



**Perspectives on enhancing a culture of Learner Voices in a 21<sup>st</sup>  
Century Post-Primary School.**

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# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	i
List of Tables .....	vi
List of Figures .....	viii
List of Appendices .....	ix
List of Abbreviations .....	xi
Abstract .....	xii
Acknowledgements .....	xiii
Chapter 1 .....	1
1.0 Introduction. ....	1
1.1 Contribution to knowledge. ....	1
1.2 Personal Journey to Voicework.....	2
1.3 The Irish post-primary School Context.....	4
1.4 Case study Setting. ....	5
1.5 What is Student Voice and Why is it Important?.....	5
1.6 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1989).....	10
1.6.1 Article 12 of the UNCRC. ....	10
1.6.2 The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009). ....	11
1.7 The Many Meanings of ‘Participation’. ....	12
1.7.1 Participation.....	12
1.7.2 Consultation.....	14
1.7.3 Collaboration. ....	15
1.8 International Policies Relevant to Youth Voices. ....	15
1.9 Irish Policy. ....	16
1.9.1 Early Changes (1991-2000).....	17
1.9.2 The Introduction of the student council.....	17
1.9.3 A move towards increased inclusion. ....	18
1.9.4 Comhairle na nÓg.....	19
1.9.5 Student Centred Policies (2010-2022).....	20
1.10 Conclusion.....	23
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework. ....	25
2.0 Introduction. ....	25
2.1 Influential Theorists: Paulo Freire and Lev Vygotsky. ....	26
2.2 The Lundy Model of Child Participation (2007). ....	29

2.2.1 The development of Lundy’s (2007) Model of Child Participation. ....	29
2.2.2 Lundy’s (2007) Model of Child Participation in Practice. ....	32
2.2.3 The Influence of Lundy’s (2007) Model of Child Participation. ....	34
2.3 Conclusion.....	35
Chapter 3: Literature Review.....	36
3.0 Introduction. ....	36
3.1 Literature Review Process.....	37
3.1.1 Conducting a thematic literature review.....	37
3.2 SPACE. ....	42
3.2.1 Voice inclusion in classrooms. ....	42
3.2.2 Key methods for elicitation of voices.....	48
3.2.3 Space Conclusion. ....	53
3.3 VOICE.....	53
3.3.1 Students show expertise when invited to participate in voicework.....	54
3.3.2 Whose voices are amplified?.....	56
3.3.3 Who is listening? .....	57
3.3.4 Deliberate exclusions from voice initiatives. ....	58
3.3.5 Unconscious filtering of voices. ....	59
3.3.6 The expectation of articulation. ....	60
3.3.7 Silent voices.....	61
3.3.8 Benefits of eliciting the voices of learners. ....	62
3.3.9 Barriers to eliciting the voices of learners.....	73
3.3.10 Criticisms of Voicework.....	78
3.3.11 Voice Conclusion. ....	81
3.4 AUDIENCE. ....	82
3.4.1 Consultations. ....	82
3.4.2 Moving from classroom consultation to enhancing a whole school culture. ....	84
3.4.3 Enhancing a whole school culture. ....	85
3.4.4 Audience Conclusion.....	91
3.5 INFLUENCE.....	92
3.5.1 Influence takes time to become habitual. ....	92
3.5.2 The difference between listening and having influence. ....	93
3.5.3 Influence Conclusion.....	97
3.6 Conclusion.....	98
Chapter 4: Methodology .....	101

4.0 Introduction.....	101
4.1 Research Aims.....	103
4.1.1 Research Questions.....	104
4.2 Research Paradigm.....	104
4.2.1 Paradigm: Constructivist.....	104
4.2.2 Ontological position.....	105
4.2.3 Epistemological position.....	106
4.2.4 Axiology.....	107
4.2.5 Paradigm Conclusion.....	108
4.3 Research Design.....	109
4.3.1 Case Study.....	110
4.3.2 Methodology: Action Research.....	110
4.3.3 Phases of action research.....	113
4.3.4 Eliciting the voices of learners in classrooms.....	115
4.3.5 Methods of eliciting learners' voices.....	117
<b>4.3.5.1 Learner Generated Questions.....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>4.3.5.3 Learner Contract.....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>4.3.5.5 Learner Led Learning.....</b>	<b>120</b>
4.3.6 Mixed Methods predominantly qualitative study.....	121
4.3.7 Qualitative Methods.....	125
4.3.8 Quantitative Methods.....	125
4.3.9 Piloting.....	125
4.3.10 Sample.....	126
4.3.11 Identifying the sample.....	127
4.4 Methods of Data Collection.....	140
4.5 Data Analysis.....	154
4.5.1 Analysis of Qualitative Data.....	158
4.5.2 Analysis of Quantitative Data.....	170
4.6 Ethical Considerations.....	170
4.6.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality.....	171
4.6.2 Transparency and Informed Consent.....	172
4.6.3 Ethical Position as an Insider Researcher.....	173
4.6.4 Researching with Colleagues.....	175
4.6.5 Storage of Data.....	175
4.7 Quality in the research.....	176

4.7.1 Triangulation. ....	178
4.7.2 Reflexivity. ....	179
4.7.3 Critical Friend. ....	179
4.7.4 The importance of the <i>unadulterated</i> voice. ....	180
4.8 Limitations of the Study. ....	181
4.8.1 Bias. ....	181
4.8.2 A Single Case Study. ....	181
4.8.3 The limitation of using volunteer participants. ....	182
4.9 Conclusion. ....	182
Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion. ....	184
5.0 Introduction. ....	184
5.1 Theme One: Voicework empowered teachers and learners. ....	187
5.1.1 Teacher self-improvement. ....	187
5.1.2 Eliciting voices empowered teaching and learning. ....	189
5.1.3 Conclusion Theme One: Voicework empowered teachers and learners. ....	198
5.2 Theme two: Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions. ....	199
5.2.1 Teacher fears in relation to participating in the study. ....	199
5.2.2 Tensions for teachers in eliciting voices and in the term ‘student voice’ ....	201
5.2.3 The complex tensions in the balance of power in learner/educator relationships. ....	203
5.2.4 Engaging in voicework was challenging for teachers and learners. ....	204
5.2.5 ‘What we think learners will do, and what they actually did’ (Interview 1, teacher 1). ....	213
5.2.6 Conclusion: Theme two: Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions. ...	216
5.3 Theme 3: Making Space for Voices: Key Learnings from Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation. ....	217
5.3.1 Space: Making space to elicit voices in the classroom. ....	218
5.3.2 Voice: Empowering youth voices by offering variety, choice, and anonymity. ....	225
5.3.3 Audience: The role of the audience in authentic voicework. ....	230
5.3.4 Influence: How voices showed influence in this study. ....	237
5.3.5 Theme 3: Key Learnings on Lundy’s (2007) model – Conclusion. ....	247
5.4 Conclusion. ....	248
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations. ....	251
6.0 Introduction. ....	251
6.1 Revisiting the research questions. ....	251
6.1.1 What is our school doing to capture the voices of learners? ....	252

6.1.2 How effective are different teaching methods in eliciting the voices of learners in our school?.....	252
6.1.3 Does eliciting the voices of learners have a positive impact on teaching, learning, assessment, and engagement in our school?.....	252
6.1.4 What impact does amplifying voices have on teacher and learner interactions? ..	253
6.1.5 What are our stakeholders’ perspectives on the value of the voices of learners? ..	253
6.1.6 How can a culture of eliciting the voices of learners be enhanced in our school? ..	254
6.2 Conclusions from theme 1: Voicework empowers teachers and learners.....	254
6.3 Conclusions from theme 2: Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions. ....	256
6.3.1 Is it time to consider a new term to replace the term ‘student voice’? .....	257
6.3.2 The balance between being a leader and a facilitator. ....	257
6.3.3 Are voice-based initiatives feasible in practice? .....	259
6.3.4 Questioning the reluctance and anxiety teachers had regarding voicework.....	259
6.4 Conclusions from theme 3: Key learning using Lundy’s (2007) model. ....	260
6.4.1 Space: The importance of good relationships cannot be understated.....	260
6.4.2 Voice: Having the opportunity to speak is important.....	261
6.4.3 Audience: It must be habitual to survive. ....	261
6.4.4 Influence: How can voice be truly authentic? .....	262
6.5 Recommendations.....	266
6.5.1 Recommendations for theme 1: Voicework empowers teachers and learners. ..	266
6.5.2 Recommendations for theme 2. ....	267
6.5.3 Recommendations for theme 3: Key learnings from Lundy’s (2007) model.....	268
6.6 Conclusion.....	271
Chapter 7: Reflection. ....	273
7.0 Overview. ....	273
7.1 Personal Reflection on the research. ....	273
7.1.1 What?.....	273
7.1.2 So what? .....	277
7.1.3 Now What? .....	279
7.1.4 Impact Statement. ....	280
Bibliography .....	284
Appendices .....	377

## List of Tables

Table 1.1 Interactions with students.

Table 1.2 Types of voice responses.

Table 1.3 Standards of Child Participation for adults.

Table 1.4 Irish policy relevant to the voices of young people since the UNCRC.

Table 2.1 Lundy's (2007) model of child participation in relation to Freire and Vygotsky in this study.

Table 2.2 UNCRC rights and their influence in this study.

Table 3.1 Literature Review Questions.

Table 3.2 Steps in the Literature Review (adapted from Creswell 2009, pp.29-30).

Table 3.3 Key phrases and readings in the literature review.

Table 3.4 Forms of Collaboration adapted from Lodge (2005, p.137).

Table 3.5 Characteristics of effective dialogue (Alexander 2013).

Table 3.6 Five Dimensions of the benefits of eliciting voices (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007).

Table 3.7 The Four F's of Feedback (Lundy 2018).

Table 4.1: Constructivism (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.193-4).

Table 4.2 Lewin's (1946) theory of action research in relation to this study.

Table 4.3 Description of the methods used by participating teachers.

Table 4.4: Methods used in this study.

Table 4.5 Recruitment of teachers.

Table 4.6 Recruitment of learners.

Table 4.7 Recruitment of senior leaders.

Table 4.8 Recruitment of Board of Management members.

Table 4.9 Recruitment of parents.

Table 4.10 First teacher responses.

Table 4.11 Selection and deletion of methods and year groups.

Table 4.12 Frequency of methods used.

Table 4.13 Year groups represented in the study after first 11 teacher responses.

Table 4.14 Increase in teacher participants and methods.

Table 4.15 Revised year group table.

Table 4.16 Methods of Data Collection.

Table 4.17 Data Collection Methods.

Table 4.18 Six Step Analysis guide from Braun and Clarke (2021, p.69) adapted.

Table 4.19 Thematic Mapping.

Table 4.20 Grouping of sub-themes.

Table 4.21 The four principles of ethical research as realised in this study.

Table 4.22 Five-step approach to member checking.

Table 5.1: Methods used to collect data with corresponding stakeholder group numbers.

Table 5.2: Tally of Observation Activity.

Table 6.1 Conclusion of benefits (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.145).

Table 6.2: Transferable template to investigate conscious and unconscious biases.

Table 7.1 Conference participation related to this study.

## List of Figures

- Figure 2.1 Lundy's model of child participation.
- Figure 2.2 Conceptualising Article 12 (Lundy 2007).
- Figure 3.1 Initial themes from the Literature Review using Lundy's (2007) model as a lens.
- Figure 4.1 Concept Mapping (Adapted from Maxwell 2009).
- Figure 4.2 Concept Mapping of the Constructivist Paradigm in relation to this research, (Maxwell 2009).
- Figure 4.3 Lewin's (1946) theory of action research adapted to the current study.
- Figure 4.4 Flow chart showing how each stage of the project informed the next stage.
- Figure 4.5 Observation sheet example.
- Figure 4.6 Contact sheet example.
- Figure 4.7 Screenshot: Questionnaire 1 response.
- Figure 4.8 Screenshot: First codes emerging.
- Figure 4.9 Screenshot showing many codes using reflexive thematic analysis.
- Figure 4.10 Screenshot: Building codes.
- Figure 4.11 Screenshot: Most popular codes from qualitative data.
- Figure 4.12 Screenshot: List of references related to the sub-theme 'Feedback'.
- Figure 4.13 Screenshot: Organisation of themes and sub-themes.
- Figure 4.14 Screenshot: Main themes with the number of references and files.
- Figure 4.15 Evidence feeding into the theme 'Change'.
- Figure 4.16 Sub-themes that made up the overarching theme 'Challenges'.
- Figure 4.17 Screenshot: Theme of Teacher-student Relationships.
- Figure 4.18 Triangulation of data.
- Figure 5.1 Stakeholders in the study.
- Figure 5.2 Learners' positive/ negative experiences.
- Figure 5.3 Comparison of learners' responses in questionnaires 1 and 2.
- Figure 6.1 The Capable Group
- Figure 6.2: Suggested Research Design for eliciting voices in post-primary settings.
- Figure 6.3 Reflections on Lundy's (2007) model from this case study.

## List of Appendices

Appendix (I) Lundy’s Model of Child Participation.

Appendix (II): Everyday Spaces Checklist.

Appendix (III): Methods of eliciting the voice of the learner in the classroom.

Appendix (IV): Advice on Leadership – Given on the MS Teams Page, October 2021.

Appendix (V): MS Teams Post (adapted).

Appendix (VI): Template for a Learner Contract.

Appendix (VII): MS Teams Post (November 2021).

Appendix (VIII): The four F of effective Feedback (Lundy 2018).

Appendix (IX): MICREC Ethical Clearance.

Appendix (X): Letter to the Board of Management.

Appendix (XI): Expression of interest form distributed to teachers.

Appendix (XII): Questionnaire 1 (Parent/Board of Management adapted).

Appendix (XXIII): Teacher Consent Form.

Appendix (XIV): Questionnaire 1 (Teacher, Senior Leaders and Board of Management).

Appendix (XV): Observation Checklist.

Appendix (XVI): Questionnaire 2 (Student).

Appendix (XVII): Questionnaire 2 (Teacher).

Appendix (XVIII) Questionnaire 2 (Parent).

Appendix (XIX): Blank Contact Sheet.

Appendix (XX): Contact Sheet Example 1.

Appendix (XXI) Contact Sheet Example 2.

Appendix (XXII): Teacher Information Sheet.

Appendix (XXIII): Teacher Consent Form.

Appendix (XXIV): Interview 1 Information Sheet (Teachers and Senior Leaders).

Appendix (XXV): Interview 1 Consent (Teachers and Senior Leaders).

Appendix (XXVI): Draft analysis of Interview 1, Member Checking Stage for teachers and Senior Leaders.

Appendix (XXXVII): Learner/ Student Information Sheets.

Appendix (XXVIII): Samples of Completed Observation Checklists with identifiers removed.

Appendix (XXIX): Round Table Discussion (Teacher) Information Sheet.

Appendix (XXX): Round Table Discussion (Teacher) Consent form.

Appendix (XXXI): Interview Two (Teacher) Information Sheet.

Appendix (XXXII): Interview two (Teacher) Consent form.

Appendix (XXXIII): Round Table Discussion Information Sheet (Adult Participants).

Appendix (XXXIV): Round Table Discussion Consent Form (Adult Participant).

Appendix (XXXV): Member Checking Stage (Responses in email).

Appendix (XXXVI): Excerpts from the Online Reflective Journals.

Appendix (XXXVII): Learner/ Student Information Sheets.

Appendix (XXXVIII): Learner/ Student Participant Consent and Assent forms.

Appendix (XXXIX): Screenshots from the Student MS Teams site; invitation to the survey and the survey analysis.

Appendix (XL): MS Teams Invitation to Focus Group.

Appendix (XLI) Learner/ Student Information sheet- Focus Group.

Appendix (XLII): Consent/Assent for Focus Groups.

Appendix (XLIII): Invitation for Learners to take part in Questionnaire two.

Appendix (XLIV): Board of Management/ Senior Leader Information Sheet.

Appendix (XLV): Board of Management/ Senior Leader Consent Form.

Appendix (XLVI): Parent Participant Information Sheet.

Appendix (XLVII): Parent Participant Consent Form.

Appendix (XLVIII): Contents of the Welcome Pack.

Appendix (XLIX): MS Teams Teachers' Page- Screenshot.

Appendix (L): Various Posts from the MS Teams Page.

Appendix (LI): MS Teams Student Site Screenshot.

Appendix (LII): Stimuli for the reflective journals.

Appendix (LIII): Excerpts from the Transcription of Interviews.

Appendix (LIV): Screenshots from the MS Teams Teacher's Page: Vygotsky.

Appendix (LV): Student Training for Voicework.

## List of Abbreviations

AP: Assistant Principal

COP: Community of Practice

DE: Department of Education

DES: Department of Education and Skills

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DCYA: The Department of Children and Youth Affairs

DCEDIY: The Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Youth

EPSEN: Education for persons with special educational needs.

ETBI: Education and Training Boards Ireland

HIQA: Health Information and Quality Authority

IIC: Investing In Children

JMB: Joint Managerial Body

LAOS: Looking at our Schools

OMCYA: Office for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

PAR: Participatory Action Research

SPHE: Social Personal and Health Education

SSE: School Self-Evaluation

UN: United Nations

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the rights of the child.

WSE-MLL: Whole School Evaluation- Management Leadership and Learning

WWGS: World-Wise Global Schools

YAP: Youth Advocate Programme.

## Abstract

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989) gave children the right to be heard on matters that concern them. Ireland, like much of Europe since the mid 1990's has had an explicit focus on the learner at the heart of the education system (Ravenhall 2007; Lamb 2011). While the rights of the young person are recognised in policy, these rights have yet to be fully realised in the lived experiences in classrooms in post-primary education settings (Skerritt *et al.* 2023). This research explored the perspectives of post-primary school stakeholders regarding enhancing a culture of eliciting the voices of learners in one setting. This constructivist, insider, case study accumulated knowledge by engaging with learners, teachers, senior leaders, parents, and the Board of Management. Through action research, teachers focused on one method of eliciting voices in their classes and listened to the voices of learners regarding their views on teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. Perspectives were gathered through anonymous questionnaires, interviews, observations, learner focus groups, a teacher round table discussion and teacher reflection journals. Lundy's (2007) model of child participation framed the review of the literature, the research design and the findings to investigate a lived experience of interaction with this model of participation in one school setting.

The study found that while space is important to give a place for voices to be elicited, there must be a variety of mechanisms in place to elicit diverse voices. Positive relationships are integral to the process. When eliciting voices, choice and anonymity were factors that increased the likelihood of gathering an authentic response. The audience has an integral role in supporting the elicitation of voices, but also in opening a dialogic process to aid and empower young people to participate. Finally, while the learners influenced changes, shared decision making is not an easy commodity to achieve. Influence is dependent on the altruistic adult to encourage habitual voice elicitations so the culture can survive and thrive.

While eliciting voices in this case study was a largely positive experience, there were many complex tensions revealed including a distaste for the term 'student voice' as it does not honour the dialogic process of listening and responding to voices. The study also revealed an anxiety among teachers when listening to young people about teaching and learning. Finally, there are many conscious and unconscious biases that exist which have an adverse effect on the purity of authentic responses.

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## **Statement of authorship.**

I certify that this submitted work is my own and was completed while I was registered as a student at Mary Immaculate College on the Structured PhD in Education programme and I have not obtained a degree elsewhere on the basis of the research presented in this submitted work.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature reads "K. Chapple" with a horizontal line underneath the name.

# Chapter 1

## 1.0 Introduction.

Listening to the voices of young people is increasingly recognised in policy and practice in education (Lancaster and Broadbent 2003). Since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations (UN) 1989) children and young people are accepted as having expertise in the knowledge and understanding on matters that concern them (Cooper 1996). This thesis contributes to our understanding about student voices by focusing on supporting learners to have their voices heard in classrooms in one school in the mid-west of Ireland. Under the overarching research question ‘How can a culture of eliciting the voices of learners be enhanced in our school, the study aimed to implement methods of eliciting the voices of learners and then listen to the experiences of school stakeholders in relation to teaching, learning, assessment, and engagement. The study investigated this in one setting, engaging with 77 learners, 16 teachers, 2 senior school leaders, 4 parents and 1 member of the Board of Management between August 2021 and June 2022. This is a mixed methods, predominantly qualitative study, comprising of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, focus groups, round table discussions and reflective journaling. The research was carried out while I was employed as a teacher in the setting.

This chapter opens with contribution this research gives to the education and voicework sectors and is followed by my personal journey to voicework which places the study in the context of my life. The Irish post-primary school context is presented, ahead of the introduction of the setting for this research. Next, the term ‘student voice’ and its varied meanings in different circumstances, contexts, and in literature is discussed. Within this section the rationale for eliciting voices is presented. Thereafter, the importance of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1989) is discussed. This is followed by consideration of other terms used, sometimes interchangeably, when referring to participation. This is followed by an examination of Irish policy since the UNCRC (UN 1989) and a discussion of international policies concludes this chapter.

## 1.1 Contribution to knowledge.

This study took place in a post-primary school where teachers elicited their learners’ voices. The study followed these teachers and learners over one academic year, documenting their

lived experiences eliciting voices and contributing to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. Teachers and learners were the key researchers, a practice which appears less in the literature with many studies favouring outsider implementation and research approach. The findings in this study show that eliciting voices is a complex activity with no one clear outcome; it mirrors the diversity of voices from varied stakeholders in the school, and the diversity within the many learner voices who contributed to the study. Another aspect of originality in this study was the focus it had on audience and influence from the outset. Many studies in the literature review focus on how to elicit voices and the importance of eliciting voices. Few studies focus on the role of the listener and how this can contain conscious and unconscious biases. In addition to this, many studies do not focus on the genuine influence eliciting voices had, the longer-term effects and the change in culture in settings. This study focuses on the gaps that exist in the literature, namely, the significance of the audience in the journey of voice elicitation and evidence of influence realised over the life of the study. This study will be useful to education practitioners and adults who have an interest in youth voices in formal or informal settings.

## 1.2 Personal Journey to Voicework.

Part of completing a PhD is to look within yourself to understand why and how you have come to this point. This process has brought me back to my time in post-primary school in the early 1990's in the west of Ireland where certain aspects stand out to me. I was a shy child who found the transition from primary school to post-primary school difficult. I was lucky to have an English teacher who sparked a love of literature in me. In her classes, I fell in love with Dickens, Austen, Yeats, and Clarke. At times my English teacher read some of my work to the class; a powerful opportunity to have my voice heard. In one instance, she read a short piece I had written and I remember the detail of that moment; the position I sat in the room, the heat of the sun outside, the listening audience and my fixed stare at my pencil case. I grew in confidence through attending a drama school, and studied English in university which led me to a teaching career beginning in 2002.

In school life, I was attracted to extra-curricular activities that focus on action and voice such as Young Social Innovators<sup>1</sup>, Gaisce<sup>2</sup>, Debating and Public Speaking. After completing a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership, where the focus was teacher reflection, I

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<sup>1</sup> A programme that empowers young people to come up with creative, innovative solutions to social challenges.

<sup>2</sup> Ireland's President's Awards for positive youth development.

began a Master of Education centred on student reflection. Following this, a bursary from the Teaching Council<sup>3</sup> supported a study using Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation (1992) to amplify student voices in the school. The school engaged with the Youth Advocate Programme's<sup>4</sup> (YAP) and was the first post-primary school in the Republic of Ireland to receive an 'Investing in Children' (IIC) award, given to organisations to openly listen and respond to young people. In response to this research, I established a 'Student Voice Community of Practice' (COP). In 2022, I began as a volunteer with the Research Engagement Group in conjunction with the Teaching Council of Ireland. I use my volunteer role to ensure that the voices of young people are authentic in school-based research. In 2023, I left teaching to manage Irish Aid's national programme for Global Citizenship Education, WorldWide Global Schools (WWGS). WWGS works with over 500 post-primary schools on the island of Ireland supporting teachers to educate young people about human rights, sustainability, and active citizenship. Reflecting on this journey, values such as the importance of voice, support, inspiration, passion are evident. Completing this PhD study is the culmination of innumerable micro-interactions and the luck of having an inspiring teacher in an English class in the west of Ireland.

This current study was shaped and influenced by Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of children and young people's participation under Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1989). Article 12 recognises children and young people as full human beings and this has yet to be fully realised in Irish educational settings (Nelson 2019; Skerritt *et al.* 2022). Traditionally, eliciting the voices of young people, has usually focused on the operations of the student council or non-academic activities and not in individual classrooms and this was the 'lacuna' for this research focusing on young people influencing classroom practices (Ravitch and Riggan 2016; Skerritt *et al.* 2022).

My experience as a post-primary teacher since 2002 has seen that eliciting voices has been effective in improving teaching and learning. I first noticed this, early in my career as a teacher, when I asked young people for their opinions on what texts they would like to engage with. This developed further when I was teaching new classes and invited young people to tell me about what they enjoyed about learning and what challenges they had. Through eliciting voices, I learned to include more collaboration, variety and ways students could showcase their abilities. I found that giving students time to think and respond

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<sup>3</sup> The regulator of the teaching profession in Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> An organisation that empowers young people.

privately, elicited more detailed information than if I solely relied on public audible elicitation. I used evaluations to ask students to assess how a module was taught and what could be improved and made changes based on their feedback. I found that through eliciting voices and using critical reflection, my practice was accountable and transparent which strengthened relationships in the classroom. Outside of the classroom, working with the student council I could see areas where tokenistic attitudes to student voices were present and realised that training for adults and young people was essential. Eliciting voices had a profound impact when it came to effectiveness in my teaching and it is for this reason that I wanted to investigate it further in this current study.

### 1.3 The Irish post-primary School Context.

The post-primary school structure in Ireland has either five or six years duration, depending on the school and the choice of the individual student. There are three lower secondary years, the Junior Cycle, in which students complete classroom-based assessments (CBAs), practical elements, and a summative state examination. Following Junior Cycle a 'Transition Year' (TY) present in 75% of post-primary schools (PDST 2022) which, depending on the school, is optional for students. This year is designed to give students a practical approach to learning, incorporating work experience and engagement in non-academic subjects such as first aid, public speaking, the opportunity to travel and driving instruction. Since 1994, when TY was introduced to mainstream schools the focus has been on formative assessment rather than written summative assessment, although this is largely dependent on the school context. The final two years of post-primary school are Senior Cycle in which 93% of students take the final exam, the Leaving Certificate, which leads to third level education (Banks and Smyth 2015). Senior Cycle is a summative examination with some practical elements to be completed before the final assessment. The grades a student attains in the Leaving Certificate examination are converted to points to gain entry to third level courses

Post-primary schools are represented by three patron bodies: Education and Training Boards of Ireland (ETBI), the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) and the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS). Within these three management bodies there are voluntary secondary schools, community and comprehensive schools and schools who come under the umbrella of the Education and Training Board sector (ETB). This ETB sector contains schools which were historically known as vocational schools but are now referred to as ETB schools or community schools (Skerritt *et al.* 2021). Voluntary Secondary schools were

typically privately owned and managed, but state funded, and are usually under the trusteeship of religious communities, a Board of Management (BOM), or individuals. Under the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) BOMs are required to have representatives from parents and teachers as well as interested stakeholders in the schools. The majority of Voluntary Secondary Schools are non-fee paying and are eligible for Government funding to assist with running costs. The Education and Training Board of Ireland (ETBI) schools replaced Vocational Educational Committees which, in the past, operated schools that were orientated towards providing technical and manual skills. Today, they are funded by the Department of Education (DE) and provide both academic and practical subjects. Community and Comprehensive Schools are also State funded and are usually established as the result of an amalgamation of Voluntary Secondary Schools and Vocational Schools. They are managed by Boards of Management that have representatives from the community and are entirely financed by the Department of Education. A recent development in the post-primary sector is the emergence of Educate Together schools which can share patronage or be in partnership with other type of schools. Some schools across each of these sectors, are categorised as part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) plan; a measure to address educational disadvantage. DEIS Schools are targeted by the government to respond to areas of educational disadvantage. Schools that are identified as ‘DEIS’ are given extra supports such as home-school community liaison support, school-book schemes and lower-class sizes.

#### 1.4 Case study Setting.

The case study setting was an urban Voluntary Secondary single-sex girls ‘Gael Scoil’ where the Irish language is the medium of instruction. It has a long tradition of academic excellence with over 96% of students progressing to third level. The site was chosen for pragmatic reasons as I was an employee from 2015-2023 and had a thorough understanding of the complexities of classroom life and the difficulties that teachers face when integrating policy and curriculum measures into classroom practice. An aim of this research is to transfer the knowledge gained from this study so that it is applicable to other post-primary settings which could potentially contribute to improving practice on a wider scale.

