, but students also. Either way, the concept of 'student voice' does not allow for all students to speak and to be heard.

It is unlikely that all staff in a school will be in favour of increasing student voice (Robinson and Taylor 2007). The literature puts forward many reasons why teachers are against student voice, with many raising concerns about the practicalities of implementing stakeholder voice. Issues such as time constraints are regularly cited as preventing teachers from engaging in student voice. Other reasons may include management issues when there are too many students (Lewis and Burman 2008), issues of space, architecture, resources, and timetabling (McIntyre et al. 2005). Woolner et al. (2007) also suggest that there may be problems with consulting students about school design because they will inevitability be moving on as they progress through the system, leaving school staff in a better position to give more balanced, long-term views of needs.

Some teachers also appear to be somewhat dismissive of various conceptions of student voice processes, and defensive about how they consult students in their everyday practice. Cooper and McIntyre (1996)[1] point out that teachers in the absent of formal mechanisms of engagement quite frequently take account of students perspectives as part of their everyday classroom practice. This is evident in the following comments of some teachers, who are reluctant to engage in student voice at a formal level:

> but I listen to children all the time anyway! (Bragg 2007a, 509).

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[1] Pedder

> I give them the rules, but I explain to them, and if there is any problem, if there is any inconformity, we talk about it. But I give the reasons. It is not that we do what I say, but 'look boys this is the reason' (Pérez-Expósito 2015, 361).

Other teachers, however, do not entertain the idea of student voice and are thoroughly opposed to it:

> Sorry kids, you are not the authority in the classroom. Me Teacher. You student. Me Teach; You Learn. End of discussion. Education is not a business. You are not my customer. My classroom is not Burger King. You do not get to have it your way. Courtesy and respect does not extend to their ideas, which may or may not be given a hearing depending on the instructor's preferred teaching style, and which may be summarily dismissed if they are judged to be beside the pedagogical point. Treat them as human beings with inherent dignity by all means; but don't treat them as sages before the fact (New York Times in Burr 2015, 31).

Teachers may also be concerned about student voice due to the possibility of receiving unanticipated (and sometimes unwanted) messages (Sellman 2009), what might be referred to as 'uncomfortable learnings' (McIntyre et al. 2005). Ferguson et al. (2011), for example, found that several teachers were surprised by students expressing negative thoughts about teachers and classrooms. Students too are aware of the consequences of voicing negative feedback:

> They might get offended, because it's not nice if you say, like, 'Our lesson is rubbish' – they'll get upset about it (Rudduck and Fielding 2006).

On the other hand, while teachers may be anxious about receiving negative feedback from students; arguably, even more, worrying for them is how student feedback positions them in relation to other teachers. Bragg (2007a, 508) describes students getting used to the flexible approach of their teacher, and then reacting badly to their new teacher's methods, leaving all involved upset and angry, and in the teacher's case, 'demoralised'. The old teacher's pedagogy had constructed the new teacher as a 'problem,' or even as 'incompetent'.

How teachers are perceived by their students and colleagues is important to them, and their self-efficacy, and can have a damaging impact if this is not in high regard. For example, a teacher in Demetriou and Wilson's (2010, 59) research admitted: 'I am sensitive to how students and staff perceive me, and this affects my relationships with them. There is a fear among teachers that loosely bound student evaluations may therefore merely be popularity contests (Zabaleta, 2007). It is probably unsurprising, therefore, that some teachers admit to engaging in student voice projects as a 'PR exercise' to counter what they perceive to be as their negative reputation amongst students (Bragg 2007b).

