

Listening to Students' Voices in Mathematics Education

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The essence of the demand for freedom is the need of conditions which will enable an individual to make his own special contribution to a group interest, and to partake of its activities in such ways that social guidance shall be a matter of his own mental attitude, and not a mere authoritative dictation of his acts. (John Dewey)

In many tertiary institutions, mathematics education staff teach courses from early childhood education through to professional development courses at Masters level. Similarly, research into teacher education processes spans these contexts. Common principles that underpin this work include staff willingness to be responsive to students' needs. This symposium focuses on the importance of listening to students' voices in mathematics teaching and research – no matter how old students are.

The “voices” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 7) in the 3 following papers are those of primary, secondary, and tertiary students. “Listening”, here, includes a range of research activities, including interviews, stimulated recall discussions, and written surveys. Doig and Groves interviewed a group of Year 5 and 6 students, seeking their thoughts on effective teaching practices in mathematics. Williams' interview with a Year 8 student threw light on the reasons for what seemed to be low-level engagement as well as barriers that he overcame. The students surveyed by Mousley and Campbell provided opinions about a new form of assessment. In each case, the student voices make available information about teaching and learning that would otherwise be inaccessible to mathematics educators.

The symposium as a whole draws on the fact that students have more experience of teaching practices than any other group of people. Listening to their voices is educative. Robinson and Taylor (2007) describe four values related to the notion of student voice: a conception of communication as dialogue, potential for participation and democratic inclusivity, recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic, and possibilities for transformation. In the following set of three papers, one sees evidence of how each of these components plays out in research that aims to support educational change by capturing students' ideas in primary, secondary, and tertiary mathematics education contexts.

Reference

- Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N., & Tarule, J. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice and mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Robinson, C., & Taylor, C (2007). Theorising student voice: Values and perspectives. *Improving Schools*, 10(1), 5-17.