#### 1.5 What is Student Voice and Why is it Important?

Student voice is not a new term. The concept of students participating in their learning has been around for years with Dewey (1916) championing the idea of active participation and

Freire (1970) seeing the elicitation of student voices as a pathway against oppression. It is a complex term which can indicate anything from being consulted in a once off informal way to being active partners in decision-making (Rudduck and Fielding 2006; Subramanian *et al.* 2013). Student voice can refer to individual or collective perspectives as well as the single or plural actions (Thompson 2011). Perspectives can include ideas, opinions, expressions, questions, concerns that are expressed by students (Forde *et al.* 2018; Peruzzi 2018). Eliciting methods are varied and can include dialogue, discussion, and consultation on education (Fleming 2015; Jones and Hall 2022), participation in policy and practice (Holdsworth 2000), student agency, co-research (Fleming 2015; McLeod 2011; Quaglia and Fox 2018) and partnership, activism, and leadership (Forde *et al.* 2018). When the term ‘student voice’ is used, it can have a range of varied meanings which can be literal, metaphorical, or political (Angus *et al.* 2013; Britzman 1989; Freeman 1987; Taylor and Robinson 2009).

There is also a wide vocabulary in relation to ‘student voice’ with the terms ‘pupil voice’, ‘child’s voice’, ‘learner voice’, ‘dialogue or dialogic methods’ and ‘student or youth participation’ used interchangeably (Jones and Hall 2022; Quaglia and Fox 2018; Spyrou 2016). These terms carry with them differences in understanding; Murray’s (2019, p.1) definition where the perspectives of young people are ‘recognised’, ‘acknowledged’ as they make ‘valuable’ contributions, and Fleming’s (2013) definition, which goes beyond acknowledgement, to students using dialogue, discussion, and consultation in voice elicitation processes. The main objective of eliciting voices is to gain insight from the speakers (Subramanian *et al.* 2013) through a variety of activities and mechanisms that encourage ‘reflection, discussion, dialogue, and action’ (Fielding and McGregor 2005, p.2). It is useful to categorise the different types of interactions that take place in educational spaces. Table 1.1 adapted from Fielding (2012) suggests six forms of interactions where voices are used for different purposes.

**Table 1.1 Interactions with students.**

Type of Interaction	Explanation of interaction
Students as data source	Adults utilise information about student progress and wellbeing.
Students as active respondents	Adults invite dialogue and discussion to deepen learning/professional decisions.
Students as co-enquirers	Adults take a lead role with active student support.
Students as knowledge creators	Students take lead roles with active adult support.
Students as joint authors	Students and staff decide on a joint course of action together.
Learning as lived democracy	There is a shared commitment to/responsibility for the common good.

Table 1.1 is useful to categorise the wide range of understandings that exist in policies and empirical studies when referring to the general term ‘student voice’. Fielding (2004) argues that the potential for transformation is higher when students are involved in dialogic methods which involve active engagement (Fielding 2004).

While tackling the myriad of understandings of the term ‘student voice’, we must also acknowledge what we mean by ‘voice’. As a noun, voice is the sound that is ‘produced in a person’s larynx and uttered through the mouth in speech or song’ or the ‘expression of a particular opinion or attitude’ (Oxford Dictionary 2023). As a verb, it means ‘to express something in words’ (Oxford Dictionary 2023). However, voice in the context of ‘student voice’ can mean vocalisation but it can also mean elicitation in other formats. In this thesis, the plural ‘voices’ is used to move away from the singular notion of one voice speaking for all. In addition to this, the term ‘learner’ is used when speaking about classroom experience, ‘student’, when referring to the life in the school and ‘young person’ when referring to the life of the person inside and outside of school. Table 1.2 shows the variety of responses that participants can use; these responses are all considered to be part of ‘voice’.

**Table 1.2 Types of voice responses.**

Type of Response	Explanation
Voice	Voice is used to articulate an opinion that is listened to recorded or noted.
Physical Movement	A participant moves to give an opinion such as putting their hands up or moves in a walking debate.
Gestures, non-verbal communication, and body language.	These movements are not sought for and may indicate emotion behind the response.
Visual Voice	Participants draw or collect images to express their opinions.
Photovoice	Participants take photographs to demonstrate their opinions.
Digital Voice	Participants give their opinions through a digital format.
Written	Participants write their opinions and views in a physical or online format.
Categorisation	Participants are given a set of items or words and they place them in order.
Silence	A participant refuses to take part or remains silent.

There is the understanding that ‘voice’ in whatever form, can have the connotation of participating with a view to change (Hadfield and Haw 2001) or lead to action (Atweh and Burton 1995) as it is bound up with ideas of identity, agency, and responsibility (Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019). To achieve this agency, responsibility, and change, indicates that there is a listener who acknowledges the presence of the young person who is speaking (Cook-Sather 2006b); it implies that when the young person speaks and is heard and that they will have the power to influence a change (Cook-Sather 2006b; Lundy 2007; Reid and Kaneva 2002).

In the late 1960’s and 1970’s there was a desire to fully understand life in classrooms (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). It became apparent in the 1990’s that the voices of students were not being heard and there was a mobilisation in this area (Cook-Sather 2006a). Many of the initiatives around this time, and since then, have focused on token consultation which had limited impact on aspects of school life other than low level issues such as uniform and cafeteria concerns (Vukovic 2020). Students are keen to participate in schools but their opportunities to do so are inadequate (Forde *et al.* 2018). Eliciting the voices of students in educational settings is carried out for a variety of reasons:

- for the wellbeing, self-improvement, and personal development of students, (Barber 2009; Correira *et al.* 2019; Luff and Martin 2014; Mannion *et al.* 2015; Nelson 2019; Pedder and McIntyre 2006; Quaglia and Fox 2018; Quintero and Gallego 2016),
- to personalise learning (Hargreaves 2004),
- to gain perspectives on school experiences (Thiessen and Cook-Sather 2007) so that it is more engaging, relevant, and meaningful for students (Fisher *et al.* 2018; Mitra 2008; Quaglia and Fox 2018),
- to have more connections with the school (Quaglia and Corso 2014),
- to reflect and evaluate teaching and learning (Fielding and McGregor 2005; Skerritt 2020; Keddie 2015; Whitty and Wisby 2007),
- to comply with policy associated with school improvement (Courtney and Gunter 2015; Flutter and Rudduck 2004; Jones and Hall 2022),
- to encourage a prefigurative democracy (Castro-Zubizarreta and Calvo-Salvador 2023; Correira *et al.* 2019; Czerniawski and Kidd 2011; Durr 2004; Fleming 2015; Golombek 2006; Hall 2017; Mayes 2016; Nelson 2019; Quaglia and Fox 2018),
- to transform classroom and school practices (Cruddas 2007; Nelson 2019; McGinn 2007),
- to fulfil the right of young people to be heard (UN1989),
- to reflect on classroom practices with the aim of redesigning, altering, or eliminating practices that are unhelpful or unproductive (Cruddas 2007).

The voices of young people, and indeed all stakeholders, bring valuable, unique, and varied perspectives which create connections in the complex environments in which schools operate but it must be carefully introduced, sustained, and followed up (Ainscow 2020; Nelson 2019). Voice elicitation success is more likely to flourish from internal initiatives, in spaces where there is trust, respect and dignity between staff and students (Fielding 2004; Noyes 2005). The principal reason for eliciting the voices of young people is that adults have a legal responsibility to do so as the next section discusses.

## 1.6 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1989).

The first World Child Welfare charter was introduced in 1924 and was adopted by the 'International Save the Children Union' in Geneva (Checkoway 2011). The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was proclaimed by the United Nations (UN) in 1959 giving the basis for the UNCRC in 1989. The UNCRC consists of 41 Articles of equal importance which interact with one another to form one integrated set of rights. Although this right is dominant in the research, there are other relevant rights which complement and interact with it and are further discussed in Chapter 2. Article 12, the child's right to be heard and its importance is discussed in the next section. This current research is underpinned by the Lundy's (2007) model of child participation which conceptualises Article 12 of the UNCRC.

### 1.6.1 Article 12 of the UNCRC.

Article 12 of the UNCRC states that a child who can form their own views, has the right to express those views freely in matters that affect them, in accordance with their age and maturity (UN 1989). This acknowledges the child as an individual (Fleming 2015; Freeman 1996) who is part of a social group (Graham *et al.* 2019), who can participate in decision-making and influence solutions (Bragg 2007) and is worthy of moral and intellectual respect (Lyle 2014). The Article moved away from representing the child as a passive object who was a possession of their parents and a passive receptor of knowledge (Doek 2019) to someone who has the right to be an important contributor to educational knowledge and has influence in the learning process; an area they had been traditionally excluded from (Fullan 1991; Jones and Hall 2022; Kozol 1991; Lamb 2011; Ravenhall 2007; Rudduck and Fielding 1996; Subramanian *et al.* 2013; Weis and Fine 1993).

Addressing student voices from this rights-based view can give young people a platform to contribute meaningfully to improve their experiences of school life and influence decisions about school practices (Cook-Sather 2006b; Fielding 2004, 2006; Robinson and Taylor, 2007; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). The ratification of the UNCRC (UN 1989), by all countries, except for USA and South Sudan, represented a milestone in advancing youth voices (Fleming 2015; Hart 2008; Noyes 2005). Ireland's ratification of the Convention on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1992 influenced policy discourse (Flynn 2017); a key area explored later in this chapter.

### 1.6.2 The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009).

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN 2009) further defined the text of Article 12 and addressed issues arising from ratification of the Convention. State parties were directed to encourage young people to form a free view in an environment that enables young people to exercise their voices. The Committee acknowledged that participation should not be a momentary act but a ‘starting point for an intense exchange between children and adults on the development of policies, programmes and measures, in all relevant contexts of children’s lives’ (UN 2009, p. 7). When addressing the phrase ‘capable of forming his or her own views’, State parties were directed to assess the capacity of the young person to form their own views, regardless of their age. State parties were advised not to begin with an assumption that a child is incapable, nor is it the child’s duty to prove that they are capable (UN 2009). The Committee (UN 2009) acknowledged the inclusion of all forms of communication including ‘play, body language, facial expressions and drawing and painting’ should be recognised as participation (UN 2009, p.9). The Committee accepted that young people do not need to have a comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of the matter affecting them, but a sufficient understanding to be ‘capable of appropriately forming her or his own views on the matter’ was deemed appropriate (UN 2009, p.9). Those with additional needs should be equipped with any mode of communication necessary ‘to facilitate the expression of their views’, and efforts should be made to communicate with those who do not speak the ‘majority language’ (UN 2009, p.9). The Committee addressed the phrase ‘the right to express those views freely’ stating that the child should be allowed to speak without any pressure and may choose whether they want to participate (UN 2009). The views of the child must not be manipulated or ‘subjected to undue influence or pressure’ (UN 2009, p.10) or be penalised for contrasting with other views surrounding them. The Committee stated that it was the obligation of individual state parties to ensure that an environment is created where the young person feels respected to freely express their views (UN 2009). When listening to the views of children and young people, the Committee stated that the child must be informed about the conditions under which they will be asked to express their views (UN 2009).

Specifically, in relation to education, the right of the child to be heard within their education was seen as ‘fundamental’ (UN 2009, p,24). The Committee noted that authoritarianism, discrimination, disrespect, and violence were aspects that characterised many classrooms and such environments are not conducive to the expression of views (UN 2009). The Committee promoted a participatory learning environment, where the life conditions and prospects of the

child were considered and it is for this reason that young people's views and the views of their parents should be part of school planning (UN 2009). The Committee stated that participation of children and young people in decision-making could be achieved through councils and student representation on school boards and committees where they can freely express their views on the development of school policies (UN 2009).

## 1.7 The Many Meanings of 'Participation'.

The next section of this chapter discusses the many terms that are related to participation that are sometimes used interchangeably, and their different meanings regarding 'student voice'.

### 1.7.1 Participation.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2009 considered the meaning of participation as it did not appear in the original text of Article 12. The term includes information sharing and dialogue based on mutual respect where adults and young people can see each other's perspective (UN 2009). It is the most common term used for listening and engaging with young people, yet the definition remains contested (Davey *et al.* 2010). The noun 'participation' is the action of taking part in an activity or an event (Oxford English Dictionary 2023) but participation in the context of voice elicitation and with the guidance of Article 12 of UNCRC (UN 1989) also means involvement of children and young people in decision-making regarding issues that affect their lives and may lead to change (Morrow 1999; Treseder 1997). Under Lundy's (2007) model of child participation, where young people are given the space, voice, audience and influence, the term implies that there are adults present who can support them in affecting change. Adults, who usually hold power, supply the pre-determined space; the room for participation to take place (Henderson 2011; Percy-Smith 2010). Support and training are needed for both adults and young people in power-sharing and for youth voices to have 'due weight' as Article 12 advocates (Percy-Smith 2010).

Participation can have different facets; it can be social, between peers or between children and adults. The political facet challenges power relations in a democratic approach intended on improvement (Boyden and Ennew 1997; Forde *et al.* 2018; Percy-Smith and Thomas 2010). UNICEF (2009) have created seven standards that can be used as a checklist to enable positive conditions for child participation and is detailed in Table 1.3.

**Table 1.3 Standards of Child Participation for adults adapted from UNICEF (2009).**

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1: An ethical approach	Transparency, honesty, and accountability. Adults are committed to ethical participatory practice to the children’s best interests.
2: Relevant and voluntary	Young people address issues that affect them and they have choice in whether they participate or not.
3: A child-friendly environment	A safe, welcoming, and encouraging environment is created for participation.
4: Equality of opportunity	Those who are marginalised are encouraged and supported to be involved. Existing patterns of discrimination and exclusion are challenged.
5: Staff are effective and confident	Adults involved are trained and supported to facilitate children’s participation.
6: Promotes the safety and protection of children	Child protection policies and procedures are adhered to.
7: Follow up and evaluation	Respect is shown by a commitment to provide feedback and follow-up and to evaluate the quality and impact of the participation.

When using participation to involve young people in research, the onus is on the adult to provide safe spaces that are enjoyable and have a diverse range of ways in which to contribute (Forde *et al.* 2018). Asking young people how they wish to participate increases the chances of attaining rich data that reflects real life experiences and perspectives (Clarke *et al.* 2011). If the participants are supported and positioned as equals, and partnerships are collegial, then participation can have a transformative effect (Bovill *et al.* 2011; Cook-Sather 2008; Sorenson 2001). The role of the adult cannot be erased; they have important expertise and a key role in the facilitation of participation (Breen and Littlejohn 2000).

The vision of the National Framework for Children and Young People’s Decision-Making (DCEDIY 2021) is participation with purpose where young people can have a voice in day-to-day experiences, activities, and practices on the development of projects, programmes, policies, and services. The framework defines young people’s participation in decision making as an ‘ongoing process’ which is ‘based on mutual respect’ (DCEDIY 2021, p.11). The framework also outlines participation, stating that it is not:

- handing over power to children and young people,
- believing that children and young people are the only experts,

- allowing children and young people to do things that are unsafe or harmful or that will violate the rights of others.

The framework also clarifies that ‘giving due weight’ is not giving young people exactly what they ask for, it is taking their views into account by giving young people information and training to reach an informed position where they can respect and acknowledge what is the safest and most realistic decision (DCEDIY 2021).

### 1.7.2 Consultation.

A common form of participation with young people is consultation. Consultations can take the form of asking for opinions in a once off manner, to delving deeply into larger matters on a national scale to influence policies, practices, and procedures. In the context of this study, consultation means asking young people for their opinions through dialogue or other means. In recent years, students have been consulted in policy making and curriculum planning such as in 2006 when youth focus groups were used to develop SPHE in conjunction with the NCCA. More recently, the NCCA (2022) have used BEACONS (Bringing Education Alive for Communities on a National Scale) to collaborate with a range of stakeholders to share their perspectives on the future of a Primary School Curriculum in Ireland. In post-primary schools, School Self-Evaluation (SSE) (DE 2022) promotes dialogic methods to improve the settings for all stakeholders. However, consultation can be considered a low level of participation as participants may be asked for their view only once and no feedback takes place (Faddar *et al.* 2021). Sometimes decisions are already made by adults and the tokenistic act of consultation is merely requiring participants to fall in with the decisions already made, leaving young people without any power (Percy-Smith 2010). Consultations can be presented in a way where they exhibit the ideas of adults and ask for approval without any form of discussion or feedback (Skerritt *et al.* 2022).

However, even when the ill-uses of consultations are considered, they can still have many benefits. Consultations can be cost effective, formal or informal, short or long, and they do have to power to have influence. Consultations can take the form of teachers partnering with students to discuss teaching and learning and students give feedback on instructional styles (Mitra 2018). Consultations can be anonymous between the teacher and student and do not have to involve management and can influence improvement in classroom practices (Skerritt *et al.* 2022).

### 1.7.3 Collaboration.

Collaboration involves multiple disciplines working together where stakeholders are equally valued (Ainscow 2016). In learning situations, groups coming together to discuss concepts or find solutions to problems. This type of learning develops oral communication, self-management, and leadership skills (Laal and Ghodsi 2012). By using collaboration to elicit voices, students can share their opinions, give feedback, and discuss ideas (William *et al.* 2022). One form of collaboration that has been an effective way of involving children and young people is project-based advisory groups (DCEDIY 2021). These groups are set up so that young people can collaborate in a variety of ways with decision-makers for the duration of a project. They are useful as they directly involve interested parties when it is not possible to involve all members of a group or an organisation for the duration of the initiative. Collaborations with young people in Ireland has developed over the years and can be seen in the changes in Irish policy as the next section discusses.

### 1.8 International Policies Relevant to Youth Voices.

Irish policy has developed since the UNCRC (UN 1989), international policies too have been influenced by this monumental change in listening to young people (Bragg 2007). The UNCRC has become the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world and has helped transform the lives of children (Sharp 2019). In England, statutory guidance encourages students to be more democratic by being active participants in youth parliaments and school councils (Department for Education 2014). The Crick Report (1998) recommended the introduction of a programme for citizenship into the National Curriculum in the UK. In both Wales and Scotland, voice is enshrined into policy (National Assembly for Wales 2005; Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2005), while Northern Ireland emphasises the importance of consultation with students (Government of the UK 2003). In the United Kingdom, the Education Act (2002) and the Children Act (2004) calls for obligatory engagement with students regarding their experiences in schools, and young people must have a say in the development of statutory plans for children. In 2008, the Education and Skills Act, UK governed that schools are required to appropriately consider the views of students when making decisions. The School Self-Evaluation framework in the UK, like Ireland, requires schools to evaluate how they gather the views of students and how they act on these views (Cruddas 2007). School Councils in the UK must be democratically elected and represent their peers while 'making a positive contribution to the school environment and

ethos' (School Councils UK, cited by Whitty and Wisby, 2007, p. 30). Similar to Ireland's Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (DES 2004), those with additional needs in UK schools are encouraged to participate in the decisions that affect them (Zilli *et al.* 2020).

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2012) undertook research in six countries: Australia, Belgium, Norway, Ireland, Spain and South Africa, investigating what changes and challenges had taken place in the years since the UNCRC (UN 1989). The study found that most of the countries analysed had a Children's Commissioner or Ombudsperson where young people could make complaints directly to the office playing an important role in the enforcement of the UNCRC (UN 1989). Norway and Belgium have acknowledged that participation is required at all levels of decision-making (UNICEF 2012). Belgium, Germany, and Spain have incorporated children's rights into their constitutions; Norway has achieved this to some extent focusing on Articles 12 and 13 (UNICEF 2012). Belgium has developed a Child and Youth Impact Assessment in Flanders (UNICEF 2012). There are challenges for each country but since the UNCRC (UN 1989) child poverty has halved, more children attend school, and corporal punishment has been forbidden by 56 countries since signing the treaty (Sharp 2019). However, youth voices both internationally and in Ireland fail to consistently meet the vision where young people are listened to in matters that affect them. Youth voices are restricted to low status objectives in schools and rarely have the power to influence the organisation; this gap in policy is discussed further in the literature review.

## 1.9 Irish Policy.

This section focuses on Irish policy since the ratification and development of the UNCRC (UN 1989). A discussion of changes in policies from 1991-2000 is presented, followed by the establishment of formal mechanisms to hear youth voices; the student council and Comhairle na nÓg. The final sub-section discusses student-centred policies published between 2010 and 2023. These changes in Irish policy are important to note as the study was conducted in 2021 and builds on the results these policies endeavoured to establish in post-primary settings with regard to the voices of students.

### 1.9.1 Early Changes (1991-2000).

A reflection of the wording used in the UNCRC was seen in the Childcare Act (Government of Ireland 1991) where the child's wishes were given due consideration insofar as it was practicable. A significant change in education policy was the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) which outlined the role and function of the inspectorate, patrons, principals, and teachers. The Act outlined the obligation to provide education for every person of all abilities in the State to have equality of access and choice in their education. The Act recognised that the educational establishment should be respectful of diverse values, beliefs, languages, and traditions and for a spirit of partnership to exist between all stakeholders. The move towards respecting the dignity and the views of young people was seen in Irish policy in the publication of a ten-year National Children's Strategy (National Children's Office 2000), developed in response to the requirements of the ratification of the UNCRC in 1992. It aimed to view young people as valuable citizens who can make worthy contributions (Nelson 2019). A national education convention took place in 1994 and notably the voices of young people were absent from any consultation process even though the publications from this convention included guidelines as to how to include young voices in decision making.

### 1.9.2 The Introduction of the student council.

Section 27 of the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) advocated for students and requested that student councils may be established in post-primary schools and the council should promote the interests of the school. This part of the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) provided schools with the chief, policy driven mechanism, for democratic involvement and promotion of the voices of students in the affairs of the school (Fleming 2015). In 2002 student councils were recognised as a valuable contribution to the 'effectiveness' and operation of the school that gave a sense of ownership to students (DES 2002, p.8). Student councils were not to disrupt class time but could be used for consultation on policies or the organisation of school events (DES 2002). Students on councils were to represent the views of the student body, communicate with management, and assist in school activities (DES 2002).

Fleming (2015) and Leren (2006) note that there is no reference to dialogue between managers and students or any reference to how students could take part in meaningful consultation regarding decision-making. Fleming (2015) also highlights the language used to describe the work of the council included words like 'representing', 'promoting',

‘supporting’, ‘contributing’, and ‘assisting’; these words are supportive rather than dialogic and they limit the sense of power that may have been interpreted by a broader view of the UNCRC (UN 1989) with limited opportunity for shared decision-making (Fleming 2015). However, students report that the most positive experiences were between members of the student councils and school staff and that the key benefits of being part of the student council were for leadership, communication, and responsibility skills (OMCYA 2010). The most recent Looking at our Schools (LAOS) framework, a reflection tool for post-primary schools, (DE 2022) recognises the valuable perspectives of students and the responsibility of school leaders to ensure that the student council is democratically elected, inclusive and is a catalyst for change where young people have an active role in decision-making and policy development (DE 2022).

### 1.9.3 A move towards increased inclusion.

The National Children’s strategy 2000-2010: Our Children - Their Lives (Government of Ireland 2000) was a strategy based on extensive consultation with parents, children and agencies that work with children, underpinned by the UNCRC (UN 1989). The aim was to provide a blueprint for the improvement of children’s lives, primarily those who experienced disadvantage. A National Children’s Office within the office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs was established in 2001. This was followed in 2002 with the Ombudsman for Children Act (2002) and the appointment of a Minister for Children showing a clear commitment to the rights of children and young people (Flynn *et al.* 2013). The year 2004 saw the passing of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (DES 2004). Section 8, subsection 4 suggests that a team can come together to plan for the educational needs of a student and where it is considered appropriate by the special educational needs’ organiser, the child may be part of this team. In 2006, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Ireland strengthen its efforts to enable children to express their views in schools and to include child rights in the curriculum (Forde *et al.* 2018). ‘Towards 2016: A Ten-year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015’ (Government of Ireland 2006, p.41) stated in its vision for children that ‘every child and young person will have access to appropriate participation in local and national decision-making’. The framework laid the groundworks for Comhairle na nÓg, to be implemented throughout the country and to establish the operation of democratic student councils, an aspect which is discussed further in the next section (Government of Ireland 2006).

#### 1.9.4 Comhairle na nÓg.

In 2006, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs worked on establishing Comhairle na nÓg (Young Person's Councils) which were set up under the National Children's Strategy 2000-2010 (UN 2015). Comhairle na nÓg are local councils for young people aged 12-17 and are a structure for participating through 31 local authorities (DCYA 2015). Comhairle na nÓg hears the voices of young people by working on topics that are important to them and by acting as a consultative forum in every locality. Each Comhairle na nÓg holds an annual general meeting (AGM) where young people from schools, youth clubs and other youth-based projects are invited. Attendance usually ranges from 80 to 150 young people in each AGM (Pobal 2014). In this meeting, a committee is elected for the coming year and topics are identified along with the consultative approaches that will be taken. In 2014, over five thousand young people attended Comhairle na nÓg meetings and 805 meetings were held across the country (Pobal 2014).

Dáil na nÓg, the National Youth Parliament of Ireland for 12-18 year olds, have 200 elected representatives from Comhairlí na nÓg and together they have had many achievements including, for example 'The Fairsay campaign' which highlighted the negative portrayal of teenagers in media and, 'The Boy in the Hoodie' an advertisement highlighting youth mental health challenges. Dáil na nÓg successfully influenced the Minister for Health in the commencement of the cervical cancer vaccine for 12-year-old girls, and initiated a peer-led, evidence based survey on body image in conjunction with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (UN 2015). Young people involved in Comhairle na nÓg were also involved in consultations and campaigns regarding:

- The development of the taskforce on active citizenship (2006)
- The age of consent for sexual activity (2006)
- The development of the Irish Youth Justice Strategy (2007)
- Teenage Mental Health (2008 and 2020)
- Inclusion and Disabilities (2020)
- Climate Change (2022)
- Youth Travel Card (2022)
- UNCRC (2021).

Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg give young people the opportunity to participate and influence the progress of local and national services and policies and all matters that affect

them. The Comhairle are recognised as the official structures for those between 12 and 18 to have their say in shaping Ireland.

### 1.9.5 Student Centred Policies (2010-2022).

In 2010, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published ‘Innovation and Identity’ which put forward a set of proposed student-centred changes to the Junior Cycle placing students at the centre of the educational experience to enable them to be confident autonomous learners (NCCA 2010). In 2011, the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection of Welfare for Children, identified the child’s right to be heard as a key principle of best practice. The year 2011 also brought a refinement of the Whole School Evaluation-Management Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) process which included students and parents as important stakeholders in the school inspection process (DES 2011). Focus groups with students were added to the inspection process, although the power of young people to affect change is questionable as feedback is given to the Board of Management and teachers, while a draft copy of the final report was distributed to the student council (Fleming 2015).

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA 2012) is an organisation which produces standards to guide services on how to protect children and promote their welfare. In 2012, HIQA listed listening to children and considering the view of children as one of their key principles. In 2012, the 31<sup>st</sup> amendment to the constitution recognised children’s rights and placing into law the right to free education and the right of the child’s views to be ascertained the ability of the State to intervene when parents fail their children (Fleming 2015; Forde *et al.* 2018; Government of Ireland 2012). Following the Child and Family Agency Act (2013), Tusla, the agency responsible for improving the wellbeing of children was formed. There is a legal requirement that Tusla must review the provision of services to ensure that the views of children and young people are being given due weight.

In 2011, over 67,000 children and young people responded to questionnaires, the largest consultation exercise undertaken with children in the State, which sought views to inform the National Children and Young People’s Policy Framework (2015-2020) (UN 2015). The National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making (2015), the first of its kind to be produced internationally, focused on facilitating the views of children and young people, in a democratic way, in their everyday lives in school policy, health, wellbeing and law (Forde *et al.* 2018). The strategy identified ‘listening to and involving children and young people’ as one of six transformational goals. Commitments

arising from this goal include ‘consultation with children and young people on policies and issues that affect their lives’ and the creation of ‘mechanisms to provide children and young people with the opportunity to be heard in primary and post-primary schools through student councils or other age-appropriate mechanisms’ (DCEDIY 2015). The wording here has changed slightly from the 1998 Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) as it addresses the term consultation for the opportunity to be heard.

School Self-Evaluation (SSE) came into being in 2012 promoting a holistic view of students and placing student voices firmly in policy as students, along with parents, are an integral part of the SSE process. A list of possible evaluation tools to elicit the voices of stakeholders including focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, and checklists is included in the framework (DES 2015). Fleming (2015) observed that while these gestures were low level and could have little impact on change, they were an enormous leap from the language and vision for the voices of students in the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) as they showed meaningful ways to consult and collaborate with the student population. However, Fleming (2015) warned of the worrying relationship between eliciting student voices and teacher or school performance; this unveils a sinister side to the voices of young people when voice work is used for surveillance (Skerritt *et al.*2022), a subject that is discussed further in the literature review.

Another landmark policy released in 2015 was the ‘Framework for Junior Cycle’ (DES 2015). In this framework, eight principles underpin the framework in the importance of the individual learner. Within these principles the individuality and independence of the student is highlighted and teachers are encouraged to be flexible and provide varied ways in which the student engages with learning (DES 2015). Students are encouraged to reflect on how they are progressing and provide feedback to their teachers thereby providing an excellent framework for consultative and participatory voice through interactive and collaborative pedagogy (Fleming 2015).