According to (Mitra 2008), teachers are used to being in control. However, there is a concern that student voice will undermine the authority of teachers and fundamentally change historically deep-rooted power relations in schools – the argument being that too much of an emphasis on student voice could have a negative effect on the totality of stakeholder engagement; that is, the voice of the teacher is diminished (Flutter 2007). This perspective

resonates with Whitty and Wisby's (2007) who felt that it was ironic that in some instances, students were being offered more say in decision-making than teachers. Indeed, radical conceptions of student power would appear to be in direct conflict with the conventional notions of teacher professionalism (Whitty and Wisby 2007) and in direct conflict of stakeholder coexistence. The re-professionalisation of teachers, via market principles that aim to raise standards via tighter accountability, signifies a mistrust of teachers' professional expertise and has generated a sense of powerlessness and high levels of uncertainty and anxiety according to Keddie (2015). In this current accountability policy context, it is therefore understandable that teachers may be wary of students being used as a potential source of criticism (MacBeath et al. in Roberts and Nash 2009). For example, in England, where student voice is perhaps more widely institutionalised, what students say is sometimes used as evidence to criticise teachers (Cook-Sather 2006).

Of all the issues teachers may have on the purpose and function of student voice in schools, being evaluated and being held accountable based on the opinions of students is arguably a teachers' greatest concern. As part of the quality assurance process, Page (2017[2]) notes the prevalence of 'learning walks' in English schools. Page (2016)[3] describes a learning walk as senior school leaders or their delegates walking along corridors and going into classrooms for short periods to observe practice. Learning walks are unannounced and can happen at any time. During these 'drop-ins,' students are involved in the evaluation process, with their feedback informally informing the judgment of the senior leader (Page 2016). During guided tours of schools as part of research into performance management in English schools, Page (2015), experiencing first-hand how learning walks operate, noted how students were used to senior managers engaging them in conversation about their learning. This was also evident in the following comments from two primary and secondary headteachers.

> I do walk around the school quite a lot, mainly because I like to be involved with the children, so I'll sit and talk to the children and you do pick up - the children here are very vocal (laughs) and we do encourage that (Page 2015, 1041).

> They tell me what's going on. I don't ask (about teachers) but they will tell me— I say I don't ask, I would go through the subjects and say 'ok, English: your target is C, currently you're on a D, are we going to do it?' Sometimes they say 'no' and I say, 'why is that' and they say, 'I need some help'. Sometimes they say, 'I'm going to do it' or 'I'm going to get a B' then I say, 'who's your teacher' and that's when they will tell me things (Page 2015, 1042).

Teachers are aware, however, who learning walks are aimed at observing and monitoring, and how powerful student voice has become in evaluating them as professionals:

> They're checking to see if I'm teaching…They try to say they're checking the students, but you know they're checking the teacher (Skerritt 2017, 56).

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[2] BJSOE [3]
emerald

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While teachers may, therefore, appear to be in charge, and at a superficial level they are, at a more profound level it is students who are in control (Smyth 2006a). Student voice, particularly in evaluating teachers, can be seen as a way of disciplining teachers (Bragg 2007b) as students become unwitting agents of government control (Fielding 2004a[3]). Here, the voice of the student becomes the voice of the customer, disciplining the teacher and deepening the accountability and responsiveness of teachers (Fielding 2001). Even at a broader level, Mitra (2004) notes that students can serve as an accountability mechanism during teacher meetings as their presence alone can alter the atmosphere of meetings, with reform-resistant staff less likely to show disdain in their presence. In any capacity, it is clear therefore that student voice, as much as it is to be celebrated, brings with it some limitations and some negative consequences for teachers who may be evaluated by the voices of students whom they may not be appreciated by.

The limitations and unintended consequences of Parent Voice

Much like student voice, parent voice is often championed as an empowering process that will improve standards in education. Parent empowerment refers to the parents' role in exercising influence within a school, typically through decision-making forums, and usually affords parents some degree of authority and power (Bauch and Goldring 1998). In England, for example, parent power has been promoted as a solution to educational ills (Leaton Gray 2013). According to Whitty and Wisby (2007) however, we need to be just as critical to both student power and parent power. There are of course, in the absence of clearly defined evaluation frameworks, many perceived limitations to parent voice in education. Common teacher barriers to increased parental involvement include a lack of time, institutional atmosphere and teacher attitude, and a fear of criticism (Shearer 2006), and more extremely, fears over potential decreases in the professional status and general wellbeing of teachers (Addi-Raccah and Ainhoren 2009).