Looking at our School (LAOS): A Quality Framework for Post-primary Schools (DES 2016, 2022), works in tandem with other policies and provides a shared understanding of highly effective practice in teaching, learning and leadership within schools. Designed for teachers and school leaders to implement effective and engaging teaching and learning approaches, it supports SSE and is used by inspectors to rate and report on the quality of teaching, learning and leadership schools (DE 2022). The policy is underpinned by Lundy’s (2007) model of

child participation and is informed by the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015-2020). One of the ten key principles of LAOS is that students are active agents in their learning who are 'afforded the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with teachers to inform learning and teaching' (DE 2022, p.9). The policy framework includes all stakeholders as valuable contributors to improvement. It challenges schools to 'promote and facilitate the development of student participation [and] leadership' (DE 2022, p.42) by recognising the value their views have in the operation of the school. School leaders are motivated to involve students meaningfully through consultation and engagement to improve practices within the school (DE 2022). The UN (UN 2015) communicated that Ireland had made significant progress since 1995 in creating mechanisms and structures for hearing the voices of children and young people.

Launched in 41 schools in 2016, the Senior Cycle Subject, Politics and Society aims to develop the capacity of learners to engage in active citizenship, helping the nation develop a new generation of leaders across the country. It was first examined in 2018, coinciding with the centenary of Irish women receiving the right to vote (PDST 2022). Power and decision-making ability of young people form a key strand of the structure in this subject. Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (DCEDIY 2019) promoted cultures that listen and respect the rights, experiences and abilities of young people, ensuring that their views will be sought to influence decisions about their own lives. Similarly, the Student and Parent Charter Bill (2019) which is currently before Dáil Eireann is in its third stage and likely to be passed into law, promotes a similar culture of listening. The bill requires schools to prepare, publish and implement charters for students and parents that will pave the way for consultations to take place between the board of management and students, student councils as well as parents and parents councils. The bill asks that schools inform students and their parents about matters relating to the operation and performance of the school (DES 2019). Key stakeholders know the local context and have a vested interest in what happens in the school better than those at government level (Odhiambo and Hii 2012) and there is a high level of informal involvement from parents in children's education; the bill intends to formalise this (Byrne and Smyth 2011). Finally, published in 2022, the Chief Inspector's report (DE 2022) called for further discussion, engagement and collaborative approaches to learning to be provided in lessons, again highlighting the need to support voice initiatives at classroom level. Table 1.4 shows the development of Irish policy since the UNCRC (UN 1989) and how the voices of young people are heard in education and other policies.

Table 1.4 Irish policy relevant to the voices of young people since the UNCRC (UN 1989).

Year	Name of Policy
1989	UNCRC
1991	OECD Report on Irish Education
1991	Childcare Act Child Participation was incorporated
1992	Ratification of Treaty
1992	Green Paper on Education
1994	National Education Convention
1995	White Paper on Education
1998	Education Act
2000	National Children's Strategy
2002	Ombudsman for Children Act
2002	Minister for Children appointed
2004	EPSEN Act includes the voices of those with special educational needs
2010	Innovation and Identity (NCCA)
2011	Children First: National Guidance for the Protection of Welfare for Children
2011	Consultation with children and young people on the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making.
2012	The 31 <sup>st</sup> amendment to the constitution recognising Children's right to free education, due weight in law and matters that concern them and to intervene when their parents fail.
2013	Child and Family Agency Act 2013- Creation of Tusla
2015	National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making
2015	Children First Act
2015	School Self-Evaluation includes students as important stakeholders
2019	Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (DCEDIY)
2022	Chief Inspector calls for more collaboration, engagement and discussion at classroom level.

## 1.10 Conclusion.

This chapter began with my personal connection to the topic of student voice and my rationale for conducting this study. My motivation to complete this PhD study was borne from my own experiences with eliciting the voices of young people and the impact it had on my teaching career. The Irish post-primary school context was introduced along with an

introduction to the setting used in this study. A discussion was presented on the definitions of student voice and the reasons it is important. The principal reason for eliciting voices is the legal imperative set down in the UNCRC. This study is anchored on Article 12, the right of the young person to have voice in matters that affect them; this Article and its definition were discussed. The term participation was discussed to understand the differences between participation, consultation, and collaboration. Following this was an analysis of International and Irish policies regarding voicework since the UNCRC (UN 1989).

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. Chapter 1 focused on the journey of voicework from before the UNCRC to contemporary national and international policies, the meaning of participation and the personal journey I have had in relation to voicework. Chapter 2 introduces Lundy's (2007) model of child participation which underpins this study and shows how theorists Freire and Vygotsky have influenced this study. Chapter 3 critically analyses the literature that supports this research and identifies the gaps that exist that made this study a worthwhile contribution to the field. Chapter 4 justifies and outlines the methodology and research design that guided this study. Chapter 5 presents the findings that this study exposed to the extant literature discussed in Chapter 3 and analysed through the lens of Lundy's (2007) model. Chapter 6 centres on the conclusions and recommendations that were drawn from the findings and discusses the importance of these, in the field of education. Finally, Chapter 7 is a reflection where I look back on the research and the impact it has had on me as an educator, as a researcher and as a PhD student.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework.

### 2.0 Introduction.

A theoretical framework refers to a set of interrelated ideas, concepts, theories, and assumptions about human affairs and the social world, that serve as a foundation to place the research upon to understand a problem or phenomenon (Brewer 2000; Creswell 2009). The theoretical framework is an important aspect of any research process as it is the blueprint that guides the study and provides a structure to ‘philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically and analytically’ approach the research (Grant and Osanloo 2014, p.21). The framework aids researchers in the design of their research as well as a structure to use to analyse and interpret findings (Polit and Hungler 1995). This structure which guides the research will ground it by explaining certain phenomena and relationships that exist in youth participation (Eisenhart 1991). The theoretical framework on which this study is underpinned, has implications for each part of the research process (Mertens 1998) from the questions that guided the literature review, to the methods used to elicit voice and the data analysis methods used to understand and establish insights from the findings (Flick 2011). The framework served as an analytic and theoretical tool from which recommendations were made, founded in a reliable, credible study (Creswell 2009).

In this current research, Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation was used to frame the research questions, to guide the literature review, to create the design of the study, to steer the analysis and to interpret findings. The theoretical framework helped to guide and explain the relationships between variables and aided in the identification of gaps that currently exist in knowledge, while also being flexible in adapting to new findings. During the data collection stage of the research, the framework acted as a common language between the frame and the lived experiences of the participants (Appendix I). This enabled effective communication and collaboration with a common goal of embedding voice work for participants. It provides opportunities for comparisons to be drawn from other similar theoretically framed research.

In selecting an appropriate theoretical framework, it is important to address the values of and rationale for the research and researcher along with the phenomenon the study aimed to address. The aim of the current research was to investigate the value participants had for eliciting the voices of learners within in the classroom. Once this key concept was identified, the relevant literature was explored to examine theories that existed that were of relevance to

this current study. This process helped in the understanding of existing knowledge and provided a basis for the selection of Lundy's (2007) framework.

The motives and rationale for this research are emancipatory and are embedded in the rights of the child (UNCRC). The voices of learners while promoted in Irish education policy, are not facilitated in the classroom even though the right of the young person to have a say is a matter of social justice. This topic is of importance to practitioners who are interested in amplifying the voices of young people in their school. To investigate this phenomenon, Lundy's (2007) model of child participation was used to formulate the research and embedded questions, presented in Chapter 4, which focus on the right to voice within the classroom space. Lundy's (2007) model of child participation was applied to the literature review, the methodology and analysis to conceptualise the topic and categorise information using space, voice, audience, and influence.

This chapter explores two influential theorists for this research, Paulo Freire and Lev Vygotsky; their work is discussed through the lens of voice elicitation. The rationale for selecting Lundy's (2007) model of child participation as a framework for this current study is presented, along with a discussion on its background, how it relates to this study, how it works in practice and what influence the model has had on Irish and international policy.

## 2.1 Influential Theorists: Paulo Freire and Lev Vygotsky.

The work of Paulo Freire (1970) has been a guiding force in this research. Freire's (1970) work focuses on oppressed peoples who are in a weakened position due to the power of their oppressors. Those who are oppressed must be empowered to liberate themselves from their oppressors (Freire 1970). In this study, the oppressed individuals are students and the process for their liberation is inquiry and connection; aspects that voice work will enhance.

According to Freire (1970), the pedagogy of the oppressed has two distinct stages; the first where the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and the second to continue in the transformed state of liberation to ensure that it is permanent. Throughout this process of liberation, the culture of domination is confronted and old practices are transformed (Freire 1970). This study aimed to support students to be liberators from their oppression by confronting the realities they encounter within the school and to transform their experiences into new practice and culture (Freire 1974).

Freire's (1970) banking theory suggests that students are perceived as vessels into which information is filled. Freire (1970) demands that those who are committed to liberation must reject this banking concept entirely and adopt a new concept where students respond as an act of cognition and not by means of information transferral. The transformation, according to Freire (1970), leads education from a place of domination to a place of freedom. Freire (1970) promotes dialogue where one set of people are not denied the right to speak by a dominant group. Dialogue is the way in which transformation can be realised and for authentic education to be carried out, it must be done *with* rather than *for* or *about* (Freire 1970). Those who are in the position to lead, must do so without imposing their word on others but the action and reflection of others should inform the transformation (Freire 1974). Voicework can provoke an insurrection (Foucault 1980) as it can disrupt the dynamic where students are not consulted at a decision-making level; this redefinition can be problematic (Nelson 2019).

Lev Vygotsky has also influenced and shaped this research. Vygotsky's interest in cultural elements such as customs, beliefs, skills and values and how young people can acquire behaviours and cognitive processes relevant to their own environments, has influenced this research on eliciting the voices of young people. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) states that the level of development depends on the guidance or scaffolding of guidance from adults or peers was applied to this study. Vygotsky (1978) identifies three main factors that support a person to move through the ZPD:

- (i) They should be in the presence of someone who has more skill,
- (ii) Social interactions must take place to allow observation and practice of the skill,
- (iii) Support must be provided to assist in mastering this new skill.

Also influencing the design of this research is Vygotsky's (1934) socio-cultural cognitive and Vygotsky's (1935) co-creation of knowledge, and Vygotsky's (1962) more knowledgeable other (MKO) theories, which assert that a child's cognitive development can be guided by their social interactions and those more knowledgeable than themselves (Rhodes and Beneicke 2002).

This emancipatory research aimed to empower learners to assert their oppression through support through collaborative methods and guidance from those more knowledgeable to transform practices (Alder and Sandor 1990; Atweh and Burton 1995). The design of the

research was based on collaborative methods where participants worked together on the common goal of improvement. Methods used to elicit voices focused on those who were more knowledgeable transferring insights with the aim of improvement. Methods of data collection used in the study were modelled on Freire and Vygotsky's work, ensuring that social spaces were utilised where knowledge could be transferred. Support of the oppressed learners was highlighted to teachers by introducing ways to empower through methods of voice elicitation.

There are numerous models of child participation. Hart's ladder of participation (1992), published by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) as a response to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), visualises an ascending ladder of participation, beginning with non-participation to shared decision-making at the top rung of the ladder. Other models include Shier's (2001) pathways to participation, Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, Fielding's (2011) patterns in partnership model, Trilla and Novella's (2011) four forms of partnership model, Mitra's (2006) pyramid of student voice, and Toshalis and Nakkula's (2012) motivation and engagement model. These models, did not align fully with the principles in Freire and Vygotsky's work, and with the constructivist paradigm that this research rests in. Freire and Vygotsky focus on collaboration with a variety of participants in pedagogical planning, co-constructing knowledge for transformation of practices; a central feature in the design of this study (Fielding 2001; Fielding and Bragg 2003; Rudduck 2007; Sorenson 2001). The lack of agency that students have and ways to address this, required a clear model for participants to follow (Bovill *et al.* 2010). The ethos of this research was rooted in a shared responsibility for learning, produced in an authentic democratic intellectual community (Hutchings and Huber 2010). This research also aimed for youth voices to have influence and a guide was needed to empower students towards decision-making (Azeiteiro 2015; Hart 1992). While aiming to affect change, the design needed to include active avenues for participants to contribute to change that was beneficial to the school community (Atweh and Bolton 1995; Bovill *et al.* 2010; Clarke *et al.* 2011; Fielding 2004; Kuh 2008; Lodge 2005; Lodge and Reed 2003). The design of the research demanded a variety of learning approaches so that students would be empowered to move from being passive receptors of learning to being able to consciously analyse what enhances their learning (Atweh and Burton 1995; Bovill *et al.* 2010; Cook-Sather 2006b; Davis and Sumara 2002; Freire 2003; McCulloch 2009; Magolda 2009; Mihans *et al.* 2008).

The conceptualisation of Article 12 of the UNCRC in Lundy's (2007) model of child participation was appropriate to this study for several reasons. Lundy's (2007) model of child participation has been used to underpin recent policies in Ireland so there may have been some previous knowledge with participants. Many models of child participation were considered including Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, Shier's (2001) pathways to participation and Hart's (1992) ladder of participation. The Lundy (2007) model of child participation was chosen as voicework is not a linear process. Any environment can be placed at more than one rung of a ladder at any stage. Linear designs suggest that movement can be up or down, but this does not consider the many nuances, varieties and diversities that exist in voicework. Lundy's (2007) model with its four pillars of space, voice, audience and influence represent the many factors that can be included when eliciting voices. Lundy's Model was also useful as it provided a lens in which to view the literature review, the design and analysis of this research. Finally, as a popular framework, it offers the opportunity for comparisons to be drawn; an aspect a single case study cannot achieve. This foundation was provided with the employment of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation which is discussed in the next section.

## 2.2 The Lundy Model of Child Participation (2007).

This section discusses the background to Lundy's (2007) model of child participation, what it encompasses, how it works in practice and the section ends with an examination of the influence of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation in Ireland and elsewhere. These combined reasons, outline a justification for Lundy's (2007) model of child participation as the theoretical framing for this study.

### 2.2.1 The development of Lundy's (2007) Model of Child Participation.

Research conducted by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY 2004) involving 1000 children and 350 adults, discovered that the rights of young people were underplayed or ignored and showed a lack of compliance with Article 12 of the UNCRC. Moreover, the rights of the child regarding this Article were not fully understood by adults. Drawing on the results of this research, academic Laura Lundy, Professor of International Children's Rights at the School of Education at Queen's University Belfast, formed a model of child participation based on Article 12 of the UNCRC, with four inter-related concepts in chronological order: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence (Figure 2.1).

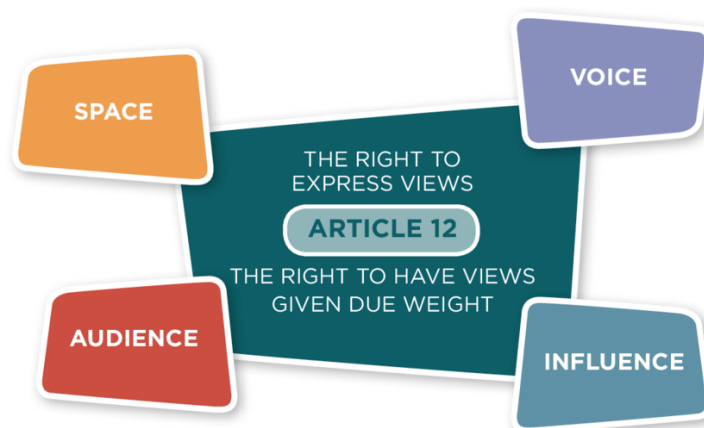


Figure 2.1 Lundy's Model of Child Participation (DCEDIY 2015, p.21).

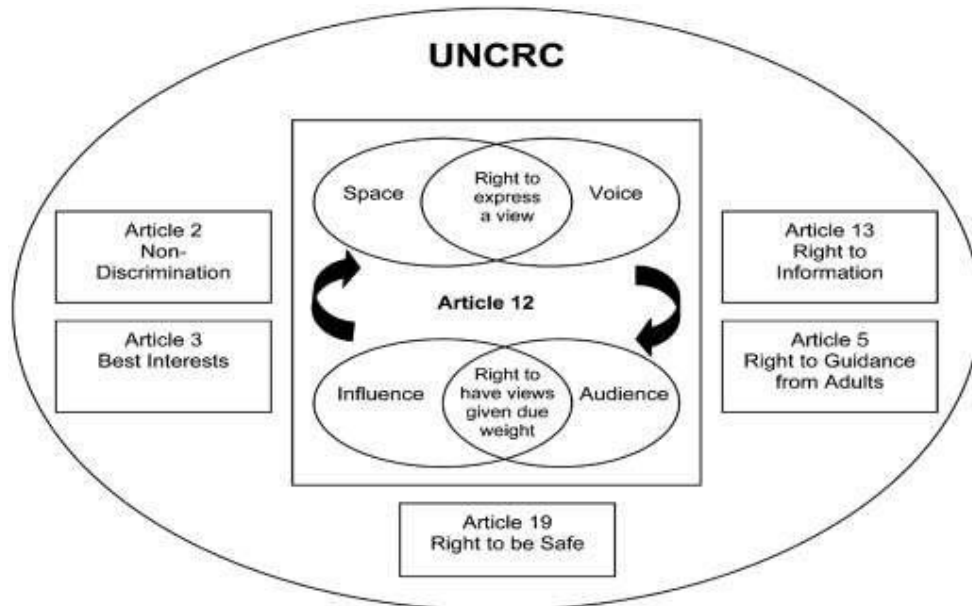
Table 2.1 illustrates how each pillar of Lundy's (2007) model was used in this study in brief. Also, in this Table (2.1 is the connection this study has with Freire and Vygotsky's work.

Table 2.1 Lundy's (2007) Model with Connections to Freire and Vygotsky in this study.

Aspect of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation	Explanation	Connection with Freire's work.	Connection with Vygotsky's work.
<b>Space</b>	Learners were given a place, time, and opportunity to express a view. One of five methods of voice elicitation was used to listen to the voices of young people.	Allowing young people to express a view replaces them as oppressed.	Adults scaffold the process by creating safe spaces.
<b>Voice</b>	Learners were facilitated by their teachers to express their views. Facilitations took place in classrooms using a variety of methods.	Young people use their voices and face their oppressors.	Adults guide young people through social interactions.
<b>Audience</b>	The voices of learners were listened to by teachers.	The oppressed and oppressors communicate on equal ground.	A 'more knowledgeable other' initiative is used. Adults and young people work together to co-create knowledge.
<b>Influence</b>	The voices of young people stimulated changes in classroom practice.	The oppressed overcome their oppression.	Young people move through the ZPD scaffolded by adults.

These four conditions must be provided and nurtured, to fully realise the potential for meaningful voice work. This model of participation, first published in the British Educational Journal, provides a legally sound conceptualisation of young people's participation as laid

down in Article 12 of the UNCRC and supported by other Articles such as Articles 2, 3, 5, 13 and 19. Figure 2.2 shows how these Articles support Article 12 in relation to youth participation.



**Figure 2.2 Conceptualising Article 12 (Lundy 2007, p.932).**

This conceptualisation of the UNCRC (Figure 2.2) was important in the design of this study as Table 2.2 presents. Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation underpinned this research; space was created for young people to use their voices within their classrooms, their teachers listened to their needs, and their perspectives influenced change. The preeminent article that this study is focused on is Article 12 (UN 1989). Table 2.2 moves Lundy’s (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12 of the UNCRC and applies it to the methods and design used in this study.

**Table 2.2 UNCRC rights and their influence in this study.**

<b>Name of Article</b>	<b>How it applied to this study</b>
Article 2: Non-discrimination	All stakeholders in the school were invited to volunteer to be part of the study. Teachers were alerted to conscious and unconscious biases when deciding what class groups to work with.
Article 3: Best interests	The study aimed to improve practices for teachers and learners. Engaging in the study promoted reflection on practice and critical thinking.
Article 5: Guidance from Adults	Teachers in the study were encouraged to empower learners. Teachers provided the spaces for young people to participate.
Article 12: The right to voice	The study investigated the moral and legal right young people have, to contribute their voices in a school setting.
Article 13: Right to information	Participants were informed before, during and after each stage of the study about what would be expected of them, what would be asked of them and how their voices were used. Member checking stages were employed throughout the study.
Article 14: Right to freedom of thought	Ideas that learners came up with were not dismissed.
Article 15: Right to Peaceful Assembly	Learners were encouraged to discuss their experiences with their peers.
Article 16: Right to Privacy	Opportunities for anonymous participation were provided. Pseudonyms used and identifiers removed.
Article 17: Access to appropriate information	All information and consent forms were provided in plain English. Learners were allowed participate in the language they felt most comfortable with – Gaeilge or English.
Article 19: Right to be safe	Teachers were encouraged to provide safe, respectful spaces for voices to be heard.
Article 29: Right to quality education	Education should develop the personality of the young person while preparing them for a responsible life, key principles in this current study.

### 2.2.2 Lundy's (2007) Model of Child Participation in Practice.

Having the right to speak, as Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN 1989) envisages, does not mean that this right will be exercised automatically (Liebel and Saadi 2012). Other facets must be included along with Lundy's (2007) four key concepts of Space, Voice, Audience, and

Influence (Strompl and Luhamaa 2020). Both age and maturity must be present; age alone cannot be the only determining factor as young people must have the capacity to understand the consequences of their actions (Keenan *et al.* 2018). Young people may need training and support to help them have a say; this includes using all methods of communication to facilitate them to express a view (Keenan *et al.* 2018). Young people can partake in activities in one of three ways; consultative, collaborative, or young person led ways. Consultative participation is adult-led where all activities are managed by adults. In consultative methods, young people are recognised as having knowledge and experiences that can inform decision-making. This method of collaborative participation is also adult led, but it encompasses young people and adults working together and sharing the responsibility of decision-making. While it is collaborative, it is adult-led as the adult impacts the outcomes. Finally, young person-led participation is where young people make the space and opportunity for themselves to find problems that they wish to address and they are facilitated in reaching their goals by adults (Alias *et al.* 2023).

In each type of activity, consultative, collaborative, or young person-led, participation implies that some sort of power sharing is taking place (Ulvik 2015) where adults are viewing young people as a group, who can promote initiatives for change and improvement (Castro-Zubizarreta and Calvo-Salvador 2023). Adults play a pivotal role in voice elicitation; it is important to be very aware of the power dynamics between adults and young people if youth voices are to be truly authentic (Mai and Gibson 2011). Authentic voices can be supported by ensuring that there is time allocated in a meeting where all views are heard (Keenan *et al.* 2018), the use of an advocate or mentor may be important to ensure a safe space that is not oppressive (McCafferty 2017), child friendly techniques and imaginative ways of communicating are used to elicit voices (Lundy and McEvoy 2012; McCafferty 2017). Checklists for planning and evaluating give guidance to agencies on how to listen to young people and involve them in decision-making at national, local, and organisational level (DCYA 2015). The everyday spaces checklist (Appendix II) is designed to help ensure that young people have a voice in the spaces they inhabit every day, like classrooms whether they are in-person or online (DCYA 2015). The checklist provides questions for each of the four concepts, space, voice, audience, and influence, to ensure that young people feel safe to participate. Questions in the checklist provide rigour and accountability and for adults to reflect upon before, during and after eliciting the voices of young people (DCYA 2015). The questions challenge adults to critically view how interactions with young people were carried

out regarding the venue, information sharing, volunteerism, feedback, influence, and communication. In addition to these important questions, the checklist (DCYA 2015) identifies important information for practitioners, including information on what participation is and is not, how to involve young people, how to involve seldom heard and marginalised voices, how to follow up and give realistic feedback to inform young people on how their voices were used.

### 2.2.3 The Influence of Lundy's (2007) Model of Child Participation.

Lundy's model (2007) of participation has changed the global understanding of youth participation. It has been adopted by international organisations, agencies, and governments to inform their understanding of participation. It provides guidance for adults on the steps to take in giving children and young people a meaningful voice in decision making. It facilitates participation purposefully as the views of young people are listened to and taken seriously. The model was prominently featured and endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015 – 2020) (DCEDIY 2015). Tusla, the Irish Child and Family agency, has Lundy's (2007) model at its core (Government of Ireland 2013) providing a template of how young people can participate and forge better outcomes in the child protection system (Keenan *et al.* 2018). The Health Information and Quality Authority, (HIQA), who monitor Tusla's compliance with national standards for child protection and its legal obligations under UNCRC, use Lundy's (2007) model as a guide to best practice. The office for the Ombudsman for Children was established in 2002 on foot of the ratification of the UNCRC in 1992 and serves to promote and protect the rights of children in Ireland. The National Child Protection and Welfare Guidelines, (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011) have adopted Lundy's (2007) model, identifying the child's right to be heard as a principle of excellence in approach (Keenan *et al.* 2018). Finally, it also is prominent in Irish Education policy in the School Self-Evaluation Guidelines (DES 2022).

Outside of Ireland, the Council of Europe have demonstrated that young people have a right to be listened to in all environments, including school environments (Council of Europe 2012) suggesting that all EU member states should implement mechanisms to promote child participation from an early age (Council of Europe 2013). This has been adopted in Scandinavia where the national curriculum in Norway has child participation incorporated into the learning content (Bae 2010). In Finland, different methods for creating spaces where

children can express their views are incorporated into the curriculum (Castro-Zubizarreta and Calvo-Salvador 2023). Lundy's (2007) model has been adapted to create an open listening climate for adults (Moore 2019). It is also used by international organisations such as the European Commission, the World Health Organisation (WHO), World Vision and UNICEF (Kearney 2020).

## 2.3 Conclusion.

This chapter outlined the importance of the theoretical framework as a guide to structure the research from the formulation of the research questions, through the literature review process, data collection and analysis and as a comparison to studies. The influence of theorists Paulo Freire and Lev Vygotsky on this research was presented. The rationale behind the selection of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation was discussed along with the connection UNCRRC (UN 1989) had with this study. A discussion of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation in practice was presented along with its impact on Irish and international policy. The next chapter details the literature review process and frames the review under the four concepts of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review.

### 3.0 Introduction.

The literature review is ‘a written summary of journal articles, books, and other documents that describes the past and current state of information’ (Creswell 2005, p.79). This literature review aims to provide a thorough understanding of voice elicitation through comparison and examination of other studies (Hart 1998). This chapter details the journey from beginning the research, to the formation of a literature map and onwards to thoroughly investigate the topic using the structure of Creswell’s (2009) literature review questions (Table 3.1). As this current study is underpinned by Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation, the main themes of the review are divided into Lundy’s four pillars of effective elicitation of voices: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. Framing the literature review in this way allowed for thorough investigation and understanding of the knowledge and gaps that exist.

The theme of Space begins the review as providing space is a prerequisite of voice (Lundy 2007). The section examines what spaces within classroom are created to elicit voices as it is a common practice in classrooms in Ireland. Existing literature shows that engaging learners to be co-creators of knowledge is amplified by providing a variety of spaces in which voices can be heard (Bovill 2013).

The theme of Voice follows this with the literature highlighting the evidence of the valuable contributions young people make when invited to participate as they are experts in their own learning. A key finding from the review of existing literature is that some voices are amplified and some are muted. The adult’s role in voice elicitation is exposed and the aspect of how silence is treated in voice elicitation initiatives is discussed. The benefits and barriers to voice elicitation are highlighted and the section ends with a robust discussion of voicework criticisms.

The importance of a listening audience is the focus of the following section. A critical review of the policies and empirical literature on the method of consultation in voicework is presented. This is followed by a critique of the aspects that support culture of voice elicitation in post-primary schools.

The final section delves into the importance of influence in Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation. Without influence, voicework can be tokenistic, so this vital part of the process is critically discussed. The literature revealed that key resources must be in place for the

voices of young people to become embedded in the culture of an education setting. Participation methods such as including learners as co-researchers in every-day spaces such as the classroom and providing effective feedback, even when that feedback is negative, were identified as important factors in the literature review. The Chapter closes with an analysis of the learnings for best practice from the literature review and highlights the gaps that exist in existing literature that this current study aims to address.

### 3.1 Literature Review Process.

This thematic literature review examines the current mechanisms in which voices are elicited in classrooms nationally and internationally and it is framed by Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation. Information was gathered to understand how voices were elicited successfully in empirical studies so that best practice could be employed in this current study. It was also essential to identify where the gaps in the literature were and how this current study could be used to contribute to the filling of those gaps. A set of questions were developed (Table 3.1) to guide and frame the review.

**Table 3.1 Literature Review Questions.**

<b>Question 1</b>	What does the literature say about how student voices have changed in educational settings nationally and internationally?
<b>Question 2</b>	In what ways in empirical studies have voices been elicited successfully in classroom settings?
<b>Question 3</b>	When viewed through Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation, what does the literature say about Irish policy and eliciting voices in the classroom space?
<b>Question 4</b>	In critically analysing policy and empirical literature through the lens of Lundy’s (2007) model of participation, what gaps emerge that could be addressed in the current study?

#### 3.1.1 Conducting a thematic literature review.

These literature review questions (Table 3.1) were used as a starting point, in parallel with Creswell’s (2009) steps in the literature review (Table 3.2) to establish themes and to create a literature map (Figure 3.1) from collating evidence from policy, theoretical discourse and empirical studies which related to the voices of students in educational settings. The process

primarily focused on journal articles but also incorporated searches of handbooks, guides, seminal and conference papers using databases such as Brill Online Journals, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), EBSCOhost Education Source, ERIC, Google Scholar, IreL-KB Taylor and Francis, JSTOR, PAC Database, Social Science Premium Collection, Springer Journals, Summon and Wiley Online Database Library. An initial timeframe (1989-2021) was used starting with the United Nation Convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC 1989) (Bell 2005, Flick 2011). This was expanded to become familiar with the history of voicework as it synthesised new perspectives by placing the research in a ‘historical context’ (Hart 1998, p.27).

**Table 3.2 Steps in the Literature Review (adapted from Creswell 2009, pp.29-30).**

<b>Step 1</b>	Identify the key words or terms that will be useful in locating materials in an academic library.
<b>Step 2</b>	Search for articles, books and publications that are related to the key words identified in step 1.
<b>Step 3</b>	Locate approximately 50 research articles or books related to the research topic.
<b>Step 4</b>	Skim the literature to try and obtain a sense of importance in relation to the research.
<b>Step 5</b>	Create a Literature Map; a visual description of the groupings of reading and how they relate to the study.
<b>Step 6</b>	Summarise and assemble the literature review.

Step 1 in Creswell’s (2009) process suggests creating a list of key words that will become a central theme in the research. Therefore, the terms ‘learner voice’, ‘pupil voice’, ‘the voices of learners’ and ‘student voice’ were key search terms for the review. In step 2, the term ‘Student Voice’ + ‘Ireland’ achieved few results and the search was widened to include terms outlined in step one of the process. Some of these key phrases are listed in Table 3.3 alongside dominant literature in this area.

**Table 3.3 Key phrases and readings in the literature review.**

<b>Voices in the classroom setting/ Voices in the school setting.</b>	Abdalla <i>et al.</i> (2013), Arnot <i>et al.</i> (2003), Baroutsis <i>et al.</i> (2016), Beattie. (2012), Bergmark and Kostenius (2009), Black, R. (2010), Bragg, S. (2001; 2007), Bray and Moses (2011), Brooker and MacDonald (1999), Cook-Sather (2002; 2006; 2008; 2017), Fielding, M. (2001; 2004; 2006; 2011; 2015), Fleming (2013; 2015), Flutter and Rudduck. (2004), Flynn (2013; 2014; 2015; 2017), Lamb (2011), Mitra (2001; 2003; 2004; 2006; 2008; 2009; 2018); Quaglia and Corso (2014), Robinson and Taylor (2007), Rudduck and Fielding (2006), Rudduck and Flutter (2000; 2004), Skerritt <i>et al.</i> (2021; 2022).
<b>Influencing school cultures/ Inclusive settings/ Influencing change in education spaces.</b>	Ainscouw (1999; 2020), Anderson (1999), Anderson <i>et al.</i> (2005), Angus (2006), Baker-Doyle (2012), Bergmark and Kostenius (2009), Blood and Thorsborne (2005), Carnell and Lodge (2002), Davies <i>et al.</i> (2006), Fullan (1991; 2002; 2007), Hargreaves and Fullan (2015), Hislop (2015), Holdsworth (2000), Leithwood and Riehl (2003), MacBeath, J. (2000; 2006; 2007; 2011), Messiou and Ainscow (2015), Rudduck (2007), Smyth (2005; 2006).
<b>Criticisms of voicework</b>	Alcoff (1992), Cefai and Cooper (2010), Clarke <i>et al.</i> (2011), Cruddas (2007), Fielding and McGregor (2005), Finneran <i>et al.</i> (2021), Lodge (2005), McIntyre <i>et al.</i> (2005), Shirley (2015), Skerritt (2020; 2022)
<b>School councils/ mechanisms in schools to hear voices/ promoting voicework.</b>	Aldridge (2017), Barber (2009), Biddle (2019), Burke (2006), Burr (2015), Canning (2017), Elwood (2013), McLoughlin (2004), Mannion (2010), Perry-Hazan (2019), Quinn and Owen (2014), Sinclair (2004), Silva and Rubin (2003).
<b>Ethical Elicitations.</b>	Alderson, P. (2009), Basit (2012), Bourke (2017), Moss (2004), Mosselson (2010), Noyes (2005), Reason (1994),
<b>Methods of eliciting voices.</b>	Andrade and Du (2007), Boomer (1992), Boud (1995; 2001), Boyd (2014), Charteris and Smardon (2019), Fitzpatrick (2016), Gallagher (2015), Noyes (2005), Rudduck and McIntyre (2007), Sargeant and Gillet-Swan (2019), Tangen (2008; 2009), Toshalis, and Nakkula (2012).
<b>Models of Participation.</b>	Arnstein (1969), Hart (1992; 1997; 2008), Lundy (2007; 2012; 2018), Shier (2001).
<b>Involvement of stakeholders.</b>	Addi-Racah and Ainhoren (2009), Baker (1997), Brown <i>et al.</i> (2020), Byrne and Smyth (2011).
<b>Students as Researchers/ Partnerships Research/ Participatory Action Research.</b>	Atweh and Burton (1995), Black and Wiliam (1998), Bovill <i>et al.</i> (2011), Boyden and Ennew (1997), Cooper (1996), Fielding and Bragg (2003), Fletcher (2005), Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2016), Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), O'Brien <i>et al.</i> (2022), SooHoo(1993), Thomson and Gunter (2005; 2007; 2010; 2015).
<b>Research methods for voicework.</b>	Babbie (1990), Bambino (2002), Bognar (2013), Bragg (2010), Brannick and Coghlan (2007), Braun and Clarke (2021), Bridgeman (2010), Rogers (2006; 2012).
<b>Rights-based education.</b>	Barn and Franklin (1996), Castro-Zubizarreta and Calvo-Salvador (2023), Davey <i>et al.</i> (2010), Durr (2004), Golombek (2006), Kilkelly (2018), McCafferty (2017), Morrow (1999), Orr <i>et al.</i> (2016), Roche (1999), Sebba, and Robinson(2010).

In addition to these search terms in Table 3.3, a new vocabulary was acquired from reading the works of others, for example ‘children’s participation (Hart 1997) and ‘negotiation’ (Fitzpatrick 2016). These new search terms added to the topics to research and opened the study from a narrow base to a wide spectrum allowing key literature to be identified and comparisons formed (Hart 1998) while returning often to the base to stay focused (Bell 2005; Creswell 2009). In step 3, Creswell (2009) suggests locating research articles, books, and grey literature such as government publications, circulars, reports, working and conference papers. Backward citation searches proved to be excellent resources in key studies where methodologies used were noted, along with the paradigms and theorists that influenced studies, data collection time frames and the key methods to engage with young people’s voices used in research. Step 4 has the proviso that the reading material must be ‘applicable to the study’ as a literature review is not simply a list of everything that was read (Bell 2005, p.110). As this research is underpinned by Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation, the literature was viewed through the lens of the four pillars: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. This underpinning gave the literature a critical focus as analysis of the literature was inspected for evidence of these four pillars. Figure 3.1 presents a literature map using Lundy’s (2007) model as a guide to investigate the literature and sort it into themes.

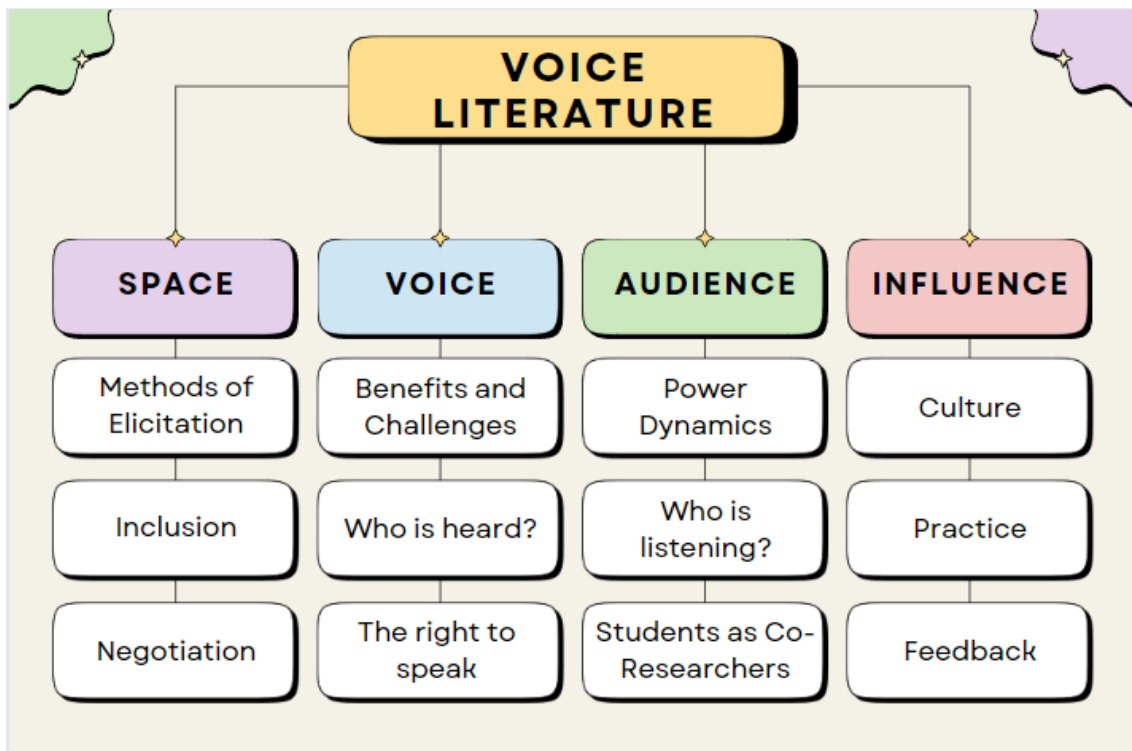
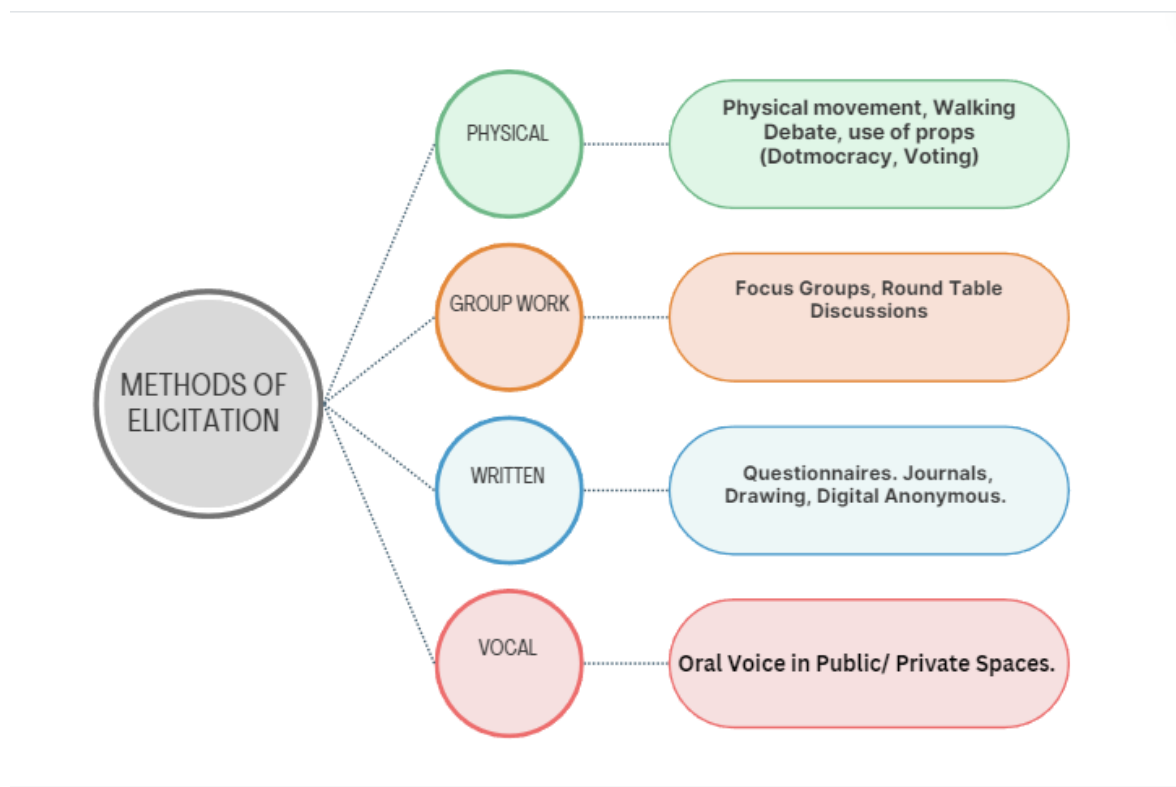


Figure 3.1 Initial themes using Lundy’s (2007) model as a lens.

Step 5 provided a visual notebook of what had been read and how it related to the research while highlighting the limitations or chasm areas so that this current study could seek to address them (Grant and Booth 2009; Hart 1998). This mapping process generated sub-themes connections between themes and categorisations which would later assemble this literature review. These sub themes are shown in Figure 3.2 where the sub theme is method of elicitation and this is sub-divided into the methods in which voices can be heard such as physical and written voicework. These are further sub-divided to list the granular details of the methods used for example walking debate requires physical movement where the ‘voice’ or opinion of the person is heard, without them having to speak. Figures like 3.2 were helpful in having a visual reference to the type of voicework being over and underrepresented in the existing literature.



**Figure 3.2 Sources of voice elicitation underrepresented in studies.**

The remainder of this chapter presents findings from existing literature through the lens of Lundy’s (1997) model of child participation. Each section begins with a guide to the breakdown of each theme and ends with concluding remarks to close each section.

## 3.2 SPACE.

Freire's (1992) theorisation of the role and purpose of education recognises that to transform the self, is to transform the world. This current study aims to transform aspects of teaching and learning through eliciting voices to embed a culture of voicework in the organisation. Creating spaces for young people to have their voices heard, is an integral step in implementing the rights of the child under article 12 of the UNCRC. These spaces must be safe for young people to contribute (Dalrymple 2003) where they have no 'fear of rebuke' or 'reprisal' (Lundy 2007, p.933). Physical, social, conceptual, and psychological spaces must be considered when creating spaces for voices to be elicited (Cleveland 2009; D'Alessio 2012; Lupton 2009). In fact, space should be considered more as a verb than a noun as it is more something that is done, rather than something that is stationary or fixed (Mulcahy *et al.* 2015). It is true that learning can happen in any space at any time (Brown and Lippincott 2003), but space, can refer to the physical classroom that the learning will take place in and to the time dedicated to the eliciting of voices, collaborations and negotiations (Boys 2011; Kokko and Hirsto 2021; Massey 2005). Kokko and Hirsto's (2021) study framed by the theory of change observed two primary schools in Finland to understand how learning spaces could be transformed and how learning could be adapted for diverse users. In safe spaces, all are invited to participate, not just a selection of privileged groups (Haug 2017; Nind *et al.* 2022). A further challenge exists when attempting to include inquiry into everyday classroom experiences (Torre 2005) where learners engage with the education process to understand for themselves (Freire 1992; Taylor and Robinson 2009).

Following this discussion on physical space and time, the next section presents the findings from the literature regarding the practicalities of eliciting voices in classroom spaces along with the integral role of the teacher in scaffolding this process. Moreover, the ideals of respect and trust were identified in the literature as being fundamental in teacher-student collaborations and dialogic processes. This section ends with a critical discussion of the key methods utilised in existing research studies such as student self-assessment, negotiation, and effective dialogue.

### 3.2.1 Voice inclusion in classrooms.

Constructive ways of providing space in classrooms to include the voices of learners to improve teaching and learning were uncovered in the literature review. Students possess a different perspective and 'positionality' to teachers (Mittra and Gross 2009, p.135). By

investigating this positionality, it gives teachers an opportunity to transform practice by taking action to amend or add new ideas (Baroutsis *et al.* 2016; Fielding and McGregor 2005; Jacobson and Mustafa 2019; Parr and Hawe 2020). To adequately hear those perspectives, learners must be repositioned and placed in central focus; a trend that has been common in the last number of years in empirical literature and in policy (Cook-Sather 2006b; Toshalis and Nakkula 2012). Providing the space to listen to learners' views means that they are being represented in a place they have historically been excluded from (Butler *et al.* 2021; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009).

Learners have expert insight on their experiences but there are difficulties in eliciting their views beyond 'bits and pieces' about what does and does not engage them (Rudduck and Flutter 2000, p.75). While there is a large acceptance in education circles that learners should have a say in their learning, there is much uncertainty about how to do this in a way that leads to lasting, effective, and meaningful change (Leahy *et al.* 2005; Shirley 2015; Sinclair 2004). While learners have unique insights, they may not feel equipped to voice their opinions. Indeed, teachers too may not be familiar with the process, so training and practice are needed for all parties (Thomson and Hall 2008). In the literature, teachers highlighted the lack of approaches to develop skills in responding to the perspective of the student and promoting student agency (Dalhaug and Nes 2010 cited in De Leeuw *et al.* 2020). Developing the skills of participation and effectively listening, takes time to hone, and it encompasses creating a safe space, respecting learners as co-researchers with expertise, practicing collaborations and dialogue and ensuring that there are a variety of methods in which to elicit voices, all of which are examined in the next sections.

### **3.2.1.1 Creating a safe space for voice elicitation.**

The typical 19<sup>th</sup> Century classroom where pew-like benches were fixed to the floor and where the teacher was elevated on a platform, the space in this case, may not have been conducive to an area where students and teachers could meet as equals (Nelson 2019). Classroom spaces, where chairs, desks and ideas are not fixed and there is more fluidity of movement encourage collaboration (Cole *et al.* 2021). Cole *et al.*'s (2021) qualitative study used recording logs to gather data on classroom environments and found that flexible seating option led to more collaborative learning. While it is not necessary to change classroom arrangements, the formal hierarchal structure can inhibit voice initiatives (Sargeant and Gillet-Swan 2019). Schools are places that are already infused with power (Freire 1973;

Melles 1999; Nind 2022) with students generally under the surveillance and control of adults (Cobb *et al.* 2005). This power difference must be addressed for all participants to occupy an equal holding and for voice elicitation to be successful (Jacobson and Mustafa 2019); a possible place to begin is the room layout. Freire (1970) teaches us that if we ignore the power differences that exist between the powerful and the powerless, we are not neutral; it means that we are siding with the powerful in not addressing the power imbalances that exist.

A practical place to begin to craft a more equal space is to ensure that the space is respectful (Cruddas and Haddock 2004; Levin 1994). Students place a high value on fairness, respect and consistency when describing good relationships with teachers (Simmons *et al.* 2015; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007) and these aspects could be incorporated when thinking of creating spaces for voice elicitation. Respectful spaces do not just happen naturally; they must be nurtured. Some studies indicate that respect was earned when teachers discovered how maturely students responded to the process of consultation in their constructive criticism of aspects of teaching and learning (Abdalla *et al.* 2020; Fielding 2004; Rogers 2012; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). The simple process of seeking students' opinions shows respect for them as equals (Morrow 1999). This finding was presented in Abdalla *et al.*'s (2020) and in Halliday *et al.*'s (2019) study, where students' perspectives were sought in a respectful manner by treating them as equals; the students' responses informed adults how to respond to their needs directly. Methods of voice elicitation can be varied, but once they are grounded in trust and respect, they have more chance of flourishing (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009).

### **3.2.1.2 Making space for students as co-researchers.**

Participation where elicitations were based on respect were successful in several studies (Leitch *et al.* 2005). One way of facilitating respectful engagement is to invite learners to be co-constructors of knowledge through voice elicitation methods (Cothran and Ennis 2000). Leitch *et al.*'s (2005) qualitative ethnographic study with students from six post-primary schools in Northern Ireland utilised the students as co-researchers, research advisors, data gatherers and co-advisors, to successfully glean valuable information about their school experiences. Similarly, Whitehead and Clough (2004) included students as co-constructors of knowledge using 139 interviews and semi-structured questionnaires with 12–13-year-olds. Likewise in Correia and Harrison's (2019) case study with 11 teachers in the UK, and part of a larger EU funded project named ASSISTME, research focused on inquiry based learning

and formative and informal assessment conversations; similar to the results in Whitehead and Clough (2004), when space was made for young people to be part of the journey of discovery, it had a powerful impact on promoting improvements in classroom practices in other studies (Clarke *et al.* 2011; Corbett 1998; Lewis and Porter 2007; Sinclair 2004).

There are times when students can be involved in some, but not all, of knowledge discoveries. For voicework to have power, students should have a sense of control in the decisions that are being made, and an acknowledgement that what they are involved in has meaning and will make a difference (Phillips 1990 cited in Holdsworth *et al.* 2007). The more space that adults give to young people to have choice and control, the more engaged and motivated they become (McNeish and Newman 2002; Toshalis and Nakkula 2012). Making space to allow learners to have some power over their learning is important even if the opportunity is informal or spontaneous (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Cook-Sather 2007; Fielding and Bragg 2004; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Sinclair 2004; White 2010). Teachers, being self ‘critical’ of practice (Holdsworth 1986, p.17) and trying out ideas ‘in partnership with students’ (Vukovic 2020, p.2) will enhance these safe, respectful spaces. This partnership moves initiatives from research *on* students, to research *with* students (Woodward *et al.* 2017) or speaking *with* rather than speaking *for* others in ‘research, planning and reform’ (Fielding 2004).

### **3.2.1.3 Making a safe space for collaboration and dialogue.**

A key finding from the empirical base, asserts that active, collaborative learning methods that have the aspiration to be autonomous, were preferential to students when considering engagement (Banks and Smyth 2015; Johnson and Golombek 2002; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009). Banks and Smyth’s (2015) mixed methods study used the Irish post-primary longitudinal study involving 900 students from a variety of backgrounds in 12 schools, focused on stress levels associated with exams found that peer learning was favoured by students. Johnson *et al.*’s (2002) mixed methods inductive analysis study found that learning that takes place in pairs or groups was highlighted in the literature as an effective way for students to verbalise their thoughts and find solutions to problems. For these reasons, collaborative methods have much in common with voice elicitation especially when students can be supported to be learning resources for one another (Sherrington 2019). Collaboration between teachers and learners will also provide space for the teacher’s perspective on the elicitation process as often the focus of voicework research tends to be on the young person

more than the adult (Skerritt *et al.* 2022). Drawing on accounts from students in three different projects in schools in the UK, Lodge (2005, p.137) categorises different forms of collaboration into weak, strong, or rich. Weak forms of collaboration offer few avenues for transformation. Strong forms of collaboration have the power to modify practice and influence change. Rich forms of collaboration when focused directly on the learning in the classroom have the capacity to remould and reshape classroom practices. Table 3.4 displays examples of collaboration in each category, a resource that was shared with participating teachers.

**Table 3.4 Forms of Collaboration adapted from Lodge (2005, p.137)**

Form of Collaboration	Examples
Weak forms	Storytelling, aiding, sharing resources and ideas.
Strong forms	Team-teaching, peer observations, action research, joint planning, design and evaluation of teaching materials.
Rich forms	Collaborative enquiry, action research with young people focusing on learning.

Providing the space for constructive dialogue can result in the revelations of how young people and adults view the world differently (Arnot and Reay 2007; Lodge 2005; Riley 1998). Moreover, discoveries from these dialogic methods can help improve practice (Lodge 2005; MacBeath 2000; Rudduck *et al.* 2006). A further step to establish a respectful space for participants could be to invite participants to determine the nature of the dialogic technique (Fielding 1999; Fielding and Bragg 2004; Hickman and Alexander 1998; Thomson and Gunter 2007). The DCEDIY's (2021) Participation Framework suggests establishing advisory groups comprising of six to twelve participants that collaborate with adults so that young people can be involved in decision-making. Havlicek *et al.*'s (2016) study used grounded theory to cultivate youth voices in foster care through the mechanism of a Youth Advisory Board with 33 youth members. Youth advisory groups such as these could be used as a pilot group before a wider cohort are consulted (DCEDIY 2021). In these spaces, young people can identify positives and unhelpful in classroom practices so modifications can be made (Mitra 2003; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007).

Whichever methods are used to elicit voices, they will take time to establish. It is important also to afford participants time to reflect before their voices are elicited so they can articulate effectively what is going well and what needs to be improved; on the spot responses are far

less effective (Tisdall 2015). Learners also need the time to understand how their voices will be taken seriously and how their voices will be used (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Labelling elicitation clearly is important as informal inquiries may not be recognised as an opportunity to contribute; bolstering informal sessions with formal methods such as focus groups or questionnaires can elevate the status of the elicitation (MacBeath *et al.* 2003; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Once elicitation is established it will need space to be ‘carefully sustained’ (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.145) a feature that is discussed later in this chapter.

#### **3.2.1.4 A variety in elicitation methods.**

Giving the time to young people to have their voices heard is just one step in the ‘space’ process; how voices are elicited, whether it is in private written messages or orally in a group space, poses many dilemmas for the authenticity of voicework (Cowie and Khoo 2017). Having a variety of methods in which learners may respond, can increase the insights received and can increase the participation of marginalised voices (Checkoway 2011; Nind 2022; Sonn *et al.* 2011). The Framework for Junior Cycle (DES 2015) places students at the core of the learning process, but it is the educator’s role to enable, empower and support learners to access the right to voice in classrooms (Nthontho 2017). Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and young people cannot be pressured or influenced to participate by adults (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Children’s Rights International Network 2010). Providing ways in which young people are comfortable to participate will increase the opportunities for voice and influence (Minton 2008).

Eliciting voices in an open forum may not be favourable to every young person. Written or digital formats may offer opportunities to include voices not comfortable with vocal, public methods. Lundy (2007) emphasises the importance of being inclusive of all young people when creating a space for participation. Methods such as drawing, role play, drama, photovoice, walking debates, poster making and private voting can support young people to contribute comfortably. Thomson and Gunter’s (2007) longitudinal three-year study in one post-primary school in the UK, utilised photovoice which resulted in multiple perspectives which were valuable to transform school practices. Bovill *et al.*’s (2010) collaborative case studies elicited the voices of university students through a variety of methods, including writing, speaking and image-based approaches, to have real input in the design of approaches and curricula in their study area. In Nind *et al.*’s (2012) qualitative study with students in a

special school, students had the choice of being video interviewed, so that physical voice and body language could be recorded. The students in this study (Nind *et al.* 2012) were also asked to contribute their voices through photovoice where participants were invited to take photographs of five of the best parts of school and five areas that needed improvement. Students were also offered visual methods such as comic strips to voice how they perceived their educational experience (Nind *et al.* 2012). Similarly, in Zilli *et al.*'s (2020) qualitative study using Black- Hawkins (2010) Framework for Participation, four male pupils aged 11-15 years who were on the autism spectrum, were invited to take photographs of places they felt listened to; the process resulted in stronger communicative relationships between adults and students. In addition to variety, giving young people a choice in how they respond and to the extent of their participation, may increase the authenticity of their responses (Kirby and Bryson 2002 cited in Holdsworth *et al* 2007).

### 3.2.2 Key methods for elicitation of voices.

The rationale for including the voices of learners in the classroom is to develop critical thinking, advocacy, heightened self-esteem, confidence, to enhance self-efficacy as well as personal and collective responsibility for learning (Barnett 1997; Cowie and Khoo 2017; Fielding 2001; Fletcher 2005; Mitra 2003; Rudduck and Flutter 2000, 2004; Rudduck 2005). Key elicitation methods are presented in the next section of this chapter.

#### 3.2.2.1 Learner self-assessment and reflection as effective methods of voice elicitation.

Self-assessing and reflecting on work were highlighted in the literature as effective methods of connecting learners cognitively with their own learning journey. These methods enhance deep learning and promote autonomy, understanding, metacognitive engagement and lifelong learning skills (Cassidy 2007; Falchikov 2005; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006; Roberts 2006; Taras 2008). In self-assessment, learners can make judgements about how well they are doing by writing reflective notes on their progress, which can enhance connections with their learning experience (Boud and Falchikov 1989; Brew 1999; Leach 2012). These written judgements, if viewed by teachers, are helpful as they identify gaps between instruction and retention (Leahy *et al.* 2005). This was experienced in Strong *et al.*'s (2004) mixed methods self-grading system study with 150 students in the US where valuable information about students' knowledge was conveyed to teachers. Self-assessment can be used in conjunction with a success criteria, a list established by the teacher to clearly identify how students can successfully demonstrate their learning at the end of an instructional period (Cauley and

McMillan 2010). Moreover, learners use the success criteria to ensure they are meeting learning goals (Biggs and Tang 2007; Boud 1995). When utilising it as a voice elicitation technique, learners can use the success criteria to judge how well they have done on a task before the teacher grades their work. These assessments are conveyed to the teacher through writing a note on their assignment.