According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002), teachers may avoid involving parents because they lack practical support, or in the case of an inexperienced teacher they may give up if initial attempts are not immediately successful, while an experienced teacher may be reluctant to involve parents if they have had previous negative encounters. A parent's attitude may also be dependent on their own past experiences with schools and schooling (LaRocque et al. 2011). Furthermore, they may be discouraged due to perceptions that their children may be put into a vulnerable position if they take a critical stance on school policies (Sliwka and Istance 2006), or if they feel that they lack the resources to make their voices heard (Tveit 2009). Many parents are also constrained by work commitments and childcare difficulties (Harris and Goodall 2008). These barriers may also be intensified in schools that find it difficult to get parents to serve as governors (see for example Ranson et al. 2005; Xaba and Nhlapo 2014). In England, for example, James et al. (2014) point out that recruiting secondary school parent governors can be somewhat more difficult than in primary schools and suggest that it could be especially difficult in disadvantaged settings. This also appears to be the case in Ireland, where although

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[3] New wave.

board members can fill a variety of duties, there are also issues surrounding the capability of schools to form a Board that has the capacity to carry out all of the required duties of School Boards. As stated by an inspector in Brown (2012)

> And there is a problem though, and I don't think anybody could deny that, and that is the problem that they are a voluntary board and particularly in areas of disadvantage. It is difficult for schools to get a correctly constituted board. It's difficult for them to get people, certainly from the locality, who would have the capacity and the willingness on a voluntary basis to do the work that needs to be done. So, there is a building capacity in relation to Boards of Management and volunteers as well.

For parents that do engage with schools and are included in the decision-making process (e.g., being a school governor), like with student voice, not all voices are heard to the same effect. Vincent and Martin (2000), for example, report that it can be difficult for any controversial parental views to get a hearing, while some parents may only attend meetings for their own self-serving ends.

An implicit assumption in the literature is that stakeholders hold similar conceptions of what counts as parental involvement, but this assumption is problematic (Barge and Loges 2003). According to Lawson (2003), parents and teachers' perceptions of the meanings and functions of parent involvement are different. Baker (1997a, 1997b) also argues that teachers and parents differ in how they perceive parental involvement, with teachers taking a narrower view of parental involvement (e.g., school-home contact) and parents taking a broader view (e.g., attending and participating in school activities that may for example, include teacher evaluations). At a fundamental level, Hornby and Lafaele (2011, 45) suggest that 'parents and teachers may also differ in their understanding of the relationship between schooling and education:

> If education is largely about schooling then logically it is teachers that possess the greatest knowledge, skills, power and expertise. If however, schooling is merely a part of education, then there is a clear shift in power and expertise towards parents…To put it succinctly, 'Should school teachers educate children while parents humbly support the schools? Or … Are parents the main educators of their child, while schools supplement home-learning with specialist expertise?'

Further limitations may be based on the ability of parents to effectively contribute to school decision-making, or at least overcome the negative perceptions school staff may have of their level of competence. In Italy, for example, Dozza and Cavrini (2012) conclude that parents do not appear to have a clear understanding of what constitutes teacher competency, the classroom climate, the organisational culture of the class and the school itself. In more extreme cases, such as in South Africa, one of the significant challenges is the illiteracy rate of parents involved in school governance (Duma 2013). As one primary school principal explains:

> The language there is, you know, the legal language issue…and as is wellknown, parents are by and large not educated or versant with legislation, while the

> language is difficult. To start with, as a principal, it's difficult for you to understand fully. So, it becomes even more difficult with the parents (Xaba and Nhlapo 2014, 430).