However, learners are sometimes reluctant to self-assess as they may feel they lack the necessary skills to judge their own work (Cassidy 2007; Chapple 2019; Kirby and Downs 2007; Thompson *et al.* 2005). This was seen in Leahy's (2012) study with 472 adult learners where it was found that learners needed guidance in reliably assessing their own work; high achieving students tended to underrate their ability and lower achieving students tended to overrate it. Andrade and Du's (2007) study with 14 undergraduate students found that self-assessment strategies work best when students do not have to grade themselves, but instead they make judgements about their own work through a success criteria which aids teachers in understanding individual student needs. In Chapple's (2019) mixed methods study with 109 students self-reflecting on their work, it was revealed that they relied on the teacher to adequately mark their work (Chapple 2019). Similarly, Leach *et al.*'s (1998) constructivist study, reviewed 1246 student responses to self-assessment techniques and found that many students preferred and expected to be assessed by experts. Cassidy's (2007) mixed methods study with 160 first year undergraduates, where students' estimated marks were compared with tutor marks and found that self-assessment had a tangible value for learning but it needed support by teachers. Students, quite simply, may be afraid of being wrong (Thompson *et al.* 2005) and can often be too harsh on themselves (Leach 2012).

Another method of self-assessment is for students to set their own targets and goals in a contract with themselves (Cauley and McMillan 2010). Schunk and Swartz (1993) investigated goal setting with 60 fifth grade students from diverse ethnicities and found that when goals are specific to the student and they can monitor their own progress effectively. When a teacher interacts through dialogic techniques with a learner about their individual goals, it can be an effective voice elicitation technique. Banks *et al.*'s (2018) report on consultation with 41 schools and the stakeholders within them on their views of senior cycle education, found that methods like goal setting had much power in teaching and learning. Goal setting can be used as a constructive reflection tool as identified in the guidelines from the NCCA (2015) where it is ascertained that reflection helps students be aware of the knowledge and skills they have developed, identify areas for development, have an action

plan for personal improvement and in this way, take more responsibility for learning. Reflection on work is a key element of Looking At Our Schools (LAOS) (DES 2016; DE 2022) where students are challenged to understand their own identity as a learner and take responsibility and review their work with a view to putting a plan into action for improvement. When shared with teachers, this goal setting can be a very useful tool for teachers to reflect on their own capacity as leaders and to plan curriculum and professional development (DES 2016; Humphreys 2015; NCCA 2018, 2019).

Self-assessment and goal setting can help develop the learner's critical consciousness voice (Boomer 1992; Sonn *et al.* 2011) as well as honing their skills of self-management and self-regulation, resulting in improved outcomes for the learner (Lamb 2011). Lamb's (2011) study with six learners of language in an English post-primary school over a two-year period, initially found that the students were not cognisant of their own learner identity but once it was scaffolded and supported by the teacher it had a positive effect on teaching and learning. Sonn *et al.*'s (2011) participatory action research study with 30 students in South Africa found that in reflection, students developed their critical consciousness to connect with their learning.

### **3.2.2.2 The importance of dialogue in eliciting voice**

Dialogue is a core value that underpins voicework (Robinson and Taylor 2007); a vehicle for active participation that cannot be underestimated (Hudson 2012; Lodge 2005). Dialogue is a fundamental process for learning (Freire and Macedo 1999) and a central part of the relationship between learner and teacher (Rinaldi 2006). Dialogue can be used as a vehicle for change; eliciting voices from learners who are experts in their own lived experiences (Thomson 2011). Four conditions of successful dialogue are:

- (i) the opportunity to speak,
- (ii) the ability to express one's own ideas,
- (iii) on 'one's own terms', that is not
- (iv) 'heeded' by others (Segal *et al.* 2017, p.7).

Entering a formal or informal dialogue with learners can give teachers a substantive understanding of teaching and learning processes serving as a catalyst to improve practice

(Flutter 2007). Table 3.5 is a useful tool to characterise dialogic interactions to scaffold the dialogue process (Alexander 2013).

**Table 3.5 Characteristics of effective dialogue (Alexander 2013).**

<b>Collective</b>	Participants address tasks together
<b>Reciprocal</b>	Participants listen to each other and share their ideas
<b>Supportive</b>	Participants articulate ideas freely without any fear of embarrassment
<b>Cumulative</b>	Participants build on each other's ideas
<b>Purposeful</b>	Talk is planned and purposeful with a specific goal in mind

The formality or informality of the dialogic process can have an impact on who included or excluded (Bray and Moses 2011). If the space is too formal, it can inhibit participation from all voices, but if it is too informal, it may not receive the credence it deserves. Bray and Moses' (2011) study found that the formality of the social space in which voices were elicited and the historical and social context of the space, had an impact on who participated. How the spaces are created, nurtured, and adapted can have impacts on participation (Bray and Moses 2011; Fielding 2004). To achieve successful and meaningful dialogue, teachers can utilise the characteristics of effective dialogue (Table 3.5) along with choice and negotiation which is discussed in the next section.

### **3.2.2.3 The importance of choice and negotiation in voicework.**

The benefits of involving learners in their learning and providing mechanisms for them to be involved in decision-making, are well documented in the literature (Rudduck and Flutter 2000, 2004; Fletcher 2005; Fielding 2001). Choice is a key element in eliciting authentic voices in classrooms; if learners have a choice in how they learn it can empower them (Edwards 2007; Francis 2008). Teachers can facilitate choices in their classrooms by entering into a dialogue with their learners to discover if choices can be given in the curriculum or in delivery of information. There may be space for choice in assessment where learners are asked their opinions on what types of assessment are preferred and when they wish to be assessed. Bourke and Loveridge (2016) found in their qualitative study with teachers in seven New Zealand schools, that assessments could be created into evaluations that were important to both parties. Assessments may be tailored to suit the needs of individual learners; when assessing a piece of work, long essays can be a barrier to some students whereas recorded

presentations, posters or voice recordings may suit the needs of others. Providing the space for choice in this way can empower learners (Lundy 2007; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007).

While choice can give power to learners, when negotiation is introduced, it can empower learners further (Freire 1973). The Negotiated Integrated Curriculum (NIC) is a plan that deliberately involves learners who contribute to and modify educational programmes so that they have a real investment in their learning (Boomer 1992; Lewis *et al.* 2018; Kuhlthau 2012). In negotiating a curriculum, the teacher listens to the needs of learners and allows for their viewpoints and concerns to be included so that practices can be influenced by their voices (Hoy and Hoy 2006). In negotiation strategies, learners may share information regarding practices that are favourable so that suitable conditions for effective learning can be established (Fullan 1992). It is important to note that the teacher can retain the agency to ascertain how many of these views they wish to incorporate (Drake 1998) as some curricula cannot be altered. Learners may have limited knowledge of different teaching styles or curriculum content and may need support from a teacher who knows the curriculum well (Bates 1994; Luke 2006; Roche 1999). Moreover, negotiation is connected to building and strengthening relationships in the classroom (O'Brien 2008) making the space safe and enjoyable to be in (Brooker and MacDonald 1999). Negotiations place learners in the focus of the learning where they can closely relate to what is being taught, improving engagement and motivation as it has personal meaning to them (Boomer 1992; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Lamb 2011; Mitra 2018). Through negotiations, learners can make valuable connections with their own world when they engage communally, collectively, and critically with others (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018). Fitzpatrick *et al.*'s (2018) longitudinal study with two primary schools in Ireland, aimed to redress the imbalance within the curriculum regarding decision-making, where, according to the researchers, student agency within the curriculum was largely absent. By utilising the method of NIC and reflecting on experiences using reflective journaling, it was found that eliciting voices in this way led to meaningful learning (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018). Lamb (2011) found an inextricable link between the level of voices and the level of motivation and agency in their research with six students in one post-primary school. One important proviso would be to make sure that the dominant voices are heard in negotiations along with those that are not as audible to try to ensure that no voices go unheard (Canning 2017).

### 3.2.3 Space Conclusion.

Using Lundy's (2007) model of child participation, teachers can create a space for young people to express their views and realise their rights to voice as intended in Article 12 of the UNCRC (Keenan *et al.* 2018). Safe spaces are respectful where voices are welcome and equal. Collaborative spaces where teachers and learners work together towards improvement are transformative for learning. A variety of methods will aid participation so that all voices are given the opportunity to be heard. The literature on how voices are elicited within the classroom space was critically discussed and findings identify that methods of self-assessment, dialogue, choice, and negotiation are effective in eliciting voices.

The next section in this chapter moves to the second aspect of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation and discusses the importance of the voice within the classroom space.

## 3.3 VOICE.

The rationale for the inclusion of voices in educational settings, as discussed in Chapter 1, can be distilled down to the simple notion; it leads to improvement. The process of eliciting and incorporating the voices of learners in classrooms, enables 'schools and teachers to better understand how learners understand themselves' and others around them (Nielsen and Arber 2018, p.2) providing insights for teaching and learning (Brooman *et al.* 2015). Voicework can lead to an understanding of how learners think and feel about their lives within school (Graham 1995). These understandings and insights gained from listening to young people can influence change and be a catalyst for improvement as Davey *et al.*'s (2010) report on children's participation in decision-making found. Using surveys and focus groups to listen to over 1000 young people between 7 and 17 years old, gave adults insight to change the opportunities young people had in decision-making in their schools, homes, and local communities (Davey *et al.* 2010). Connections between eliciting voices and improvement of practice are strong and varied, however, voices that were included in many studies, raised critical questions about who is and who is not given power to speak; those on the margins are often not included (Cruddas 2007).

The next section focuses on the mechanisms of hearing voices within the classroom space. The section also investigates the difficulties in voice elicitation when adults speak *for* instead of *with* young people. Problems with the term 'voice' as a singular entity are discussed as it is a misrepresentation of the diverse voices that exist in educational settings. Elicitation can be

hindered when adults expect young people to be articulate and ready to participate, without fully preparing the young people for involvement. Voicework has the potential to give preference to those who contribute while silent voices are ignored.

The benefits gained from listening and responding to the voices of young people in education settings are wide ranging and plentiful. Rudduck and McIntyre (2007, p.145) use a division of five dimensions (Table 3.6) to build a robust argument for the inclusion of voices in educational settings. These dimensions are:

**Table 3.6 Five Dimensions of eliciting voices (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, adapted).**

<b>The Organisational Dimension</b>	Young people influence an organisation
<b>The Power Dimension</b>	Teachers to create a more equal space in which to elicit voices
<b>The Personal Dimension</b>	Personal abilities of the young person such as confidence and wellbeing are developed
<b>The Pedagogic Dimension</b>	Young people influence curriculum
<b>The Political Dimension</b>	Voicework is used as a prefigurative democracy to prepare young people to be active citizens in life beyond school

The barriers to eliciting voices are also abundant, beginning with an acknowledgement that voicework is not commonplace in Irish classrooms (Skerritt *et al.* 2021b). A discussion follows on the evidence extracted from the literature on the reasons some teachers may be reluctant to change, the barrier of time and the difficulties encountered in adapting to changes that eliciting voices may bring. The section closes with a discussion of the criticisms of voicework, detailing the unpalatable uses of voices such as surveillance, stigmatisation of teachers who do not wish to take part, and tokenism for adult gains.

### 3.3.1 Students show expertise when invited to participate in voicework.

When asked to participate in voicework, students communicate openly and insightfully (Chapman and Sammons 2013; Clarke *et al.* 2011; Pedder and McIntyre 2006). In Clarke *et al.*'s (2011) study with teenage girls in England who were excluded from mainstream education, researchers saw that when these students were invited to participate in voicework, they were astute and open. Young people are experts in their own lives and this self-

knowledge is key to understanding ability and progress (Fielding and Bragg 2004; James *et al* 1998; Kushman 1997; Leitch *et al.* 2005; McIntyre 2000, Mitra 2003; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Thiessen and Cook-Sather 2007). McIntyre (2000) utilised participatory action research with seventeen primary school students in an urban area in the US and found that students were experts in their own lives and on matters that concerned them. In Kushman's (1997) mixed methods study with over 1,000 students from a variety of diverse settings, focus groups, interviews, surveys, and observations were used successfully to understand the importance of what young people had to say.

Several studies found that students possess a unique perspective and have different kinds of valuable knowledge that could influence and improve teaching and learning (Butler *et al.* 2021; Friend and Caruthers 2015; McIntyre and Rudduck 2007; Mitra 2003; Mitra and Gross 2009; Pedder and McIntyre 2006; Quinn and Owen 2016; Sandberg 2017). Friend and Caruthers' qualitative study (2015) utilised videotaped interviews with over 170 students from primary and post-primary schools in the US to gain student perspectives about their urban school contexts. The study found that listening to young people helped adults reflect on practice for improvement (Friend and Caruthers 2015). Mitra and Gross (2009) reflected on case studies in high schools in America to understand how young people, when they are encouraged and supported to share their opinions, can improve things that affect themselves and others. Butler *et al.*'s (2021) study with twenty primary school students focused on experiences of assessment. In this study (Butler *et al.* 2021), young people had excellent assessment literacy and highlighted the need for communicative based diagnostic assessment. The act of interviewing and asking the individuals about their experiences was beneficial to the teachers to reflect on their practice and for the young people to assess their own learning (Butler *et al.* 2021). Sandberg's (2017) qualitative research with 16 primary school students in their first year of school used observations to understand how the perspectives of these children were unique and had enormous benefits for classroom practice. As experts in their own environments, young people can raise issues that teachers may not have thought of, like structural biases in schools, or how to make meaningful connections between their home and school lives, as well as insight into what motivates them to learn (Mitra 2006; Pedder and McIntyre 2006; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009).

### 3.3.2 Whose voices are amplified?

Like any group of people, some young people are naturally drawn to be involved in school initiatives than others (Davey *et al.* 2010; Flynn *et al.* 2012; Maybin 2012; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Silva and Rubin 2003; Weiler 1991). Certain voices are favoured in elicitation processes and others are silenced (Arnot and Reay 2007; Bragg 2001; Brooker and MacDonald 1999; Noyes 2005). In the literature, clever, privileged, articulate, well-behaved, and popular young people, who have parental support, and are confident to navigate the power structures in the school, are disproportionately over-represented in studies (Angus *et al.* 2013; Bernstein 1977; Bourdieu 1989; Bragg 2001; Butler *et al.* 2021; Clarke *et al.* 2011; Cook-Sather 2006b; Davey *et al.* 2010; Finneran *et al.* 2021; McIntyre *et al.* 2005). Those students who put themselves forward to participate in voice initiatives may have a vested interest in education and have the cultural capital that enables them to have a strong voice (Taylor and Robinson 2009). When a large student body is considered, there are diverse abilities, ages, races, genders, class, backgrounds and reasons for cooperation or lack of cooperation (Fleming 2015; Salim 2015). However, in the literature, the term ‘student voice’ suggests that there is one voice that speaks for all (Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019). The plural term ‘voices’ is more representative of the diversity of young people who do not occupy one single social category. All too often when researching voices, the differing voices get distilled into one homogenised voice (Kinchin and Kinchin 2019; Marshall 1996). In focusing on the bigger picture of ‘student voice’ there is a danger of losing the detail and complexity of individual stories (Hamshire *et al.* 2017). This homogenised voice can lack representation of the full student body as it implies that one unified speaker is vocalising the concerns of all; the term does not recognise the diverse heterogeneous group that exists (Subramanian *et al.* 2013). Engaged students are more likely to volunteer to take part in initiatives and to offer their voice in participation actions (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019). In Davey *et al.*’s (2010) study, according to student participants, only the popular, well-behaved students were on student councils. Furthermore, Davey *et al.* (2010) noted that mechanisms such as student councils or youth forums failed to represent the real lived experiences of young people from a variety of backgrounds, socio-economic and age groups. Keogh and Whyte (2005) researched 14 student councils in post-primary schools in Ireland and investigated the enablers, barriers and supports that exist in relation to councils. The study found it difficult to assess the effectiveness of councils as they differed greatly between settings; three school councils were totally ‘disillusioned’ with their experiences on the

council where four others had both positive and negative experiences to report where there was room to improve in the future (Keogh and Whyte 2005, p.120). Students from this study found that support from management, time, a committed staff member, regular meetings and pupil-led agendas were positive factors in the council whereas communicating with the whole school, recruiting students, and clarifying the role with new members were difficulties encountered (Keogh and Whyte 2005). Similarly, McLoughlin (2004) found that students were frustrated with the slow pace of change, poor communication with the student body and the tokenistic form of power the students held. Fleming (2015) notes that the student council has the potential to be a structure for meaningful participation as a prefigurative democracy and experience of active citizenship for students, but in reality, students' experiences were tokenistic and restricted to event organisation and fundraising. In 2014, Comhairle na nÓg reported on students' experiences in schools and they reported that school councils had little power and influence with regard curriculum or the organisation of the school (Perry *et al.* 2014).

### 3.3.3 Who is listening?

Critical interrogation of the ideology and positionality of adults who listen to young people, or who seek to listen to young people must be considered (Smyth 20015). Adults may have a preconceived notion as to what participation is and how it fits into their culture and tradition (Freire 1970; Morrow 1999). Previous experiences of participation will colour adult perceptions of what is being sought and how voicework should be facilitated, whether in a public or private forum. Considering questions such as: Who is invited to be included in the participation? How are they chosen? What training do they have? How are they supported? are important when seeking authentic voice responses (Christensen and Prout 2002; Graham *et al.* 2019; Jones and Hall 2022; Mannion 2010; Subramanian *et al.* 2013). Moreover, it is important to consider who holds power in the facilitation, what conflicting agendas are at play, whether member checking is carried out and how are participants given feedback (Arnot and Reay 2007; Freire 1970; Mihans *et al.* 2008). Above all, we should question how young voices have influence (Jones and Hall 2022). It is certainly not straightforward. The sound of voices is only part of the definition; the depth of the term is complex (Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019).

### 3.3.4 Deliberate exclusions from voice initiatives.

Findings in the literature noted through deliberate or unconscious exclusion, young people from marginalised groups are often excluded from discussions and decision-making processes (Black 2010; Castro-Zubizarreta and Calvo-Salvador 2023; Clarke *et al.* 2011; Cruddas 2007; Felten *et al.* 2013; Flynn *et al.* 2012; Flynn 2017; Johnston and Nicholls 1995; Keddie 2015; Robinson and Taylor 2013; Rodriguez and Brown 2009; Weis and Fine 1993). Firstly, the age of a young person may have a discriminatory effect as adults may ignore the voices of younger people perceiving that they are too young to have a say and, deliberately exclude them from voice initiatives (Carr and Williams 2009; Gunter and Thomson 2007; Lodge 2005; McCafferty 2017; Mabovula 2009). In existing literature, students reported, that as they got older, they felt they had more of a say in the structures of the school (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Forde *et al.* 2018). Butler *et al.*'s (2021) study interviewed twenty primary school students, learning English in China, and found that they had valuable expertise in assessment literacy, showing that their age was not an inhibiting factor to meaningful participation. When we consider The Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) there is no mandatory requirement for primary schools to have a student council; perhaps an unwritten message that they are not capable.

Often, young people who have social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties (SEBD), or those with additional needs, are excluded from voicework initiatives in educational settings (Cruddas 2007). The omission of this marginalised group was addressed in Clarke *et al.*'s (2011) study with teenage girls who were excluded from mainstream education in England due to SEBD. The study found that these participants were outside decision-making processes on matters that affected them by being ignored or excluded due to their past behaviours and experiences (Clarke *et al.* 2011). Moreover, literature suggests that students who need most support are the ones who are the most reluctant to become engaged in voicework (Angus *et al.* 2013; Cooper *et al.* 2010; Flynn 2015; Kirkwood *et al.* 2010; Luke 2006). Indeed, Cefai and Cooper's (2010) qualitative research in Malta found that the voices of those with SEBD were rarely heard in studies.

In addition to this SEBD group being excluded, voicework is sometimes deemed unimportant to those who are preparing for examinations (Chapple 2019; Fitzpatrick 2016; Fleming 2020; Smyth *et al.* 2011). Fleming's (2013) study of eighteen post-primary classrooms over one year, in three settings in Ireland, saw difficulties in incorporating voice in examination years

with conflicting interests between teaching practice and student expectations. In Ireland, the pressure on teachers and students concerned with the high stakes Junior and Leaving Certificate exams can be overbearing and have the result of diminishing any voice-based initiatives (Ball *et al.* 2012; McKeon 2020; Moynihan and Donovan 2021). Including the voices of learners in everyday lesson planning can be problematic as there may be a mismatch between the kind of teaching that elicits voices and the kind of teaching that prepares students for exams and is curtailed by the demands of the curriculum (Chapple 2019; Mitra 2004; Smyth 2016; Whetton 2009). In fact, it may even be viewed that the rights of the child are undermined by the demands of the curriculum lessening the opportunities they have to participate in decision-making in the school (Cosgrove and Gilleece 2012).

### 3.3.5 Unconscious filtering of voices.

In addition to these deliberate exclusions, there are also unconscious ways in which adults can exclude certain voices from being heard. Each setting will have hierarchies and privileges that determine who is allowed to speak, to whom they are allowed to speak, what is said, in what language they are permitted to speak and who is listening and responding to them (Angus *et al.* 2013; Marshall 1990; Noyes 2005; Skeritt *et al.* 2023; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009).

Even when adults provide the space for voice participation, it is naive to think that this will be ‘unproblematic’ (Henderson 2011, p.20). One reason for this is that the voices of young people are filtered through the voices of adults; the young person is the object and conversations or voice facilitations are often initiated and controlled by adults (Rudduck 2005). Often, young people are invited to give their opinions in certain consultative situations, but when it comes to decision-making, they may be excluded even though they are the central focus of decisions being made (Brooker and MacDonald 1999; Dyson 1995). At times, consultation processes have adults holding power so the conversation can be steered in a particular way to fulfil an adult agenda whether they realise it or not (Castro-Zubizarreta and Calvo-Salvador 2023; Holdsworth 2014; Lodge 2005; Rondinella *et al.* 2017; Walsh and Black 2009). There is also a tendency for adults to cleanse or ‘sanitise’ voices when negative, racist, or homophobic views are expressed (Cruddas 2007, p.480) or even when what is said is disagreeable to the adults involved (Bragg 2001). When this process of sanitisation takes place, one must consider if we are truly hearing an ‘authentic acoustic’ (Cruddas 2007, p.480). By ignoring these voices and filling research with a hegemony of middle-class values,

the rhetoric around inclusion will be slanted, and results will serve some more than others (Brooker and MacDonald 1999; Rogers 2012; Slee 2011).

There are voices that are more easily heard than others; quiet voices may be overlooked, or some may not seek to engage (Alcoff 1995; Cherryholmes 1987; Finneran *et al.* 2021; Freire 1985; O'Brien *et al.* 2022; Pearce and Wood 2019; Roche 1999). Alderson's (2006) study reported on findings from a survey of 2,272 students in Northern Ireland aged between 7 and 17 years which found that young people may feel too intimidated to speak up. However, there are ways in which dialogue can be achieved in supportive ways by speaking 'with' rather than speaking 'for' others (Fielding 2004). Speaking 'for' others may saturate the language with the personal values, identity, and beliefs of the world of the adult (Alcoff, 1992; Fielding 2004). Speaking 'with' young people and including their voices to inform practice can be a powerful catalyst for change as found in Mihans *et al.*'s (2008) work by using a team of faculty and undergraduate students to redesign a university course. Voicework should not take power, but 're-invent power' (Freire 1985, p.179) as students are a powerful resource in influencing change (Checkoway 2011; Mihans *et al.* 2008).

### 3.3.6 The expectation of articulation.

When young people are given the space and opportunity to participate, there can be an expectation that they will be ready to contribute whenever they are asked, and in a way that the adult eliciting their voices deems appropriate (Arnot *et al.* 2003). There is also an expectation that young people will articulate their needs in a highly mature fashion, using appropriate language, displaying a high level of trust, with a motivation to learn (Arnot *et al.* 2003). The action of eliciting voices can be romanticised into thinking that the young person is naturally competent and reasonable (Marshall 1996) and that their responses will be articulate 'spontaneous, coherent and consistent' (Cruddas 2007, p.480). Young people, like all people, are shaped by their own personal experiences and this will impact how engaged they do or do not become (Bernstein 2000; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009). Learners may not be adequately prepared to enter discussions regarding curriculum planning (Heath 2004) as it may not be an area that they have thought in depth about, especially if they are given one chance to participate without prior warning. Simmons *et al.*'s (2015) mixed method study with over 600 primary and post-primary students found that using only one phase for data collection did not give students adequate time to reflect critically on their views. Participation and collaboration require support and guidance (Bovill and Bulley 2011) but few studies

explore what this support looks like in practice (Heron and Palfreyman 2019). Young people may require coaching in oral literacy to develop the confidence in effectively communicating their needs (Checkoway 2011; Mercer *et al.* 2017). They may also need the practice and confidence (Bovill *et al.* 2011) along with the metacognitive skills to take part in constructive negotiations and dialogue (Clarke 1991; Mercer *et al.* 2017; Rudduck and Fielding 2006). Eliciting the voices of students is not a cure for all that is wrong in education; giving students the opportunity to be part of the decision-making process does not equate to them being automatically more engaged in their learning (Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019). The likelihood is that young people may need help and support to air their views (Orner 1992). A framework that is adaptable to support all young people in contributing their voice, regardless of their ability or experience in voicework is essential (UNESCO 1994).

### 3.3.7 Silent voices.

Inviting young people to take part in voicework initiatives is one part of the journey; there are varied reasons why some young people do not wish to participate. Amplifying the voices of those who do not wish to speak is conceptually and practically difficult (Arnot and Reay 2007); the reasons for silence being varied. We must remember that adults are inviting young people to participate in a space that is pre-determined by the adult in charge (Alcoff 1995; Henderson 2011) who may be the one to decide that this group are oppressed and need emancipation (Cook-Sather 2007). The reasons why a young person remains silent may be due to an already established culture in the organisation where some voices are recognised as important and some are silenced (Bernstein 2000). If elicitation depends solely on elicitation in a public, spontaneous way, it impinges on those who are not willing to speak out (Arnot and Reay 2007). There is an idea that exists that ‘voice’ must be audible, and this has been challenged in recent literature (Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019). While Cook-Sather (2006) argues that voice indicates being present and taking part, there can be a tendency to focus on audible voices rather than eliciting voices through silent means. Silent voices may be from individuals who are marginalised, as explained previously, or they could be silent due to the dominance of others (Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019). ‘Voice’ is not a single monolithic entity and in placing the emphasis on audible, articulate voices, there are important messages that may be lost in ignoring gestures, silence and what is not said (Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019).

Silence can be a ‘powerful political act’ (Cook-Sather 2006b, p.370). When we work to elicit the voices of learners and some learners wish to be silent, the supposedly emancipatory work

that we are doing can infringe upon the young person's right to *not* cooperate. Students who are disengaged, powerless or disillusioned may feel that there is no point in speaking, that it is not worthwhile or safe to do so (Angus *et al.* 2013; Cook-Sather 2006b; Clarke *et al.* 2011; Danso *et al.* 2003; Howard 2004). If a young person wishes to remain silent, the silence cannot be ignored (Hadfield and Haw 2001; Sinclair 2004). We must examine the preconceived notion that speech equals engagement; the onus is on adults to help young people to contribute in a way that is safe for the young person (Orner 1992).

### 3.3.8 Benefits of eliciting the voices of learners.

The benefit of elicitation of voices is well documented in existing literature (Cook-Sather 2006b; Fielding 2004; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Sebba and Robinson 2010). Eliciting the voices of learners can serve as a catalyst for change in relation to improvement of practices, relationships with staff, professional development, and the enhancement of the organisation (Fielding and Bragg 2003; Lodge 2004; Macbeath *et al.* 2003; Thomson and Gunter 2005). Schools are well suited to develop youth-adult partnerships through eliciting voices (McGregor 2007). The next subsections use Rudduck and McIntyre's (2007, p,145) five dimensions (Table 3.6) to categorise the benefits of voice elicitations in schools.

#### 3.3.8.1 The Organisational Dimension

When voices are elicited in educational settings, students feel a greater connection to the organisation which can help in improving the school (Flynn 2014; Holdsworth *et al.* 2007; Shier 2001; Simmon *et al.* 2015; Smyth 2016; Tangen 2009; Wilson 2008). To transform learning environments, it is important to recruit teacher and student participants as key actors in the research, following a distributed leadership model (Bolden 2011; Spillane 2005). Bergmark and Westman's (2016) case study using open ended questionnaires with 69 students in Swedish schools, highlighted the importance of participant inclusion to contribute to the improvement of the school, including enhancing course designs. Likewise, the voices of young people played a crucial role when considering the organisation, in Simmons *et al.*'s (2015) study where over 600 students' views were recorded through focus groups, providing rich accounts of their experiences to inform school improvement. Adult-youth partnerships which work towards improvement have the added benefit of strengthening adult-youth relationships (Sebba and Robinson 2010; Tangen 2009). This was realised in Bovill *et al.*'s (2010) study where student voices were elicited and used to redesign approaches to courses and curricula; the process also forged strong relationships between staff and students.

Similarly, in Wilson's (2008) case study of one post-primary school in England, focus groups and interviews were used to investigate student school experiences and strengthen adult-youth partnerships in the process. Developing a youth voice culture can provide critical knowledge to strengthen educational settings as well as the relationships within them (Cook Sather 2007; Harvey 2015; Lodge 2005; Mitra 2008; Phelan *et al.* 1992; Poplin and Weeres 1992).

### **3.3.8.2 The Power Dimension.**

A dominant theme in the literature is that eliciting voices can create a shift in the balance of power (Freire 1970; Hart 1997; Mitra *et al.* 2012; Morrow 1999; Sargeant 2018). This switch in the power dynamic, brought forward by offering students their right to voice, can present a challenge for teachers (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Freire 1970; Sargeant 2018; Skerritt *et al.* 2022). While the redistribution of power was a challenge experienced in Fitzpatrick *et al.*'s (2018) study, the consensus among participant teachers at the end of the project was that through eliciting student voices, learning was more meaningful as it was adapted to suit the cohort. Learners do have increased control and power over their learning in negotiating decisions around curriculum content, learning approaches and assessment (Fitzpatrick 2016). In working with learners in a power-sharing way, they move from merely speaking, to having more power in the development and improvement process. To facilitate this, major shifts are needed on the parts of both young people and adults (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Freire 1973; Hart 1997; Oldfather 1995). However, it may be very difficult for a young person to challenge the power of someone in authority (Bragg 2007b). It may also be very difficult for adults to receive criticisms (Chapple and Raftery 2023). Eliciting voices may mean that one group, who traditionally held less power are given more power which upsets the traditional balance (Freire 1970; Habermas 1984).

There is a balancing act to be achieved between adults having too much power and therefore limiting the amount of influence a young person can have, and, not presiding over situations enough that they lose traction (Chapple and Raftery 2023). The level of support and training may have to be increased as young people may be capable of working with adults, and adults, need to be sensitive to the limitations young people may have when it comes to expert knowledge (Hart 1997). Fitzpatrick *et al.*'s (2018) study of two primary school classes found that students took some time to get used to being asked for their opinion on matters that were of concern to them. Adults need to be mindful when they open the dialogue between

themselves and learners to elicit voices, the onus is on the adult to do something with the suggestions given, to give young people some power to influence change (Angus *et al.* 2013; Luke 2006; Lundy 2007). Ultimately, the teacher is the intellectual authority and responsible for learner progression and delivery of the curriculum; participation can be part of the process (Bergmark and Kostenius 2009; Flynn 2017). There is a danger here, as these initiatives are adult led, they can have an adult focus with the adult in charge placing their own views on the process, filtering the voices of students (Flynn 2017; Mitra 2008). The adult holds power and any utterance from a young person is susceptible to being ‘entangled’ in adult ‘judgements’ (Bakhtin 1981, p.276). This power struggle was identified in Cefai and Cooper’s (2010) review of qualitative studies, where researchers found that it can be difficult to maintain a power dynamic that is collaborative and democratic in the teaching space. The democratic teaching space where there are opportunities for shared decision-making, listening to other points of view and weighing options can help build an appreciation of the democratic process (UNICEF 2002). The role of the adult in eliciting voices cannot be erased; if the adult’s role is removed, it is not realistic to assume that the young person will represent their own interests (Cruddas 2007). However, if this difficulty is managed by supporting young people and treating them as equal participants and not ‘passive actors’ in the improvement process, the results can be profound (Bragg 2010, p.59). Eliciting youth voices is more than simply listening; it is a challenge to the traditional power dynamics that exist in education (Angus *et al.* 2013; Freire 1973). To restructure this dynamic, ‘radical collegiality’ must take place, based on strong teacher-student relationships, discussed in the next sub-section (Fielding 2004 p.147).

#### 3.3.8.2.1 Teacher-Student Relationships

The positive relationship between students and teachers is identified as an important factor in facilitating student voices in the literature and has implications for the empowerment of students (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Darmody *et al.* 2012; Fielding 2001; Forde *et al.* 2018; Mitra 2006, 2018; Postlethwaite and Haggerty 2002; Rudduck and Flutter 2000; Rogers 2012; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Smyth *et al.* 2011; SooHoo 1993; Tangen 2009). Postlethwaite and Haggerty’s (2002) research directly engaged with under- and over-achieving students to investigate what were the conditions that made them learn, finding that teacher-student relationships were of high importance. This finding was similar in other studies where the sense of being valued in strong teacher-student relationships were identified as important factors for voice elicitation to thrive (Fleming 2016; Flynn 2017; Kristmanson *et*

*al.* 2013; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Secure relationships between teachers and students can ease the elicitation process as SooHoo's (1993) research with middle school students as co-researchers, found that positive teacher-student relationships enabled young people to speak more freely about what meaningful learning is. In Mitra's (2006) longitudinal two-year study in California, Mexican American families took part in a bilingual translation programme to increase connections to the school. It was found that the voices of over fifty student participants were key in strengthening ties between home and school life (Mitra 2006). Banks and Smyth (2015) in their mixed methods case study investigating the stress of high stakes summative examinations with 900 students in twelve post-primary schools in Ireland, found that eliciting the voices of young people positively impacted on relationships between teachers and students. The importance of trust and respectful relationships between adults and young people was critical for the project in Sonn *et al.*'s (2011) study with thirty students in one case study. This idea of trust was also identified as a key factor in Tangen's (2009) study, where the quality of school life for seldom heard students was investigated and it was found that positive relationships must exist for students to feel safe to participate. Students are generally happier when those in positions of authority do things *with* them rather than *to* them or *for* them (Laurence-Lightfoot 2000; Noyes 2005; Wachtel 2016). Involving young people in the decision-making process can help foster a culture of mutual respect and strong relationships which will outlive any project (Bourke 2017; Carnell and Lodge 2002; Davey *et al.* 2010; Pedder and McIntyre 2006).

### **3.3.8.3 The Personal Dimension**

Findings from the literature review emphasised the importance attributed to the relationship between eliciting voices and personal growth of the young person. The various personal development elements that are connected to voicework are discussed in the next subsections. These include wellbeing and enjoyment, self-confidence, self-awareness, and empathy.

#### **3.3.8.3.1 Wellbeing and Enjoyment**

A connection between students being able to have their say and students' wellbeing is evident in the literature (Anderson and Ronson 2004; Flynn 2017). Simmons *et al.*'s (2015) study focused on the wellbeing of 600 students in three school regions in Australia and students observed that when their voices were heard, it had a positive impact on their wellbeing. In the 'Framework for Junior Cycle', the wellbeing of students is one of eight core principles where it is stated that the curriculum should contribute to the 'physical, mental, and social wellbeing

of students' (DES 2015, p.13). Other existing literature presented findings with a well defended link between being listened to and positive effect on wellbeing (Bourke and MacDonald 2016; Halliday *et al.* 2019; Waters *et al.* 2022).

The literature also exposed the importance of enjoyment in schoolwork in students' lives (Fitzpatrick 2018; Kristmanson *et al.* 2013, Postlethwaite and Haggerty 2002; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Halliday *et al.*'s (2019) participatory action research study with ten students in an Australian public school offered students the opportunity to give their perspectives on wellbeing in the school. The results showed how much students valued enjoyment in the classroom which impacted positively on their wellbeing (Halliday *et al.* 2019). In Kristmanson *et al.*'s (2013) study, the twelve purposively selected 17-year-olds, identified that a large part of their learning had been linked to the enjoyment they experienced using European Language Portfolios (ELPs). Postlethwaite and Haggerty (2002) found similar in their research, discovering a strong link between enjoyment and learning. In other studies, students reported that they felt the atmosphere in the class was important; fun and enthusiasm were deemed important aspects of learning and in facilitating voices to be heard (Butler *et al.* 2021; Kincheloe 1991; Postlethwaite and Haggerty 2002; Halliday *et al.* 2019; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Simmons *et al.* 2015). Making learning fun, engaging, interactive, purposeful with a variety of means to communicate will increase the possibility of participation (Corbett 1998; Hill *et al.* 1996; Holland *et al.* 2008; Horgan 2017; Nind *et al.* 2012; Taylor and Robinson 2009).

#### 3.3.8.3.2 Self-confidence and awareness of self and others.

In several studies examining the impact of student voices, links between voice elicitation and confidence, awareness and acceptance were found (Holdsworth *et al.* 2007; Shier 2001; Sonn *et al.* 2011; Smyth 2016; Wilson 2008). Improvements in confidence through voice elicitation were found in Flynn's (2014) transformative emancipatory study with twenty Irish students with SEBD. Voice elicitation has the power to develop a greater understanding and self-awareness of learner's abilities (Dennis *et al.* 2008; Mitra 2003). Through observations and interviews Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) focused on marginalised groups to investigate how organisations can cultivate identity and found through listening to young people how confidence could be boosted. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) noted that having a say was positively connected to motivation and awareness of their learning. The process of eliciting voices increased empathy and awareness of other's needs (Flynn 2013; Lynch and Baker

2005; Noddings 2005). Engaging in dialogue with young people encourages them to be aware of their own rights and the rights of others (Ginwright and Cammarota 2007; Lynch and Baker 2005; Noddings 2005; Smyth *et al.* 2010).

#### **3.3.8.4 The Pedagogic Dimension.**

The self-awareness discussed in the previous section can lead learners to influence pedagogy and to be autonomous and agentic. In the next subsections, the similarities between voice elicitation and formative methods of teaching are highlighted, and this is followed by a discussion on the teacher's role in facilitating pedagogic change.

##### **3.3.8.4.1 A greater understanding of curriculum**

Eliciting the voices of learners leads to meaningful learning (Abdalla *et al.* 2020; Bovill *et al.* 2010; Fitzpatrick 2018; Lewis *et al.* 2018; Mitra 2003, 2006; Parkes 2008; Wong *et al.* 2020), strengthens student achievement (Black and Wiliam 1998; Ferguson-Hessler de Jong in Theberge 1994; Oldfather 1995; Rudduck and Flutter 2000; Quinn and Owen 2016; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009) and fosters workplace readiness (Salim 2015). A number of these pedagogic aspects were highlighted in Abdalla *et al.*'s (2020) study with 75 senior students in three Australian Islamic schools where voices were elicited through focus groups and questionnaires. The research (Abdalla *et al.* 2020) found that students responded informatively to influence changes in class sizes and resources. The process of voice elicitation gave teachers a deeper understanding of the pedagogic process from the perspective of students (Abdalla *et al.* 2020). Similarly, Wong *et al.*'s (2020) research of 116 upper post-primary school students utilised voice elicitations through storytelling and the pedagogy was altered to suit the interests of students. The sentiment from students regarding the disconnect between the lives of students and what is included in the curricula was highlighted in other studies (Lodge and Reed 2003; Yonezawa 2009). Including the voices of learners in decisions regarding pedagogy found that if learners' interests were incorporated into the curriculum, there was greater metacognitive understanding of topics (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Mitra 2003, 2004, 2018; Pedder and McIntyre 2006; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). It was clear from Bergmark and Westman's (2016) case study in a Swedish school, that the connection to schoolwork was greater when teachers included student interests. Bovill *et al.* (2010), Fitzpatrick's (2016) Lewis *et al.* (2018), Oldfather (1995) and Quin and Owen (2016) had similar results, finding that when students had the

opportunity to have input into the design of curricula, the connection with what is being taught is substantial.

#### 3.3.8.4.2 Autonomy and agency

For learning to have deep meaning, learners need to have autonomy (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Fielding 2004; Fitzpatrick 2016; Kristmanson *et al.* 2013; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Vukovic 2020). Autonomy is described as the ‘ability’ (Holec 1979, p.3) or ‘readiness to take charge of one’s learning’ (Dam 1995, p.2). In autonomous learning, students can document their self-progress, self-assess their own competency, and set goals for their future (Kristmanson *et al.* 2013; NCCA 2018, 2019). Autonomy can be promoted in a variety of ways; eliciting the voices of learners is one proven way to enhance it in learners. In Kristmanson *et al.*’s (2013) study with twelve 17-year-olds in a Canadian post-primary school, focus groups were used to record the students’ learning experiences of using a portfolio to set goals and this contributed to their autonomy. Furthermore, Forde *et al.* (2016) found, in their study with 74 students in schools and youth organisations in three locations in Ireland, that providing choice to learners, fosters an environment that promotes student autonomy. Collaborative learning, where students have agency and ownership, is welcomed in school situations (Pedder and McIntyre 2006). PISA (OECD 2017) compared 15-year-olds in 65 cities across the world and found that the most successful students were those who had a sense of ownership of their learning. Luke’s (2006) study with one university Spanish class, found connections between self-directed learning which increased their autonomy. Learner autonomy is highlighted in policy documents such as LAOS (DES 2016, DE 2022) and SSE (DES 2016) where statements of effective and highly effective practice aim to promote independent learning. Many of the methods used to promote autonomy are formative in nature and the next section discusses this further, highlighting the links with voice elicitation.

#### 3.3.8.4.3 Formative methods of teaching.

Formative teaching methods, such as using open ended questions, quizzes, KWL charts<sup>5</sup>, success criteria, feedback and goal setting, are noted in the literature as an effective means of encouraging learning and motivation (Banks *et al.* 2018; Butler *et al.* 2021; Mitra 2006; NCCA 2018, 2019; Nolen 2011; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009). These methods have ties with voice elicitation as they promote student-teacher dialogue (Brophy 2008). Formative assessment overlaps with voice inclusion as it aims to (i) clarify so that young people understand (Leahy

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<sup>5</sup> These identify what students already know, what they want to know and what they have learned.

*et al.* 2005; Sherrington 2019; Wiliam 2011; Wiliam and Thomson 2007) (ii) engineer classroom discussions to elicit evidence of learning and to be responsive to the needs of learners (Wiliam and Thomson 2007) and (iii) provide feedback that helps learners go forward (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Sherrington 2019; Wiliam 2011).

However, the reality is that students exist within a system of high stakes state examinations. Ireland's post-primary education system emphasises the importance of summative assessments which has an enormous influence on teaching and learning, encouraging didactic and rote learning (Fitzpatrick 2016; Flynn 2013). Eliciting the voices of learners regarding their education is formative in nature and is sometimes not directly connected with the summative exam (Banks and Smyth 2015; Smyth 2016). In Chapple's (2019) study with 109 students which investigated the usefulness of student self-reflection, students found that while reflection was helpful, they didn't see how it connected with a summative exam. Moreover, some participant students in this study, saw no value in taking time to assess their own work, as it would take time away from examination preparation (Chapple 2019). However, it is acknowledged that formative teaching methods lead to higher quality learning (Wiliam *et al.* 2010). In Wiliam *et al.*'s (2010) study, 24 teachers in six UK schools were supported over a six-month period to incorporate formative assessment into their classroom practice. Wiliam *et al.*'s (2010) research found similar results to others that formative assessment produced tangible benefits to teaching and learning (Clark 2012; Kulasegaram, and Rangachair 2018).

In Ireland, the Chief Inspector's Report (DE 2022), which summarised key inspection findings from 2016-2020, found that deep engagement through active learning was taking place in post-primary classrooms. The Chief Inspector championed the use of student self-assessment as these practices 'enabled students to review their progress' and suggested that teachers build on this so that 'quality judgements can be made by students' in the future (DE 2022, p.130). The report also highlighted the importance of Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) in Junior Cycle and tasked teachers to reflect on their approaches to assessment in general with the aim of promoting formative assessment without the 'unnecessary burden of overly frequent summative assessments' (DE 2022, p.131). The Chief Inspector's Report (DE 2022, p.134) directly addressed the space for the voices of students by highlighting the need for 'classroom discussion' as well as other formative methods mentioned above.

#### 3.3.8.4.4 The role of the teacher in pedagogic alterations

When eliciting voices, the intention to adapt teaching styles to strengthen teaching practice was a finding in existing literature (Daniels *et al.* 2001; Fleming 2013; Fitzpatrick 2016; Kristmanson *et al.* 2013; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Mitra 2018; Skolverket 2011). The voices of students are in Irish education policy so there is a greater connection to classroom practices (Fleming 2013). Once a teacher decides to focus on improving their own teaching practice using learner's perspectives, elicitation can inform the delivery of programmes in partnership with students (Daniels *et al.* 2001; Graham 1995; Rogers 2006). In several studies where voicework methods were introduced into classrooms, one of the changes noted was the improvement in teaching and learning; irrespective of whether the voice-based initiative was the Negotiated Integrated Curriculum (NIC) (Fitzpatrick 2016), student centred portfolios (Kristmanson *et al.* 2013) or student formative assessment (Chapple 2019) the results found positive improvement in the pedagogic dimension (Fielding and Bragg 2004; MacBeath *et al.* 2003; Rudduck and Flutter 2004). Engaging directly with learners brings about a renewed sense of excitement (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007) as it stimulates ideas for change (Messiou and Ainscow 2015) and removes unnecessary barriers to learning (Angus *et al.* 2013; Holdsworth *et al.* 2007). Messiou and Ainscow's (2015) three-year study in three European countries identified that students' views had been largely absent when reflecting on teaching; when time was dedicated to eliciting the voices of students, the information students gave was a powerful catalyst for change in practices. This also echoes Freire's (1973) teaching where he identifies education as a praxis, where action and serious reflection can influence positive change. Eliciting student voices amplified interest and engagement as they introduced topics that had meaning and were personalised to learners (Charteris and Smardon 2019b; Fitzpatrick 2018; Luke 2006; Kristmanson *et al.* 2013). It is true however, that teachers who were already interested in student autonomy, had a preconceived conviction to support autonomy (Bryan 2012; Wallace and Kang 2004). This aspect was recorded in Correia and Harrison's (2019) case studies with Science teachers and in Wallace and King's (2004) research with six high school science teachers, finding that autonomy was heavily influenced by teacher's beliefs.

In education settings, there are opportunities for radical changes in pedagogy guided by the voices of young people (Shier 2001). Teachers, co-constructing knowledge with learners, are most qualified to identify the spectrum of their students' needs (Creech *et al.* 2020; Mantie *et*

*al.* 2021). Methods to identify changes that need to be made in relation to pedagogy can be classified as guided (by the teacher) or free (by the student) and these prospective changes can be reflected on when both perspectives are shared (Wenning 2007). Taking the learners' ideas on board is one part of the process; the teacher must balance learners' views with the knowledge the teacher possesses about individual learning needs and skills, to make valid and reliable decisions about changing practices (Nolen 2011). There are bound to be crossovers in the strategies that both learners and teachers believe are best for the classroom. These crossovers were exposed in Daniels *et al.*'s (2001) study with 66 pre-school and primary school students, where similarities in perspectives from both students and teachers existed on what was good classroom practice. This sort of co-construction for improvement may need scaffolding and support for learners. Training learners to have agency through voice can help them take on extra responsibilities and reduce obligations on the teacher as observed in Fitzpatrick *et al.*'s (2018) study. To allow all parties to be included in decision-making, the teacher needs to ensure that:

- (i) all participants are involved in decisions that affect them,
- (ii) everyone involved understands why final decisions were made and
- (iii) once new pathways are made, everyone knows what to expect so that they have a clear vision for the future (Chan Kim and Mauborgne 2003).

Co-construction may involve giving learners choices which can cultivate positive attitudes to learning (Bergmark and Westman 2016; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Toshalis and Nakkula 2012). There is an importance for each method of eliciting voices to be flexible and adaptable for teachers to incorporate in ways that are beneficial to learning.

However, there can be some inhibiting factors to engaging voices to influence pedagogy, such as time, curriculum pressures, and accountability for covering course work (Correia and Harrison 2019). These barriers are discussed in detail in the next section. Inevitably, it is the teacher who makes the decision to elicit student voices to become part of the improvement process even if they cannot change a state determined curriculum (Bragg 2007a; Salim 2015). Dialogue to elicit voices, can transform the position of students from passive consumers of knowledge (Finneran *et al.* 2021; Fielding and Moss 2010) to agents of change and creators of knowledge (Cook-Sather 2007). When voices are elicited, learners have a greater interest and willingness to learn, along with a sense of empowerment to make changes (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Sebba and Robinson 2010).

### 3.3.8.5 The Political Dimension

The belief that eliciting voices within schools will constitute a society in miniature, has been widely discussed in the literature and can be encouraged using spaces that already exist in the school environment (Brough 2012; Freire 1970; McDermott 2020). Giving students the ability and power to influence change in ‘meaning-making activities’ which have links between their education and the wider world, provides a prefigurative democracy through participatory activities (Dykes 2013; Flynn 2017; Freire 1970; Henderson 2011; Hoskins *et al.* 2012; Mitra 2006; Raby 2014; Roche 1999). The prefigurative democracy is supported in policy in the School Self-Evaluation Guidelines where the vision of a holistic style of learning, incorporating a wide range of skills and competencies to ‘enable personal wellbeing, active citizenship and lifelong learning’ is promoted (DES 2016, p.16). It is also supported in Article 15 of the UNCRC (UN 1989) where young people have the right to create and join organisations and assemble peacefully, helping them to take part in the political process; a critical part of the democratic development of society (Checkoway 2011; Freire 1970). Voicework offers the opportunity to give voice to all, including those in under-represented and marginalised groups which will pave the way for civic inclusion (Flynn 2014; McLeod 2011) in which positive changes and improvements can be made for the future (Checkoway 2001; Freire 1970; Levin 2000; Shier 2001). Manni and Knekta (2020) found that the elicitation of the voices of students increased their courage to speak up on civil matters that affected them. Shosh (2019) in their study with 14 teachers in the US, reported that giving the opportunity for leadership helped students feel valued and listened to and prepared them for life beyond school. Salim’s (2015) experiences as a post-primary school teacher highlighted the importance of incorporating the voices of learners in classrooms as it provides opportunities for students to make democratic changes and to feel the effect of these changes. Similar results were found in Yonezawa *et al.*’s (2009) study which reflected on ten years of youth engagement in two high schools in San Diego, finding that once young people engaged in participation activities, they viewed themselves as powerful agents of change. Cook-Sather and Lu’s (2014) case study of one partnership programme at a liberal arts institution in the US, saw that when students were given the opportunity to have their voices heard they had a transformative effect and had the potential to reconceptualise classrooms into democratic spaces. Mechanisms that already exist in schools, such as student councils can provide positive examples of how changes can be applied to classroom situations and how all students can become active innovators of change (Finneran *et al.* 2021).

In creating power sharing classrooms that have space for voices to have influence, classrooms become more democratic (Beane 2005; Brough 2012; Freire 1973). This practice of listening to the voices of students in the classroom is in keeping with Article 12 of the UNCRC, which empowers students to participate for their own, and for the common good (Brough 2012). In participating in voicework, students expand their understanding of creating healthy working environments (Sonn *et al.* 2011) and they can take on extra responsibilities to make changes for themselves and their peers (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018). Other forms of voice inclusion like consultation can also transform the position of students (Finneran *et al.* 2021; Fielding and Moss 2010) empowering them to make changes for improvement (Cook-Sather 2007). Eliciting the voices of learners, fosters a more democratic school ethos (Mitra and Gross 2009; Ruddock and Flutter 2004) where students can develop skills that are crucial for productive citizens; tolerance, respect, questioning, leadership, and public speaking (Flynn 2014; Mayes *et al.* 2016). The rights of the child outlined in the UNCRC should filter into the everyday lives of students in educational settings; it should matter what young people think, their views should be considered (Morrow 1999).

### 3.3.9 Barriers to eliciting the voices of learners.

Several barriers exist in the elicitation of voices, the first being that, although the right of the child to be heard on matters that affect them (UN 1989) was ratified in Ireland in 1992, the due weight afforded to young people is not commonplace in classrooms (De Leeuw *et al.* 2020; Forde *et al.* 2018; Harrison *et al.* 2020; Skerritt *et al.* 2021b; Skerritt *et al.* 2023). Studies from the Irish context focused on voicework within the parameters of student councils or on non-academic activities (Brown *et al.* 2020; Fleming 2013; Forde *et al.* 2018; Percy-Smith 2010) and not on practice within the classroom. Forde *et al.* (2016) notes that although measures are present in policy, they may not always be present practically in classrooms.

The increase in voice-based initiatives since the early to mid-1990's has been focused on school reform rather than realising the rights of young people to participate (Mitra 2005). Barriers due to institutional cultures and practices that have an adverse effect on the liberation of voices are discussed in the next section (Graham *et al.* 2018; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Skerritt *et al.* 2021b). In addition to this, there are several reasons why individual teachers may be reluctant to get involved; the perceived time it takes to implement voice activities along with a resistance to change can inhibit the flourishing of voice elicitation. Finally, a

discussion on tokenism and how it can masquerade as voicework can hamper students' potential to have genuine influence, ends this section.

### 3.3.9.1 Voicework is not commonplace.

Students' right to be heard has been more aspirational than meaningfully enacted (Black and Mayes 2020; Brown *et al.* 2020; Fleming 2013; Forde *et al.* 2018; Lundy 2007; Mooney Simmie *et al.* 2019; Perry *et al.* 2014; Skerritt *et al.* 2023) as they frequently describe their school experiences as anonymous places in which no one cares about them (Cook-Sather and Luz 2014; Fielding 2001; Mitra 2018; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). While there are ample studies on the benefits that eliciting voices can have, it seems that the opportunities for the inclusion of voices remain the exception and not the norm (Davey *et al.* 2010; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Skerritt *et al.* 2021; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009). The reasons for this are complex. Finneran *et al.* (2021) found in conducting research with 24 students in primary school student councils in Australia, that institutional habits and practices adversely affected the right of students to participate in decision-making. Harrison *et al.*'s (2016) case study of a 600 pupil post-primary school in rural Ireland, found through questionnaires and interviews, that students wanted more substantial voice engagements than were in place in the setting. Students in the study (Harrison *et al.* 2016) wanted more than representation on the student council, they wanted involvement and feedback before decisions were taken. The hierarchal nature of the school, large class sizes, poor relationships with key personnel in the school system, poor information systems and age can also be barriers to participation with students (Forde *et al.* 2018). Skerritt *et al.* (2021) highlighted that different countries have different histories, traditions, and cultures; they are at different stages of their student voice journeys. While Ireland has a strong tradition of dialogue with students, these dialogues are connected to individual school contexts (Graham *et al.* 2018; Skerritt *et al.* 2021a; Skerritt *et al.* 2021b). Indeed, while there are many examples of the promotion of voices in policies as discussed in Chapter 1, the empirical research in Ireland suggests that the focus of voicework initiatives is centred on non-academic matters (Brown *et al.* 2020; Fleming 2013; Skerritt *et al.* 2023) and does not necessarily translate into classroom practices (Enright *et al.* 2017; Morgan 2011; O'Brien *et al.* 2022); a key justification for this current study.

The type of school a student attends has an impact on the level of the amplification of student voices in Ireland. Skerritt *et al.* (2021a) found that Educate Together Schools, DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) and ETB (Educational Training Boards) Community Colleges were more likely to have a more advanced culture of voice elicitation than in Voluntary Secondary Schools. The Voluntary Secondary schools were more likely to have traditional structures, institutional habits and attitudes to hierarchy that impacted on the

amplification of student voices (McKeon 2020). Similarly, Devine *et al.* (2013) and Devine and McGillicuddy (2013) identified that DEIS schools were more likely to engage in reflective behaviours, using methods that are similar to those that promote voicework, than in their non-DEIS counterparts. Cosgrove and Gilleece (2012) found through surveys, schools serving lower socioeconomic areas had a higher chance of youth voices influencing pedagogy and school organisation.

### **3.3.9.2 The reluctance of individual teachers.**

Individual teachers can be reluctant in getting involved in voice-amplifying activities. Adults can be sceptical about the capacity of young people to have meaningful input into decision-making (Bragg 2001; Lundy 2007; Oakley 1994) as many teachers perceive that young people may not take it seriously, or they will have little of value to contribute (Burr 2015; Skerritt *et al.* 2022). Teachers in several studies reported that, at times, the voices of learners can be unrealistic, inaccurate, or have little educational merit (Amis 1971; Chapple and Raftery 2023; Forde *et al.* 2018; Pedder and McIntyre 2006; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Voicework can be viewed as something that is on the periphery (Biddle 2019; Forde *et al.* 2018) and does not have a place in the classroom. Eliciting voices can be difficult to begin and maintain as actors must push through ‘the counter-normative forces that are ingrained in the traditional roles’ (Mitra 2018, p.142) of student and teacher (Beattie 2012). Skerritt *et al.* (2021a) notes that much student voice research is carried out by university researchers and not school staff and can be perceived as a threat or a form of surveillance. There can be a perception that voicework would be used to monitor teachers or to fulfil outside initiatives (Fielding 2001). Eliciting the voices of learners may vulnerably position teachers in a place where criticisms of their personal style may be identified and this can be emotionally scarring (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Mooney *et al.* 2019). It is important to note here that not all voice elicitations that evaluate teaching and learning will be negative. Often teachers are surprised and delighted when positive feedback is received and are very happy to respond to such feedback when it affirms good practice or has educational merit (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). However, the reluctance to become involved initially remains a barrier.