Within a discourse of 'partnership', the locus of power changes (Barge and Loges 2003) and just like with student voice, teachers are wary of the potential parent voice has to undermine them and hold them more accountable. As Inglis (2012) notes, the balance of power has shifted from professionals to teachers. Speaking in an American context, Bulkley (2005) refers to some schools as providing parents with means to express their dissatisfaction through greater voice, and in England, teachers have raised concerns about parents becoming 'more aware' of educational issues, with schools less likely to 'automatically back a teacher up' due to greater accountability to parents (Moore et al. 2002). As one headteacher puts it, 'parents are at our throats' (Ball 2016, 1053). With parents gaining more confidence in utilising their 'rights', they may pose a threat to teachers' professionalism (Crozier 1998). For example, Dor and RuckerNaidu (2012, 253) compared the attitudes of teachers in the USA and Israel towards parent involvement and found that:

> The teachers mentioned parents who questioned the teacher's authority and professionalism. In some cases, parents do not trust the teacher's judgment, and this leads to inappropriate, contemptuous behaviour toward teachers. Being exposed to these kinds of reactions may cause tension and insecure feelings among the teachers.

Greater reservations, tensions, and challenges were expressed among the Israeli teachers, however (Dor and Rucker-Naidu 2012). Previous research from Israel by Addi-Raccah and Ainhoren (2009) indicates that teachers' least favoured school context is one in which parents are empowered more than them. Addi-Raccah and Arviv-Elyahiv (2008, 403) also report that 'on the whole, the teachers expressed concern and distress about parents' increasing power and control over their work and practices'. The comments from Israeli teachers can, therefore, be very insightful in terms of how parent voice can be damaging to teachers' sense of professionalism: 'It is an invasion of our privacy. Parents come to school and criticize our work. They can do whatever they want' (Addi-Raccah and Arviv-Elyahiv 2008, 403).

> I punished one of my pupils and told him he couldn't leave the class during the break because of his behaviour. Then I got a phone call from the child's mother telling me that I obviously don't know how to control her son and that she forbids me from punishing him in any way (Dor and Rucker-Naidu 2012, 254).

Consequently, teachers who feel insecure in meetings with parents, or who worry about possible threats to their professional expertise tend to keep a distance when communicating with them (Westergård 2007). Reflecting on past experiences where 'parents could come in and take pupils out of detention', a deputy headteacher in Martin and Vincent's (1999, 142) research, who admitted to previously feeling insecure and undermined, explains his school's current stance on parent involvement:

> Before (under the previous headteacher) parents did have the upper hand somewhat. (The current head) is certainly into accountability ... we are all very

> much accountable to parents in terms of exam results and in terms of whatever
> the pupils require. But I think we, that's as far it goes. We like to make sure they
> know their role and we don't like them to interfere…We are not into
> consultation. Certainly no collaboration…If you like it, fine, if not you can go
> and that is your choice…Certainly that is the attitude we give.

Research from Norway reports that teachers may try to limit the influence of parents by emphasising their own professionalism, thus leaving parents with the role as supporters (Bæck 2010). In the UK, Crozier (1999, 225) reports that parents' respect for teachers' professionalism was considered to be very important to teachers, A common response from teachers was that parents should keep their distance and know their place, just as they themselves did with regard to other professionals. As one Year Head contends,

> again, it comes down to my professionalism. I'm a great believer in this, I mean
> at the end of the day should people have a greater say in the treatment by the
> doctor?...I suppose they have an input and I've got absolutely no objection to
> that whatsoever. But there's very few people that would actually want to be in
> the doctor's place, making the doctor's decisions…(But) at the end of the day
> 'everybody, anybody is an excellent teacher' but they wouldn't put themselves in
> that situation as a doctor, or as a solicitor etc.

More recent research from England also found that teachers tended to assume authority on educational matters whilst parents played a supporting role or acted as passive receivers of information. In the majority of conversations between teachers and parents, the flow of information was predominantly from teachers to parents, with teachers selecting the topics for discussion, deciding who would speak, and focusing on the knowledge that only they possess (Bilton et al. 2017). Indeed, the literature shows that teachers do approve of parent involvement once it does not relate to their professional work in the classroom (Addi-Raccah and ArvivElyahiv 2008). However, Ule et al. (2015) explored parental involvement in the educational trajectories of children in Europe and found that parents not only realise that the future of their child depends on the work of the teacher but also to a great and growing degree on parents as co-educators, meaning that teachers' classroom expertise may be called in to question:

> Some parents suggest that teachers should adopt a more individualized
> (teaching) approach, taking the individual personality of students into account;
> for example, one Italian parent proposed that: 'Teachers should change their
> methods: sometimes it is too schematic and too much based on the assumption
> that pupils are part of general categories. They should try to see pupils according
> to their way of expressing themselves (Ule et al. 2015, 343).