### **3.3.9.3 The barrier of time.**

Time for the adequate inclusion of voices was cited as a limiting factor (Brown *et al.* 2020; Lewis and Burman 2008; McIntyre *et al.* 2005; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Atweh and Burton’s (1995) collaborative study between researchers from the University of Birmingham,

teachers and students reflecting on whether to leave or remain in school in the UK found that time was a limiting factor for the inclusion of voices. Bovill *et al.* (2010), and O'Brien *et al.* (2022), had similar findings where time was a limiting factor to achieving influence in the life of the studies. In Chapple and Raftery's (2023) study with 32 post-primary school students, the academic year was chosen to complete the project, but a large part of the year was devoted to training; in addition to this, some aspects that students had identified for change could not be tackled over the life of the project so the time limit affected the amount of influence the project had. In Kristmanson *et al.*'s (2013) study, when students were asked to reflect on their learning experiences, there was little that could be addressed, adapted, or changed for the future as they were consulted near the end of their educational journey. Meaningful engagement, where the perspectives of all educational stakeholders are considered, takes time to adequately engage and respond to participants (Faddar *et al.* 2021). Teachers in many studies reported a disappointment when students or teachers failed to meet the high expectations that eliciting voices can set (Mittra 2006; Morrow 1999; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Fitzpatrick (2016) found that teachers would have liked to participate in projects but could not, due to time restraints. Many class periods were 40-minutes and this was deemed too short to get valuable voice-based work done (Fitzpatrick 2016).

Teachers are faced with many non-teaching tasks such as extra-curricular and management duties, which can make it harder to focus on initiatives (Atweh and Burton 1995). Voicework can be perceived as requiring too much effort and time; time that would be better spent on the education of the students (Angus *et al.* 2013). Teachers may find themselves in the crossfire between national policies, curriculum boundaries, and school expectations and demands (Bragg 2001; MacBeath 2011; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007).

#### **3.3.9.4 A reluctance to change.**

In the literature, some students and teachers found when responding to voices and change was suggested, the change in teaching style caused difficulty for both parties (Moorhead and Griffin 1998). New skills may not be seamlessly introduced (Lamb 2011). In Kristmanson *et al.*'s (2013) study, students found self-assessment, formulating questions, and goal setting difficult, having little experience beforehand. Lamb (2011) found that even though the study focused on learners who were purposively selected as being perceived to have the capacity to self-manage, the six student participants still needed training and guidance in understanding how they learn. Ambitions like shared decision-making and inclusion of youth voices are

largely adult themes and the changes expected, may be adult dominated rather than organically coming from young people (Mitra 2006; Morrow 1999). Some students may find the process of commenting on a teacher's work as rude or bizarre (Chapple 2019; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007) or may not feel comfortable contributing as the teacher is the one best placed to make key decisions about learning (Davey *et al.* 2010).

Eliciting the learners' voices needs to be a habitual practice for it to have value and respect in the school environment (Flynn 2017; Hart 1992; Kirby and Bryson 2002 cited in Holdsworth *et al.* 2007; Skerritt *et al.* 2021b) as there can be an unrealistic expectation that people will change quickly (Blood and Thorsborne 2006). Teachers must cultivate their learners' confidence in decision-making and support them to autonomously engage in learning activities, but this takes time (Blood and Thorsborne 2005; Chapple and Raftery 2023; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Morrison *et al.* 2005).

### 3.3.10 Criticisms of Voicework.

It might be tempting to think that eliciting the voices of young people is a panacea for all that may be wrong in schools. The zeitgeist commitment to listening to voices infiltrates national and international policies (Rudduck 2006) and while it may appear simple, in reality, it is complex (Flutter 2007). There can be a tendency in research to focus on the moral and emancipatory benefits of voicework without thoroughly criticising the challenges that are posed through the radical changes that challenge traditional hierarchies (Seale 2016) The Marxist idea of the elimination of power structures idealises a classless society, free of hierarchies. The traditional power structures that exist in schools seem anachronistic; students and teachers do not usually transfer power, especially not in a classroom situation (Fielding 2004). The idea of reifying power imagines it as being something tangible where parts can be given away (Taylor and Robinson 2009). There are strong criticisms of voicework and there are valid grounds for students, teachers and management not wanting to take part in voice initiatives. Eliciting the voices of students can be used as a surveillance of teachers (Ball 2004). Adults who do not wish to take part, can be stigmatised and labelled as non-co-operative and opposed to progress. The tokenistic, inauthentic elicitations of voices are identified as a further criticism of voicework. Schools can be presented as places, where teachers, students and management are all striding towards one melodious goal but it must be acknowledged that there are some unpalatable aspects to voicework (Bragg 2007b; Chapple

and Raftery 2023; Skerritt *et al.* 2021a; Skerritt *et al.* 2021b) which are discussed in more detail in the next sections.

#### **3.3.10.1 Varied reasons why adults do not take part.**

Voicework literature does not tend to focus on the negative aspects of eliciting voices (Mager and Nowak 2012). There are many tensions which can surface when the aim is to empower young people (Chapple and Raftery 2023). Adults in educational settings may be reluctant to take part in voice initiatives as they may feel threatened by it (Ferguson *et al.* 2011), or they may feel that their authority in the classroom could be undermined (Skerritt *et al.* 2022). Teachers may not feel comfortable in eliciting the voices of young people in their classrooms as students may be critical of teachers' practice and this could have a negative impact on teachers (Graham *et al.* 2018; Messiou and Ainscow 2020; Morgan 2009; Peruzzi 2018). Teachers may be hesitant to take part as they do not feel confident in their abilities and opening themselves up to criticism may be demoralising (Perry-Hazan 2019; Skerritt *et al.* 2021b). If students are judging practice, teachers may feel that they must explain and rationalise their own style of instruction (Charteris and Smardon 2019a). Changing one's teaching practice may take away the freedom the teacher has to carry out their own profession in their own style (Skerritt 2022). By taking the opinions of students on board, teachers may feel like they must alter how they teach and may have to become someone they, quite simply, are not (Holloway and Brass 2015) and this could have an emotional toll on staff (Skerritt 2022).

#### **3.3.10.2 Eliciting voices as a means of surveillance of staff.**

Eliciting the voices of students can be used for 'surveillance, suspicion and stigmatisation' (Skerritt 2022, p.2). SSE uses consultation to improve areas of learning such as literacy and numeracy (O'Brien *et al.* 2019) but could formalise consultations to gain data about individual practices (O'Brien *et al.* 2022). Skerritt (2022) who highlights this aspect of voicework, notes that the Student and Parent Charter Bill that is currently before the Irish parliament, aims to increase the level of the voices of students and parents in Irish schools, and this has raised concerns about the increased surveillance that such a Bill might introduce. As the Student and Parent Charter Bill is committed to introduce a stronger complaints procedure (Skerritt 2022), it may be used as a method to monitor teachers (Charteris and Smardon 2019a). The Chief Inspector's Report (DE 2022) also calls for more consultation with students regarding teaching and learning; this push from policy may not deliver an

authentic acoustic. On a non-policy level, informal conversations between management and students could potentially be used as a data source to find out about teachers (Charteris and Smardon 2019a; Lodge 2008; Mitra 2004; Skerritt 2022) which, undoubtably could lead to suspicions from teachers as they may not trust what is being said about them when they are not present (Ball 2009). These methods of surveillance are a threat as they can breed mistrust in the emancipatory efforts that voicework is intended for (Keddie 2015).

#### **3.3.10.3 The stigmatisation of teachers who do not comply with voice initiatives.**

Some staff in educational settings may not be in favour of eliciting voices for a variety of reasons, and these adults can be stigmatised for their non-compliance (Skerritt 2022). There may be a perception that teachers who do not want to take part in voice-based initiatives may have something to hide (Holloway 2019) or they simply don't have confidence in their own ability (Holloway and Brass 2018). This can have the effect of bringing shame on those who don't comply with voice-based initiatives (Black and Mayes 2020). It appears age may be a contributory factor as younger teachers seem to be more receptive to voicework, perhaps as they are coming from a tradition of voice elicitation in their own recent school experiences (Skerritt 2022). Teachers who are in their career for a longer period, may be less willing to adapt based on student feedback and may feel reluctant to students evaluating their long-established practice (Skerritt 2022). This can place a hierarchical, age and experience division between experienced and inexperienced teachers (Spicksley 2021) which can bring tensions to the surface.

#### **3.3.10.4 Tokenism.**

A well-documented criticism of voicework is that it can be tokenistic when voices are elicited but not acted on thoroughly (Fielding 2004; Fleming 2013; Sutherland *et al.* 2011; Yu and Shay 2022). Tokenism is defined as a symbolic effort to recruit underrepresented groups to give an appearance of equality or fairness (Oxford Dictionaries 2022). In terms of voicework, it occurs when the views of young people are not taken seriously (Carr and Williams 2009; Hart 1999) or their contributions are not acted upon so that young people cannot have an influence on matters that affect them (Fleming 2013). A widely held view suggests that if young people are victims of tokenistic attempts to extract their voices, they may not participate in further activities (Alderson 2006; Danso *et al.* 2003; Fielding 2004; Kirby and Bryson 2002; Mitra 2009; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Ravenhall 2007; Woodhouse 2003). Furthermore, if voices are distilled into one homogenous 'voice', then the complexities that

dwell within the diversity of voices may be overlooked and a tokenistic approach will prevail (Bragg 2007; Dahl 1995; Herriot 2013). It is, as Lygo-Baker *et al.* (2019) determine, a fallacy to believe that students speak with one unified voice; in any group there are fluctuations and discord. Power, conscious and unconscious biases and sanitising voices can make it difficult to gain a non-tokenistic application of voice elicitation and if adults preside, students may not be able to speak freely (Charteris and Smardon 2019b; Herriot 2013). This filtering may be due to their voices being elicited to 'serve institutional ends' (Lodge 2005, p.133) and to convey the messages that have been predetermined by adults involved (Tisdall 2015). Hart's (1992) ladder of participation defines tokenism as instances where young people are given a voice, but they have little say in the choice of what they are speaking about or in the way in which they are communicating. There is a danger that constantly asking for students to contribute or treating student voice initiatives as a fad or a passing fashion will be damaging to the trust that voicework can establish (Rudduck 2006; Wisby 2011). Tokenistic elicitation is classed as an entry point where little beyond listening occurs (Cousens 2017; McDermott 2016; Sutherland *et al.* 2011).

In recent years, there has been a review of tokenism, to re-examine if it is damaging to young people, or if it is fair to align tokenism with non-participation (Lundy 2018). Listening to young people is an important part of the voice elicitation process and many young people appreciate the fact when their voices are considered (Flynn 2014; Noyes 2005; Shirley 2015). There are instances where, even though there are tokenistic responses to voicework, it still empowers young people to seek further action (Orr *et al.* 2016). Moreover, there is value in consultation as young people appreciate being listened to (Flynn 2014) as they grow in confidence arising from positive engagements (Davies *et al.* 2016; Marshall *et al.* 2015). The biggest difference between tokenistic behaviours having a positive or negative impact is the inclusion of feedback to students after the consultations. This sub-theme will be discussed in Section 3.5.2.3 under the overarching theme of Influence.

### 3.3.11 Voice Conclusion.

The overarching theme of Voice, through the lens of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation included discussions on a range of varied topics. The section began with a discussion of which student voices were heard and which were silent. The difficulties in treating 'voice' as a single entity were exposed as not representative of a diverse group. The conscious and unconscious reasons for elevating some voices and silencing others were

examined. The discussion moved to address the benefits and barriers that exist when adults listen and respond to student voices in educational settings. The benefits were categorised into organisational, power, personal, pedagogic, and political while the barriers were subdivided into the reluctance of teachers, the barrier of time and the unwillingness that some adults and young people have in changing or adapting to methods that support voice elicitation. This section ended with a discussion on the criticisms of voicework, namely that it can be used as a surveillance method and those who do not wish to take part can be stigmatised. The topic of tokenism ended this section, identifying that the voices of young people can be used for adult gains and this can have, in some cases, an adverse effect on the young people involved.

### 3.4 AUDIENCE.

Lundy's (2007) model of child participation highlights the idea that voice alone is not enough; for voices to have power, an audience is needed to be present to communicate to and take responsibility for decisions (Keenan *et al.* 2018). Without the audience, young people have little power to influence change (Flynn 2017; Lundy 2007; Noyes 2005; Welty and Lundy 2013). A first step in including the voices learners is to invite them to set goals for themselves and have leadership roles to ensure that initiatives move forward because if students have 'buy in' the initiative has more of a chance of success (Checkoway 2011; Dahl 1995). However, the power of voice initiatives is determined by who is listening as 'voices are nothing without hearers' (Noyes 2005, p.536). We must acknowledge that the right of young people to freely express their opinions in education is rare. Students may be consulted but they are rarely asked to participate in the development of programmes that affect their lives (Nthontho 2017). The next section delves into the importance of audience and takes a journey through consultations, informal and formal, to the importance of collaboration from all stakeholders. A discussion of professional learning models concludes this section.

#### 3.4.1 Consultations.

The voices of learners can be elicited and acted upon using consultation methods. Consultation in the classroom can take the form of teachers partnering with learners to discuss teaching and learning and learners feedback on instructional styles (Mitra 2018). In recent years, students have been consulted in policy making and curriculum planning, for example in 2006, focus groups were used to develop the Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum (SPHE) in conjunction with the National Council for Curriculum and

Assessment (NCCA). Students have an acceptance and an appreciation of the process of consultation (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007) and a willingness to give their opinions when asked (Ireland *et al.* 2006). In Ireland *et al.*'s (2006) longitudinal case study (2001-2009) of 91 schools in the UK, including over 13,000 student participants aged 14-15 years, it was found that students were keen to co-operate when consulted on matters that affected them. In this study (Ireland *et al.* 2006) on citizenship, students believed that they should have had a voice on matters that affected them and wanted to know and understand how they could use their voice 'both individually and collectively, in a responsible manner' (Ireland *et al.* 2006, p. viii). The Student and Parent Charter Bill (DES 2019) calls for consultation at school level with students and parents and responds to comments made by students and their parents to assess and improve the school on an ongoing basis. School Self-Evaluation (SSE) (DE 2022) promotes the idea of dialogue with students to aid the evaluation process and improve the school experience for all parties, which advances the promotion of voices (Fleming 2013). In 'The Learner Voice Research Study' (Flynn 2017) twenty schools across Ireland, with a total of 350 students, took part in consultations on (i) the development of the junior cycle curriculum specifications and (ii) determining how to include student voices in education discourse. The study showed great respect for students as experts in education and valued their contributions as equal contributors. The key point here is that the audience for student voice has changed in importance, giving youth voices great value which should improve the ability for them to be transformative. One way of ensuring that consultations and elicitations take root in school culture is to start small and build, incrementally. McIntyre *et al.*'s (2005) study with six teachers and their classes in three post-primary schools found that consultation may be in existence in some forms in classrooms so working on what is already present is a good starting point; introducing new methods of consultation and giving little support to the teachers is not a productive way to influence long term change.

While examples of consultations in classrooms are valuable, there is a body of literature which argues that student voicework should go far beyond ascertaining perspectives from young people and move towards a democratic process of shared curricular development and co-construction as well as a collective responsibility for developing solutions in education environments (Bovill *et al.* 2011; Daniels *et al.* 2001; Shirley 2015). It is contended that 'voice' is not solely what is needed, but the audience must open their minds to 'diverse perspectives' including those that may challenge their 'expertise and status', a trait that is badly needed in the education profession (Shirley 2015, p.127). This echoes Lundy's (2007)

ideas that the audience may find it easy to comply with the outward signs of consultation and then ignore the views put forward by young people, which can be harmful to voicework. Authentic listening must be part of the consultative process which acknowledges and responds to the expertise of students (Angus *et al.* 2013). The audiences that authentically listen and respond to the voices of students are the gate keepers to influence.

### 3.4.2 Moving from classroom consultation to enhancing a whole school culture.

While eliciting voices in a classroom situation is a helpful beginning, influencing the culture of a whole school, to enhance a culture of listening to the voices of students, as this current study aims to do, is a complex process. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA 2015, p.16) states that organisational change is ‘essential to ensuring meaningful participation by children and young people’. This organisational change must be implemented by key personnel within the organisation. Once formal and informal consultations are established, a move towards participation could be appropriate in some instances. This sub-section discusses the strategies that may need to be in place to ensure the audience can aid the voices of young people being heard and responded to. These include ensuring that key actors are in place to help the promotion of voice initiatives. Once established, there is a need to move away from consultation to aid young people in participating as co-constructors of knowledge with the support of adults. Adults in educational organisations need support too and a crucial element in this support is collaboration between the teachers who are involved, and all stakeholders. Finally, professional learning models to aid the change in culture close this section on the importance of the audience.

#### 3.4.2.1 Key personnel are integral to the survival of voice initiatives.

If voicework is to be embedded in the culture of the organisation, it must begin from within, as outside interventions rarely flourish (Angus 2006; Bath 2013; Fielding 2004; Simmons *et al.* 2015). Key actors are certainly important as Davey *et al.* (2010) found in their research of over 1,000 young people, teachers, and managers in England. There needs to be a commitment from senior management and key staff to promote and respect, according to Davey *et al.* (2010), voicework as participation is a developmental process which takes time and training of relevant parties. For voicework to become embedded in school culture, it

needs to be led with sustained enthusiasm and support, as individual or one-off projects are ineffective in immersing voice enhancement in schools (Simmons *et al.* 2015).

#### **3.4.2.2 Taking steps from consultation to participation.**

Consultations with young people, whether in the classroom or at a whole school level, are important to establish in education settings. Consultations are about seeking the views of young people, but participation moves a step further and invites stakeholders to be joint decision makers. The role of the audience is key in this stage, as identified in Lundy's (2012) checklist for participation. Lundy (2012) identifies:

- (i) that once a space has been provided for young people to have their views, it is vital to assess how those views are elicited by ensuring that young people have an opportunity to express themselves safely and freely,
- (ii) that information must be provided so that young people can express their views freely in a variety of ways and should know that they do not have to participate if they do not wish to,
- (iii) that when young people communicate, they should have an audience that will listen and process their views, and
- (iv) that there are procedures in place so that the views of young people can be taken seriously and that young people can be given feedback explaining why decisions are taken.

The audience's role is pivotal and is the bridging link to the success of voice elicitation.

#### **3.4.3 Enhancing a whole school culture.**

Culture can be defined as the traditions, rules, customs, and expectations that an organisation has, written or unwritten (Deal and Peterson 2016). The ethos and vision for the school, along with the school principal can set the tone for the culture in which it resides (Burke 2013; Evans 2001; Hinde 2005; Kezar and Eckel 2002; Leithwood and Riehl 2003). Relationships and interpersonal factors are also important in determining a culture (Eller and Eller 2009). When promoting an inclusive culture, the values of trust, respect, recognition, and dialogue need to be replicated and promoted across all sections of the school (Fielding and Bragg 2004; MacBeath *et al.* 2003; Minow and Garland 1991; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Ainscow and Sandill (2010) identify that some schools have an inclusive culture where there is respect for and a commitment to inclusion and participation for all students which is

usually fuelled by the presence of leaders who are committed to inclusive values. Modelling shared leadership can have a positive impact on the culture of collaboration in schools and is fundamental to enhancing or changing a culture (Fullan 2002; Kehoe 2015; Kruse and Lewis 2009; Pearce and Wood 2019).

Teachers, working together in a collaborative manner, where all parties have the same goal in mind, will ease new methodologies into place (Cibulka and Nakayama 2000; Given *et al.* 2010; Hopkins 2001). If high levels of staff and students are interested in promoting the voices of young people in the education setting, they must first address:

- (i) the existing culture and the ethos of the organisation,
- (ii) the structure of the organisation regarding planning, development, and resourcing of youth participation,
- (iii) assess of clearly defined pathways that enable young people to become involved and,
- (iv) systems that are monitored and evaluated periodically to produce evidence that change has taken place (DYCA 2015, p.16).

A coaching or mentoring model to support colleagues (Rhodes and Beneicke 2002) where one colleague is more experienced than the other (Clutterbuck 1991) could be introduced to support collaborative initiatives. Schools could also be less focused on a hierarchal structure, in favour of a climate of collaboration and consultation (Fielding and Bragg 2004; Rachal 1998). However, this climate where young people are suddenly listened to cannot be simply created; it takes dedication by key actors building it into school life (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2021; Harrison *et al.* 2016). It takes a good deal of thinking, talking, reviewing, and refining practice, to develop a more inclusive culture (Ainscow and Sandhill 2010). An important place to begin is to support the staff to build confidence in consultation and participation to ensure that they are an effective audience for student voices (Cook-Sather 2006b). Senge's (2000b) learning organisation is one where all individuals are engaged in aligned personal and collective goals where everyone knows they can make a difference. A learning environment as Senge (2000b) envisages, needs much support, particularly for key staff who may champion the initiative. Supports for staff in relation to voice initiatives could include reassurance by being sensitive to reluctance in taking part, or presenting a range of methods that work in harmony with other practices and procedures already in the school (Buchanan

and Boddy; Fielding and Bragg 2004; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). One study in Finland where the focus was to embed a culture of digital technologies into classrooms, found that although teachers work alone and have a high degree of autonomy in their work, powerful transformations were made when collaborating with other teachers (Reinius *et al.* 2022). Given *et al.* (2010) collaborated with three schools to share teachers' common experiences and this process enhanced their abilities in teaching and learning. For transformations to take place, small steps must be taken, even if the practitioners are not certain that they will be successful (Stetsenko 2017).

In the past, teaching was a profession where one worked by themselves with little interferences (Rudduck and McIntyre 1997) but in the modern teaching world of inspections and accountability, there are avenues where feedback for improvement is available. Utilising the knowledge that is already present in staff, is a valuable way to share accomplishments and learning. Collaboration between teachers will have an impact on the culture of a school as it helps teachers accumulate and circulate knowledge by encouraging improvement and change (Hargreaves and Fullan 2015). The importance of social connection was found in Baker-Doyle's (2017) study with twenty-four teachers to investigate their support networks as they embarked on their teaching career. These support networks within the schools highlighted the importance of professional learning communities and how they can positively influence teachers' experiences in school (Stoll *et al.* 2006). Similarly, Oddone *et al.* (2019), drawing on the theory of connectivism in a qualitative case study with thirteen teachers, found that using professional learning networks met educational professional needs, interests and goals. When collaborating, practitioners are no longer isolated but connected to other professionals, supporting each other to enact change (Trust *et al.* 2016). This social connection can also be achieved in communities of practice where there is mutual engagement and understanding in developing professionally (Wenger 1998). The combination of knowledge is a powerful mechanism for the creation of new practices and culture (Boreham 2000).

The opposite of this collaboration is what Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) term 'Balkanized' groups who are sub-groups often separated by subject department or year group and can make cooperation difficult. Collaborative cultures don't emerge by themselves and often need to have some deliberate action to get them started and have structured support to keep them alive (McGregor 2007). One way of implementing this transformative culture is to begin a learning community or a group that engages in learning conversations where adults come

together to co-plan, share knowledge, and make strategic plans to collaborate for improvement (Freire 1970; Hargreaves and Fullan 2015; McGregor 2007). Nolen (2011), speaking about introducing formative assessment into classroom structures, has advice that resonates with changing or enhancing any part of a school's culture. The first step is to start small by focusing on a single class or subject area, as this stops people being overwhelmed with too much change at once, a point that Fullan (2007) makes also. Step 2 in Nolen's (2011) model calls for collaboration with others to bring new viewpoints and perspectives. Step 3 instructs that organisations should work with what is in existence already as this will highlight what is already valued and of importance to the school. Schools are well situated to become supportive learning environments for teachers. Small learning communities can thrive when they develop a shared vision and are supportive of all members that share a common thirst for inquiry and exploration (Kools and Stoll 2016). Once a system exists for knowledge exchange, schools can transform themselves into learning organisations that enhance student outcomes (Kools and Stoll 2016).

#### **3.4.3.1 Moving mountains begins by carrying small stones.**

The literature indicates that schools that tackled reform successfully focused on classroom activities first and worked collaboratively in small step by step processes (Balakrishan and Clairbone 2017; Fielding 2004; Gray *et al.* 1999; MacBeath 2007; Mitra 2003). Bovill *et al.*'s (2010) study, which used a small step approach to redesign curricula, fared well as there were not a multitude of initiatives happening at once. Building on strategies that pre-exist like the student council can be an excellent way to enhance a culture as it is already a democratic medium that enables students to express their voices and be involved in the affairs of the school (Government of Ireland 1998; Fleming 2015; Sinclair 2004). In some settings, the student council is a mechanism to build democratic life skills (Forde *et al.* 2018) and in others it is a tokenistic representation of shared decision-making (Fleming 2013; Mager and Nowak 2012). Enhancing culture is not a quick fix; it is an ongoing, evolving and developing process (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Hart 1992) which has more chance of being successful if changes are taken slowly.

#### **3.4.3.2 All stakeholders play an important role.**

All stakeholders share a part in influencing and changing culture. The messages given about culture from management and key actors are considered by others; they act as symbols of the values of the organisation (Taylor 2004). When parents, students and staff feel a sense of

community and ownership they are more likely to work with each other (Ainscow and Sandill 2010; Kadel and Follman 1993). In many studies, one stakeholder group was engaged with but few had the engagement of multiple perspectives (Collins *et al.* 2018; Mitra 2018). Those that did such as Faddar *et al.* (2021) and Collins *et al.* (2018) found that multiple perspectives enhanced the study. Collins *et al.*'s (2018) study focused on students with physical disabilities in higher education settings and engaged with 40 stakeholders to understand their perspectives on inclusive education regarding resources, training, and representation. Collins *et al.*'s (2018) inclusion of all stakeholders, not just those with a physical disability with whom the research was focused on, was important in the design. This inclusive model aligns with the constructivist paradigm, where all participants have equal value, working together, creating, and improving the environment (Brydon-Miller and Maguire 2009; Savin-Baden and Wimpenny 2007; Stelmach 2016). The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's (DCEDIY) Participation Framework (2021) defines the role of young people in decision-making as an ongoing process with includes information sharing and dialogue based on respect from all parties. As highlighted in the DCEDIY Participation Framework (2021), young people are experts in matters that affect them; adults have a key role in being the audience that facilitates them in making their voices heard.

However, adults may not always understand how young people think or feel so it is imperative that the voices of young people are heard and given due weight along with other stakeholders. Ferguson *et al.*'s (2020) study with six schools affected by anti-social behaviour in Jamaica highlighted the importance of a range of perspectives through surveys and interviews from different stakeholder groups. The study (Ferguson *et al.* 2020, p,165) focused on schools that were characterised by 'violence, anti-social behaviours, low self-esteem and low achievement' and engaged with stakeholders who were open to work together using a 'Change From Within' strategy. By including stakeholders in the co-construction of knowledge, all parties felt a sense of ownership and worked together against violence (Ferguson *et al.* 2020, p.170). This study (Ferguson *et al.* 2020) encompasses vital parts of the change phenomenon which are integral to changing culture and highlights the way that culture is affected by the individual conditions in which it operates (Hargreaves and Fullan 2015, p.103). Kouzes and Posner (1997) suggest a five-step approach to enable leaders to change environments: (i) Challenge the process, (ii) Inspire a shared vision, (iii) Enable others to act, (iv) Model the way and (v) Encourage the heart.

The inclusion of the voices of stakeholders has increasingly gained attention in education discourse (Sliwka and Istance 2006; Smith and Benavot 2019) and it is considered a positive shift as more perspectives and insights can help to improve the organisation (Chapman and Sammons 2013; Daniels *et al.* 2001; Gordon and Seashore Louis 2009). Challenges do exist for the inclusion of stakeholder voices as resources can be too few to scaffold meaningful engagement (Addi-Racah and Ainhoren 2009). There may also be differing opinions on what stakeholder involvement should be (Baker 1997; Faddar *et al.* 2021) and whether all stakeholders would have a true understanding of the culture and climate of the school (Burr 2015). It is true that including a myriad of voices is likely to lengthen the time that the initiative will take (McIntyre *et al.* 2005) but when nurtured, these voices can enhance research.