This understandably can be threatening for teachers, and is unlikely to receive a warm reception from them as alluded to in the following the following teacher comments:

> What I would not want is parents coming in and actually saying, you know, 'he's
> not teaching that lesson right (Crozier 1999, 225).

> We know our subject, and we know what the exam boards require and I think, hopefully,
> we know the best way to teach (Crozier 1999, 226).

THE LIMITATIONS, PRACTICAL REALITIES AND CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR STAKEHOLDER VOICE IN SCHOOL SELF EVALUATION

At a wider level, the research literature is limited on how parents' influence interacts with principals' decision discretion (Ni et al. 2017), or how principals perceive school governance challenges (Xaba and Nhlapo 2014). However, studies do indicate that more conflicts arise between school leaders and principals in schools where parents exert strong influence on school matters (Addi-Raccah and Ainhoren 2009). For example, research from America suggests that principals tend to view teachers' influence as positively associated with their own while other stakeholders' influence were weakly related with principals' own influence in most decision areas(Ni et al. 2017). Research from Australia also suggests that a significant number of principals do not consider parents to be well-equipped to be active participants in school governance, regardless of socio-economic context (Povey et al. 2016). Ni et al. (2017) also suggest that the low level of parent influence in wider school areas may be reflective of parents' limited knowledge or access to information. For Gordon and Seashore Louis (2009), it may be that in schools that are doing well academically, principals may feel less compelled to bring in other stakeholders such as parents for direction since they might contend that external influence could steer them off course. Much like student voice, therefore, it is clear that parent voice, for all the potential benefits, brings with it various limitations but also challenges from teachers and principals who may feel that their own voice, drawing on their professional expertise, is more valuable to the school decision-making process than parent voice.

Discussion and Conclusion

A common theme in the literature is that student voice needs to be dialogic. Lodge (2008) argues that dialogue is the only form of student voice that allows for the presence and participation of young people. Fielding (2004b[4]) also argues strongly for a dialogic model of student voice work in schools and contends that student voice must involve 'speaking with rather than speaking for' young people. In this approach, young people are viewed as active participants in their own learning as dialogue requires people to be engaged in conversations that build on each other's ideas, to be open to new ideas and ways of thinking, and to be honest (Lodge 2005). These stipulations, but especially the requirement for honesty, is dependent on a climate of trust (Lodge 2005). According to Baroutsis et al. (2016), there must be active 'listening' by all parties for effectiveness, and Robertson (2017) suggests that voice could be understood in terms of bodily presence and text as opposed to exclusively verbal explanations. This, therefore, means that voice does not literally need to be spoken, but that it involves students being consulted through various means. This would certainly help mitigate limitations to do with student confidence.

According to Smyth (2006b), spaces of leadership from which young back can speak back in relation to what they consider to be important about their learning are needed. According to Smyth (2006b, 282), such leadership involves:

- Giving students significant ownership of their learning in other than tokenistic ways

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[4] Transformative

- Supporting teachers and schools in giving up some control and handing it over to students
- Fostering an environment in which people are treated with respect and trust rather than fear and threats of retribution
- Pursuing a curriculum that is relevant and that connects to young lives
- Endorsing forms of reporting and assessment that are authentic to learning
- Cultivating an atmosphere of care built around relationships
- Promoting flexible pedagogy that understands the complexity of students' lives
- Celebrating school cultures that are open to and welcoming of students' lives regardless of their problems or where they come from

Furthermore, Rudduck (2006, 142) constructs a set of basic guidelines for policy-makers in schools that help to define specific conditions in which student consultation can flourish:

- Re-assuring teachers, pupils, parents and governors that consulting pupils and strengthening their participation are recognized nationally as legitimate moves
- Building support among teachers (who may be sceptical) by presenting evidence of the positive outcomes of consultation
- Being sensitive to the anxiety experienced by teachers who have not before consulted pupils about teaching and learning
- Ensuring that other policies and initiatives are in harmony with the values that underpin pupil consultation
- Making time for consultation and for developing pupils' and teachers' confidence and competence in handling consultation
- Ensuring that consultation is pursued through a range of avenues and not seen as something simply for a school council
- Giving pupil voices a central place in school self-evaluation
- Ensuring that newly appointed teachers understand the potential of consultation and feel confident about developing it

For successful parent-school relationships, the principal is the key individual (Rapp and Duncan 2012). Barr and Saltmarsh (2014), for example, argue that whether parents feel welcome or unwelcome in the school community is significantly shaped by the ways inclusive leadership is exercised by the principal with and on behalf of parents. A school culture of trust is also significant for fostering collaboration among school staff and with the greater community as teachers working in a supportive environment will be more likely to provide parents with information (Gordon and Seashore Louis 2009).

We should, however, be cautious of one size fits all interventions for supporting parental engagement because not all parents are the same, have the same needs, face the same barriers or share the same conceptualisation of parental engagement (see Goodall and Montgomery 2014). According to LaRocque et al. (2011, 118):

> It may be more helpful to parents if teachers request specific forms of involvement, by describing exactly what parental expectations are. In doing so, teachers should be

attentive to logistical barriers and perhaps cultural considerations when conceptualizing the varied ways in which parents can become involved.

LaRocque et al. (2011) suggest a variety of ways in which schools can address barriers to school involvement and participation:

• Addressing emotional barriers: In addition to the teacher sharing expectations of the students and their families, teachers could also encourage parents to share their expectations of the teacher. With regular interactions and the teacher's encouragement, parents can begin to feel more comfortable and confident in the school setting.

• Addressing cultural differences: Having some understanding of families' visible and invisible cultural nuances can go a long way in helping schools find something of value in families. Visible cultural nuances include facets such as language or clothing; invisible culture includes facets such as communication style, status, or imbedded values.

•Addressing physical barriers: schools can facilitate parents being able to physically attend school activities. It may be as simple as scheduling parent–teacher conferences to accommodate the schedules of the family. If teachers provide a variety of meeting times, there is a greater likelihood that parents will find a time that suits their schedules or if schools provide childcare or suggest alternate locations for meetings, those parents for whom these types of issues constitute barriers will be better positioned to being able to physically attend and meet with teachers. For school-based activities, school buses could also be used to pick up parents before meetings and return them to bus stops near their homes afterwards.

•Addressing language barriers: teachers should be conscious of the language they use so it is not too academic, scientific, or abstract. Teachers could use a variety of means of communication when communicating with parents, such as translating newsletters. In addition, oral communication (in person or by phone) may be preferred to written communication as it allows for immediate clarification in case of misunderstanding. Translators could also be used when necessary.

Murray et al. (2014) also suggest addressing barriers by soliciting parents' ideas on ways to overcome work and schedule-related problems, and by implementing more reliable and timely methods of communication (e.g., utilization of social media or texting). Bilton et al (2017) also recommend that meetings be held more regularly and on a less formal basis. This would foster trusting relationships and reduce the amount of 'cautious' talk, allowing parents and teachers to focus on educational matters. Fewer meetings scheduled on any given day, with more time allocated for each conversation would also reduce time pressure on teachers and facilitate genuine, open-ended dialogue (Bilton et al. 2017).

THE LIMITATIONS, PRACTICAL REALITIES AND CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR STAKEHOLDER VOICE IN SCHOOL SELF EVALUATION

Drawing on 'Epstein's Model of School, Family, and Community Partnerships', Smith et al. (2011) give some examples of innovative strategies that have been used in some American schools to attract hard-to-reach parents. Strategies included, at a basic level, schools offering incentives to get parents to bring their children to school and providing parenting classes, before, and the schools then making home-visits, sending material home translated in native languages, using translators in schools for meetings etc. At a more advanced level, to get parents involved in decision-making and governance, parent focus-groups were held to shape school policies, or parent surveys were issued to gauge satisfaction and to plan new activities. As one principal explains,

> We don't just collect information and ask parents a few things for the sake of it, we actually use it and make changes to the program based on it, and parents see that their input is taken into consideration, and so they're more apt to give it when we ask for it (Smith et al. 2011, 84).

To achieve collaboration and exchanges with community organisations, schools were partnered with community organisations that could provide services, training, and opportunities to parents (Smith et al. 2011). My working through different levels, starting with and getting it right at the basics, schools can progress to more advanced stages of parental involvement. As McKenna and Millen (2013) contend, parent engagement must develop over time and not through quick-fix, one-shot seminars or workshops, and must be cultivated and sustained via students, parent and educator interactions and the environment. According to LaRocque et al. (2011, 120), there are many different stakeholders need to play a role in forming a successful parental involvement program:

- School administrators can facilitate the development of a parental involvement committee
- Teachers can receive professional development in communication skills necessary to work with families
- Colleges of education can include the teaching of how educators can successfully include parents in education
- Support networks can provide the forum for parents to motivate each other
- Students can play a role in getting their parents excited about school happenings
- Businesses and community organizations can provide financial and service support so that parents, teachers and students can spend time together. Through two-way communication, the roles and expectations can become clearer

What might be particularly useful for facilitating improved stakeholder voice is Ravn's (1998) model of 'Joint Acting', a process of enabling all education stakeholders to share ideas in an environment of mutual respect, that ensures a logical, reasoned communication process.

According to Ravn (1998, 377), 'Joint Acting ensures that no single party continuously determines the ideas that form the basis of discussions or actions in education'. It recognises four fundamental functions, each of which can best be explained by questions related to patterns of interaction:

- The expressive function: what opportunities exist for the people involved to express themselves? Is there time for everyone's ideas to emerge?

- The social function: what opportunities exist for enjoying a common experience? For people getting to know each other? To take planned action? To feel a sense of belonging?

- The informative function: what opportunities do people have to exchange sufficient and high quality information on equally valued terms? To generate common and complementary knowledge? To share useful information with other educators and parents?

- The controlling function: what are the opportunities for the people involved to equally influence the proposed plans? (Ravn 1998, 377).

Joint Acting requires various ways of meeting and making decisions about education, and requires that everyone understand and agree upon four key areas (Ravn 1998, 377): content (the focus of parent-teacher discussions, which must be significant to the participants i.e. children's learning), structure and organisation (the ways that meetings and consultations are conducted, to ensure dialogue and mutual assistance), intentions and possibilities (why particular topics are discussed, decisions are made and actions are taken), and benefits (who gains from the interactions and partnership activities).

In conclusion, to facilitate effective stakeholder voice, a supportive and non-judgemental environment based on the transformational aspect of quality in the form of mutual trust and respect between teachers and students needs to be established and maintained so voice can be a beneficial, worthwhile process for all involved. For teachers, they need student voice to help them to improve practice, and not to be used against them. They need to be encouraged and equipped to the point that they do not feel inhibited about providing parents and students with the opportunity to utilise their voices (Lewis and Burman 2008). However, for deep rooted notions of quality in education, being able to 'see' young people differently (Rudduck and Fielding 2006) is a difficult task; hence why student voice needs to be conducted in a benevolent manner with cleary defined and above all, transparent frameworks for engagement. Finally, regardless of the evaluation methodologies and the various roles of stakeholders in schools, the inclusion of parents, students and other members of the school community largely remains absent from any form of systematic and transparent school evaluation activities. It is no wonder therefore that this has resulted in varying conceptions of the role of parents and students in evaluation and as a result varying and at times, unintended outcomes arising from parental and student engagement in education.

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