#### **3.4.3.3 Professional learning models to support teachers to enhance culture.**

Hargreaves and Fullan (2015, p.103) humorously describe culture as the ‘difference between having bacon and fruit on the same plate in America and regarding this as almost unthinkable in Britain’. These distinctions are ‘traditional’ and ‘unquestioned’ (Hargreaves and Fullan 2015, p.103). To transform culture, one must bring into the open the connection between ‘what people believe’ and ‘who believes it’, to make it necessary for people to examine their own culture and its impact (Hargreaves and Fullan 2015, p.103). MacBeath’s (1999) observations on the case for SSE have many lessons to guide educators on changing culture. MacBeath (1999, p.105) suggests that change must come from within but must be ‘supported from the outside’. This outside support comes from professional associations and other practitioners so that new initiatives are built on the successes of others. MacBeath (1999, p.106) suggests that practitioners begin the process of change by ‘starting with the end in mind’. Asking questions such as ‘what is the desired result?’ and ‘why do we want that result?’ help to focus the process of change (MacBeath 1999, p.106). If change is driven by political motives such as an impending inspection, it may turn out to be a cynical exercise without genuine commitment from the practitioners, who would not become an effective audience for voices. The second step in making a change is to create a climate of trust with an openly agreed agenda; anything that is perceived as a burden or too time consuming will lose its impact (MacBeath 1999). This openly agreed agenda should be contributed to by all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the same mindset will drive the process forward. The third movement is to promise and deliver confidentiality (MacBeath 1999). If people are being asked about problems and how to fix them, they may have to identify individuals or

practices that are currently taking place; they need to know that this information will be taken seriously and in confidence (MacBeath 1999). Asking open questions that encourage debate may be a risky strategy in an open forum, so it may be wise to provide ways in which people can have their say, and that they will be listened to, ensuring that their words don't cause harm or offence to any person (MacBeath 1999). MacBeath (1999) identifies in step four, the importance of a critical friend, an outsider who can seek to understand, be supportive and identify ways in which practitioners can be critical of their own practices to move towards improvement.

A plethora of models for initiating change exist, from Kotter's (1996) top-down approach to Beer *et al.*'s (1990) bottom-up approach; the advice, at times, seems contradictory (Fullan 2007). It is clear from the literature that a senior leadership team is certainly helpful in facilitating new initiatives (Andrews and Lewis 2004; Frost 2012; Kennedy 2005; King 2014; Mylles and Frost 2006; Reinius *et al.* 2022; Tarnanen 2021). Fullan (2001) warns that many new schemes have an implementation dip where there may be a dip in performance when practitioners familiarise themselves with new skills or new understandings. Time must be allocated to facilitate opportunities for collaboration and to create the conditions for the culture to flourish (Frost and Durrant 2004). Teachers are the change agents in any process (Bubb and Earley 2010; Guskey 2002). Finally, Fullan (2007) uses the analogy of the tortoise and the hare when leading new initiatives in school settings; changing aspects of a culture involves slow learning over time.

To embed a culture of participation so that the adults in the educational organisation may become an effective audience, there must be a whole systems approach. This can be achieved by increasing the opportunities for participation for young people, raising awareness of participation, providing training for adults and young people, and having an opportunity for information sharing (DCYA 2015). In a space where there is a culture of participation that is led by key adults as a constructive audience, young people are more likely to feel valued, listened to and will have the confidence and support to influence decisions (DCYA 2015).

#### 3.4.4 Audience Conclusion.

The vital role of the audience in voice elicitation was examined in this section. The importance of informal classroom consultation was discussed as an important starting point. The bulk of this section was concerned with moving the culture of listening within the

classroom, to enhancing a whole school culture as this current study aims. For this to happen, the audience needs to be receptive of the voices first, and then respond to aid those voices to be transformative. For audience to enable influence, key strategies were discussed to encourage success of initiatives such as having key personnel in place that will collaborate with other stakeholders. MacBeath's (1999) change-making model was examined as a framework to base enhancing a culture of listening to learners' voices. The chief learning in these models was to start slow and keep building.

### 3.5 INFLUENCE.

Lundy's (2007) model of child participation challenges adults working with young people to be an effective audience to ensure that the views of young people are taken seriously and have 'due weight' as expressed in Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN 1989). For voices to have influence in classrooms and in whole school settings, they need their own space where stakeholders acting as an effective audience, can meet as equals to forge pathways in creating effective teaching and learning (Fielding 2004). The literature established that in addition to the space afforded to voice, time must also be dedicated in classrooms and at whole school level for the recognition of the importance of voices and to ensure they have influence. The literature also outlines how culture can be changed and enhanced, and that it can be a slow process with resistance from adults who are not in favour of raising the voice levels of young people for varied reasons.

The next section focuses on the important factors that need to be in place for voicework to survive and thrive in education settings. This involves using participatory methods of eliciting voices in respectful consultation where the audience is open to hearing and taking on the ideas put forward by students. This section concludes with an acknowledgement that the key factor in ensuring that young people have been listened to, is the response that comes through feedback.

#### 3.5.1 Influence takes time to become habitual.

Any initiative that aims to sustain innovation and make it habitual, takes time, training, support, and dedication from all stakeholders committed to change (Blood and Thorsborne 2005; Bovill *et al.* 2010; Skerritt *et al.* 2021b). While listening and responding to students has a long-term effect on teaching (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007), teachers need to be supported by regular reflective conversations to overcome any barriers that may occur (Bergmark and

Westman 2016; Freire 1970). A key finding in Bergmark and Westman's (2016) study that used open ended questionnaires to gain data from 70 student participants in Sweden, found that when the opportunity to participate is presented to students, it may be their first time in having an influence in matters that affect them. Findings from this study (Bergmark and Westman 2016) highlighted the need to support and train participants over time and incorporate time for learning conversations in methodology. Freire's (1970) work advocated for this type of collaborative structure where people come together to identify their own concerns and seek answers to understand themselves through group dialogue. Support and time are needed for adults who facilitate elicitation methods so they can learn from others and help young people contribute meaningfully to influence changes (McGregor 2007), a finding that connects with the previous section.

### 3.5.2 The difference between listening and having influence.

There is a chasm between listening to voices and those voices having a genuine influence in matters of concern to them (Fleming 2013). Although there may be many differing voices (Arnot and Reay 2007), those voices should not just be listened to, but should be given the due weight they deserve by giving them appropriate audience to have influence (Lundy 2007). To adequately include young people in the process of change, participatory methods are the most successful to realise influence, according to the empirical evidence. The following section builds on the definitions of participation in Chapter 1 and the discussion of consultations earlier in this chapter.

#### 3.5.2.1 Participation rather than consultation.

The concept of participation in schools has become more prevalent in policy in Ireland and internationally (DCYA 2015; Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2019; Lancaster and Broadbent 2003). The term 'participation' as discussed in Chapter 1, has evolved slowly, and is now used to describe dialogue and information sharing that is based on 'mutual respect' in which the 'views of young people are taken into account' (Davey *et al.* 2010, p. 6) and where student influence can lead to change (Treseder 1997). Participation is not about one specific 'project, programme or initiative' (Holdsworth *et al* 2001, p.11) but it is a strategy or attitude that 'encourages young people to express their opinions' and to become involved in decision-making processes 'at different levels' (Johnson and Golombek 2002, p.8 cited in Holdsworth *et al* 2007, p.11). Participating has the added inference of 'knowing that one's actions are taken note of and may be acted upon' and have influence (Boyden and Ennew 1997, p.33).

Student participation aims to enable students to share in decision-making processes in collaboration with other stakeholders (Vukovic 2020). The intention of participation is to transform education by including the influence of young people, to improve outcomes for all and is important for ‘legal, political, and social reasons’ (Markham and Aveyard 2003; Sinclair 2004; Sonn *et al.* 2011).

Adolescence is a formative period where young people shape their identity so it is an important time to have a voice and see how that voice can have influence (Strack *et al.* 2004). Having young people participate in school development in their formative years can help them face challenges and opportunities in an environment that is safe and supportive (Lodge 2005; Sonn *et al.* 2011). However, even when intentions are focused on the empowerment of young people, often the areas in which young people can have influence are on the periphery (Forde *et al.* 2018). Young people may not be recognised as partners and opportunities for them to participate may focus on minor aspects like choosing what books they might like to read or adding comments to a comment box and they are overruled on ideas about bigger matters (Forde *et al.* 2018). It can be difficult to identify examples where young people have genuine influence in their school lives (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Fleming 2013; McIntyre 2000).

Still, participation with young people is a right that recognises young people as equal citizens (Mayes *et al.* 2016). Helping them understand their own wants and needs, contributes to the democratic process, promotes debate, negotiation, and communication which empowers and builds self-esteem and self-efficacy (Sinclair and Franklin 2000). Participation can be powerful, as realised in Sonn *et al.*’s (2011) study with thirty students from schools with challenging contexts were helped to develop critical consciousness through reflective writing and photovoice and led to a transformation in their educational engagement. These thirty learners shared the vision to tackle complex social issues such as diversity, drug use and violence and promote their settings, through participation, to be a health promotion school (Sonn *et al.* 2011). Having a say is more meaningful for young people when it is rooted in their everyday lives on the matters that are important to them (Correia and Aguiar 2022); in this way, the influence that they have, will directly affect them.

### **3.5.2.2 Students as researchers**

While there is much literature on participation since the ratification of UNCRC, it is evident, according to Forde *et al.*’s (2018) study, which was commissioned by the Department of

Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), practice in classrooms has not kept up with innovations in policy. Student and teacher spaces for dialogue do not generally cross one another and when they do, they are predominantly adult led (Sinclair 2004). While there has been a focus on formal, adult led participatory approaches but they may not be a true representation of actual student experiences (Fleming 2013; Forde *et al.* 2018). The spaces that currently exist in schools may fulfil adult agendas and are not spaces of joint engagement by students and teachers equally (Alcoff 1992; Percy-Smith 2010; Robinson 2014). Many initiatives that seek students' opinions are adult-led for adult purposes and may be unlikely to be embedded in culture as there may be no incentive for students to buy in to the initiative (Fielding 2004; Peruzzi 2018). Indeed, students may tire of being invited to give opinions on aspects where the language used may be alienating, 'patronising or condescending' or where the outcomes have little effect on their lives (Fielding 2004, p.307).

However, the 'student as researcher' model has most chance of success as the potential for transformation increases when teachers and students are working in partnership (Fielding 2004, p.307). Engaging the voices of students allows for research to be a process of partnership that is not charitable or romantic (Nind *et al.* 2012) but designed to empower students as they are an active part of the research (Kitzinger 1995). This equal partnership was realised in Nind *et al.*'s (2012) research which focused on one special school in the South of England for girls with SEBD. Students spoke intuitively about their school experiences through recorded interviews, photovoice and comic strips (Nind *et al.* 2012). The students powerfully communicated how it felt to be marginalised in education; a perspective that could never be captured by other stakeholders in the school and their views led to informing future plans for the school to be mindful of how important the feeling of belonging was for students (Nind *et al.* 2012). In more recent research, Nind *et al.* (2022) call for the disruption of spaces to include other stakeholder perspectives to gain other views and opinions.

Graham's (1995), case study of one high school asked students for their opinions on how they felt about aspects of their physical educational programmes. The purpose of Graham's (1995) study was to analyse what students thought about and understood physical education; through elicitation, valuable insights were gained which influenced how teachers designed and delivered their programmes. If students have a vested interest in the matters that affect them, and they are treated as equals, the students become co-constructors of knowledge and find ways in which aspects of the organisation can be improved (McClure *et al.* 2010). Young

people may need different ‘methods, spaces, and opportunities’ to participate in research (Mitra 2008, p.222) ranging from sharing opinions to taking on leadership roles and seeking change for themselves. Once those aspects are supported, the students as researcher model will be successful.

### **3.5.2.3 The gateway to influence is in feedback.**

While it was evident in empirical literature that some organisations are listening to young people, what is not evident is what happens after the listening process; where do the voices go? How do schools move from listening to influence? (Angus *et al.* 2013). Effective listening is the gap between the initial speaking out and the final incorporation of learners’ views into action (Holdsworth 2000) but there is a chasm between the two (Cook-Sather 2006b) as practitioners may find it easier to listen than to hear and change (Lincoln 1995).

To demonstrate to students that teachers have heard what they have said, teachers need to show that they have effectively listened. Effective listening is an ‘active process’ in the exchange of meanings (Tangen 2008, p.159) which involves hearing, reading, interpreting, and constructing meanings (Corbett 1998; Nind *et al.* 2012). Voicework can truly be powerful when young people know they are genuinely being listened to (Holdsworth 2014; Simmons *et al.* 2015). If adults include a variety of methods in which to listen to young people in a safe, democratic space, the final part of the puzzle is to follow up and actively listen and respond (Lodge 2005).

When young people are supported by adult facilitators to contribute their voices, there is an opportunity for the adults to reassess and acknowledge what they have gained from the participation process (Chawla and Heft 2002; Lundy 2018; Neilsen and Arber 2018). The dominant way to communicate that young people have been heard is by feeding back to them (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Lundy 2018). Feedback to students is crucial as it gives young people the understanding that they can change some, but perhaps not all, things in the teaching environment (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). For many students in Flynn’s (2014, p.167) study with 20 young people with SEBD, based in the transformative paradigm with an emancipatory framework of inclusion, voice and empowerment, the opportunity to talk and to encounter an ‘authentic response’ influenced the students’ decision to participate in the research. Angus *et al.*’s (2013) study with 49 stakeholders in Australian Vocational Educational Training Centres found that feedback is a large part of the voicework process and must be worked into any voicework initiative. Providing feedback to students encourages

meaningful participation to show that voices were heard and responded to (Lodge 2005; Mannion 2007). This may take the form of a child-friendly summary using the European Union’s guidelines to create child-friendly documents (EU 2021) or an oral delivery but the onus is on adults to complete this pivotal part of the dialogue (Lundy 2018). One way to action feedback is to draw up an agenda informed by consultation as it gives an excellent starting point in designing collaborative meetings with students (DCYA 2015) or to use the four F’s for effective feedback (Lundy 2018) in Table 3.7.

**Table 3.7 The Four F’s of Feedback (Lundy 2018).**

<b>Full</b>	Provide feedback to young people about why their views were or were not accepted. Young people should be told about what is being implemented and who is in charge and what is happening next.
<b>Friendly</b>	Feedback given by adults needs to be in plain English. Findings from consultation should be shared so they can see how their views were given due weight.
<b>Fast</b>	Young people need to be given timely feedback that acknowledges their initial contribution and shows what progress is being made.
<b>Followed-up</b>	Decision-makers need to provide ongoing feedback and information to children and young people throughout the decision-making process.

Being realistic with young people about their expectations is an important part of the feedback process. It is also worth considering that the adults who are consulting with young people may not be the adults who have the power or authority to affect change but they are the mediator (DCEDIY 2021). Feedback does not always have to concur with the students’ ideas; it may encompass reasons why something did, or did not, happen. Nevertheless, it is vital for the continuance of voicework that this process be adhered to. Adults need to be honest with young people and inform them that it may be some time before anything happens and to keep them informed throughout the decision-making process, not just the consultation stage (DCEDIY 2021).

### 3.5.3 Influence Conclusion.

Influence is the final segment of the four pillared model of child participation (Lundy 2007) that this current study is underpinned by. Eliciting voices must have the foundations of making a safe space for voices to be heard by an effective audience that is open to listening and responding to the young people. Only then can the final pillar be realised. Radical change

cannot be expected to happen overnight, it takes time to hone the skills to nurture influence. The methods that have most influence increase with the level of student participation, especially when they are co-creators of knowledge in research. One of the chief ways in which voice is shown to have influence is to feedback using Lundy's four F's method of Full, Friendly, Fast and Followed-up feedback.

### 3.6 Conclusion.

The purpose of the literature review is to critically discuss the literature, highlighting the relationship between previous studies and how this current study relates to the 'larger, ongoing dialogue' (Creswell 2009, p.25). The chapter presented a summary of the key findings of empirical and methodologic rationale for the current study. The review lies as a framework in which this current research has a strong foundation (Bell 2005). The research could not be independent of the framework, as each piece of literature was read through the lens of the Lundy's (2007) model of child participation and was assembled thematically to mirror best practices in each of the four pillars: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. Within these four pillars, the strengths of research were identified to create a safe and respectful place in which voices had the most chance of being heard. The key to this was to focus on relationship building, collaboration and providing a variety of methods for young people to respond. The literature review highlighted that self-assessment, negotiation and dialogue were key methods in eliciting voices.

The bulk of the literature review focused on the voices of young people, critiquing which students' voices have been amplified. This research also investigated what impact listeners can have on the voices being heard. The listener plays a pivotal role as they hold the power, possessing biases whether deliberate or unconscious, that filter out certain voices. While it may not be possible to change the standpoint of anyone else involved in the research, it was important to share the knowledge so that biased practices would be highlighted to not repeat them. Practices such as expecting young people to speak at our will and ignoring silent voices were also highlighted. Benefits of voicework were critiqued under organisational, power, personal, and pedagogic dimensions to show that voicework transcends the different boundaries of school life and is about the holistic development of the young person, in school and the life beyond the school. Factors that inhibit voicework from flourishing were discussed along with the limitation that voicework is not commonplace in Irish schools even though there is a legal and moral right to voice. The commandeering of voices to act as

surveillance is an unpalatable aspect of modern voicework and is a threat to its emancipatory power.

The role of the audience discussed along with the adult's role as the intermediary to listen effectively. Identifying the strengths and gaps in this section was important as the roles of audience and influence are somewhat more difficult to quantify and measure. The review critiqued many methods of eliciting voices starting with informal consultations between teachers and learners and then moving, step by step, to ensure there are key actors in place who collaborate and encourage participation. Through these mechanisms, voicework will have a greater chance of success. The audience cannot be one sole teacher, but key personnel from all stakeholder groups must be present for outcomes to be favourable.

The final pillar in the review was Influence. This final step is crucial in ensuring the culture of eliciting and listening to voices will be sustained after the completion of the research. The literature review emphasised the importance of habitual behaviours that are ingrained in everyday practices and how they are significant for long term culture change. Behaviours such as meaningful participation and co-researching where young people are treated as equals are particularly effective in empowering learners. Finally, the significant role of feedback, whether it is to affirm the ideas of young people or to go against them, was deemed essential. The strengths and the gaps from the literature review were transferred and addressed in the current study to honour the studies that compiled this literature review and to build on it further (Bell 2005; Cooper 1984). The literature review provided key knowledge to inform this current study and allowed the space to review the methods, methodologies and critical frame utilised in existing literature. The gaps in the literature have shaped the design of the current research and are listed in brief below:

- Many studies were conducted with an outsider implementing methods of elicit youth voices. Few studies focused on participants as co-researchers. Moreover, fewer studies incorporated both youth and adult voices.
- The literature is 'Space' and 'Voice' dominant. It is more difficult to uncover research that focuses on the role of the audience and the power the listener holds regarding the biases and cultures that exist and how that affects power of voicework.
- Many existing studies focus on the act of elicitation and not the influences that voicework achieved, both short and long term. Changes regarding culture,

teaching practices and the role feedback plays, is underrepresented in the literature.

- Methods of elicitation were predominantly oral and public while best practice suggests that varied methods, both public and private are recommended for an authentic voice acoustic.
- The literature focuses on a predominance of young people who are confident and articulate. Seldom heard voices are less popular in literature.
- Much of the literature highlights the many benefits of eliciting voices. The challenges associated with voicework are less prominent.
- The singular term 'voice' is dominant in the literature and fails to represent the variety of experiences that exist when engaging in voicework. 'Voice' indicates that all youth voices are one entity with one vision and do not represent the many diverse voices that exist when eliciting voices.

The next chapter builds on this literature review and demonstrates how each pillar from the review was brought into every facet of the methodology and methods. It illustrates how the learnings from this chapter were brought to life by creating the best conditions to enhance a culture of listening to the voices of learners in classrooms of one post-primary school.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### 4.0 Introduction.

Lundy's (2007) model of child participation framed the research of the literature review dividing each piece of knowledge into the four pillars of Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. The knowledge from the literature review and the four pillars of Lundy's (2007) model informed the methodology of this study, ensuring that the conditions for the voices of learners to be elicited were favourable. Both the theoretical framework and the literature review informed the construction of the research questions, the methodology and methods and how the design of the study would be fashioned.

The literature review presented the strengths and gaps that exist in current Irish and international voice research. Chiefly, the literature identified that eliciting voices in schools is confined to non-academic matters (Black and Mayes 2020; Brown *et al.* 2020; Enright *et al.* 2017; Fleming 2013; Forde *et al.* 2018; Lundy 2007; Mooney Simmie *et al.* 2019; Morgan 2011; O'Brien *et al.* 2022; Perry *et al.* 2014; Skerrit *et al.* 2023). The literature highlighted the best conditions for voices to be elicited authentically and called attention to respectful spaces based on fairness along with time dedicated to voicework (Butler *et al.* 2021; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Youth and adult participants in research should be treated as equal contributors (Clarke *et al.* 2011; Corbett 1998; Correia and Harrison 2019; Lewis and Porter 2007; Macbeath *et al.* 2003; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Sargeant and Gillet-Swan 2019; Sinclair 2004; Whitehead and Clough 2004) with opportunities for collaboration whether between learners, learners and teachers or between teachers to nurture a culture of eliciting and listening to voices (Arnot and Reay 2007; Lodge 2005; MacBeath 2000; Riley 1998; Rudduck *et al.* 2006). Choice and variety are integral in the methods of eliciting voices so learners can have control and have a meaningful and active part in the research (Checkoway 2011; Fielding 2011; Nind 2022). Goal setting, self-assessment and dialogic methods of eliciting voices were also identified in the literature to be highly effective for achieving authentic voice responses (Barnett 1997; Fielding 2001; Fletcher 2005; Mitra 2003; Rudduck and Flutter 2000, 2004).

It was important to remain alert to the criticisms of voicework highlighted in the literature review by ensuring all youth participants are included and by being aware of conscious and unconscious biases present in adults eliciting voices (Carr and Williams 2009; Cefai and

Cooper 2010; Clarke *et al.* 2011; Cooper *et al.* 2010; Cruddas 2007; Fleming 2020; Flynn *et al.* 2012; Gunter and Thomson 2007; Keddie 2015; Lodge 2005; Weis and Fine 1993). When eliciting voices, a variety of methods should be included and once off elicitations should be discouraged (Alcoff 1995; Finneran *et al.* 2021; O'Brien *et al.* 2022; Pearce and Wood 2019). Coupled with this, youth participants should be given time to consider how and when they wish to respond (Arnot and Reay 2007; Cook-Sather 2006b; Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019).

The benefits and barriers to eliciting voices need to be communicated to teacher participants so they are aware of what works well and what may need to be altered in their practice. The barriers were given much consideration; support for teachers who may not feel comfortable in eliciting voices (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Bragg 2001; Lundy 2007; Mayes *et al.* 2020; Oakley 1994 Rudduck and McIntyre 2007), ensuring that eliciting voices does not take time away from teaching the curriculum (Bragg 2001; MacBeath 2011; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007), and supporting habitual voicework practice by establishing learning conversations (Flynn 2017; Hart 1992; Kirby and Bryson 2002 cited in Holdsworth *et al.* 2007; Skerritt *et al.* 2021b).

Including learners and teachers as active participants in the research was crucial as the focus of the study was classroom practice (Cook-Sather *et al.* 2015). The literature informed the importance of including all stakeholders so the perspectives of senior leaders, the Board of Management and parents were also incorporated in the research design (Angus 2006; Collins *et al.* 2018; Bath 2013; Fielding 2004; Mitra 2018; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Sliwka and Istance 2006; Smith and Benavot 2019). Support structures were also identified in the literature as important to assist teacher participants (Clutterbuck 1991; Fitzgerald *et al.* 2021; Hargreaves and Fullan 2015; Rhodes and Beneicke 2002).

The main aim of this current study was to enhance a culture of eliciting the voices of learners in the school. Informed by the literature, the study aimed to reveal learners' perspectives and use those perspectives for influence, as evidence of influence was difficult to uncover in existing literature (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Fleming 2013; McIntyre 2000). This research is rights-based, focused on classroom practice, using the student as co-researcher model (Fielding 2004; Nind *et al.* 2012) while emphasising the importance of feedback and dialogue; these areas of voicework that were lacking in empirical examples in the literature (Chawla and Heft 2002; Corbett 1998; Lundy 2018; Mannion 2007; Neilsen and Arber 2018; Simmons *et al.* 2015).

This chapter begins by discussing the main aims of the study, informed by the theoretical framework and literature review as outlined. These aims were realised by an overarching research question and embedded research questions. The constructivist paradigm which this research is situated in discussed terms of axiology, epistemological and ontological positions. Following these considerations, the rationale for using a mixed methods qualitatively dominant status (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2009) design of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations, round table discussions and reflective journaling is outlined. The sample informing this study is introduced in addition to the rationale for using a convenient, voluntary, and purposive methods of sampling. Data analysis procedures are discussed, as are the ethical considerations in this study. Finally, the steps taken to ensure that the research was trustworthy and credible are presented.

#### 4.1 Research Aims.

The aim of this research was to enhance learners' voices to transform teaching and learning by taking into consideration the perspectives of all participant stakeholders and by providing opportunities for participants to be involved in decision-making, generating ideas, and drawing conclusions (Reason 1994; Shevlin and Rose 2008; Whitmore 1996). Perspectives from learners, teachers, parents, senior leaders and the Board of Management were invited to analyse views on enhancing a culture of eliciting the voices of learners in one post-primary school. The objective of gaining and analysing these perspectives was to implement positive change in classrooms regarding teaching, learning, assessment, and engagement. As a teacher in this school, I wanted to undertake this study as through experience I understood it was beneficial to classroom practice to listen and respond to learners. Basing the study in a familiar context could provide a case study to assist practitioners in enhancing their own teaching practices through voicework.

Although the setting for the study was not new to voicework, it was still important to establish the depth of knowledge of the school community by defining what was understood by participants when speaking about voicework as many different interpretations exist. The research questions were informed by the literature and theoretical framework, while being alert to the gaps that were evident in existing literature.

### 4.1.1 Research Questions.

The study's main research question is:

1. How can a culture of eliciting the voices of learners be enhanced in our school?

Five embedded questions were formulated:

2. What is our school doing to capture the voices of learners from the perspectives of stakeholders?
3. How effective are different teaching methods in eliciting the voices of learners in our school from the perspectives of learners and teachers?
4. Does eliciting the voices of learners have a positive impact on teaching, learning, assessment, and engagement in our school from the perspectives of stakeholders?
5. What impact does amplifying voices have on teacher and learner interactions?
6. What are our stakeholders' perspectives on the value of the voices of learners?

## 4.2 Research Paradigm.

This study aligns with the constructivist paradigm. This section details the journey from identifying experiential knowledge from past research, to conceptualising this study, and finally through the thought experiments that informed alignment of the study with the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm will be discussed through the lenses of ontology, epistemology, and axiology as well as a detailed analysis of the paradigm and how it guided this research.

### 4.2.1 Paradigm: Constructivist.

The search for knowledge and understanding is part of human nature (Epstein 1985; Frankl 1963; Kincheloe 1991). The constructivist paradigm informed the methodology, methods and guided the action in this current study (Bateson 1972; Lather 1986; Maxwell 2009; Mertens 2005, 2015). The constructivist paradigm identifies the values of trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability (Denzin and Lincoln 2005) and from these broad values, Table 4.1 was constructed to cross reference the ontology and epistemology with the pillars of constructivism.

**Table 4.1 Constructivism -adapted from Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.193-4).**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Constructivism</b>	<b>Alignment with the Current Study.</b>
<b>Ontology</b>	Relativism- local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities.	Working together on a common goal.
<b>Epistemology</b>	Transactional/ Subjectivist created findings.	Recognising and acknowledging the influence of my lived experience and perspectives on interpretation of findings.
<b>Methodology</b>	Hermeneutical/ Dialectical.	Research is based on communications.
<b>Inquiry Aim</b>	Understanding/ Reconstruction.	The aim is to understand other perspectives and co-construct knowledge.
<b>Nature of knowledge</b>	Individual or collective reconstruction coalescing around consensus.	Individual and collective perspectives are gathered with one main goal.
<b>Knowledge accumulation</b>	Vicarious experience.	Participants listen to the experiences of others and reflect on their own.
<b>Quality Criteria</b>	Trustworthiness, authenticity.	Member checking and participants' control over what is shared.
<b>Ethics</b>	A tilt towards revelation: Special problems	There are no preconceived ideas; the results will be a revelation.
<b>Voice</b>	Passionate participant as facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction	Voice-based research where many voices are included.
<b>Training</b>	Qualitative and Quantitative: history; values of altruism, empowerment, and liberation.	Mixed method, emancipatory study.

The constructivist paradigm identifies that constructivist researchers attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt 2000).

#### 4.2.2 Ontological position.

Ontology is one's basic set of beliefs that guide action (Guba and Lincoln 1989; McNiff 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest posing two questions to interrogate ontological beliefs: 'What kind of being is a human being?' and 'What is the nature of reality?' Who I am has a distinct relationship with this research; I am a student, a teacher, and a researcher. Like Vygotsky, (1978) I believe that humans make meaning from their experiences and do not

exist independently of their social environment. In the 1990s while I was a post-primary student, consulting students on the learning environment was not a habitual occurrence. As a teacher, in my later years of teaching I elicited the opinions of students, where possible, in the English curriculum. I found this process to be beneficial in strengthening relationships and engagement as when learners related to something they had chosen themselves, they showed an interest in learning about it.

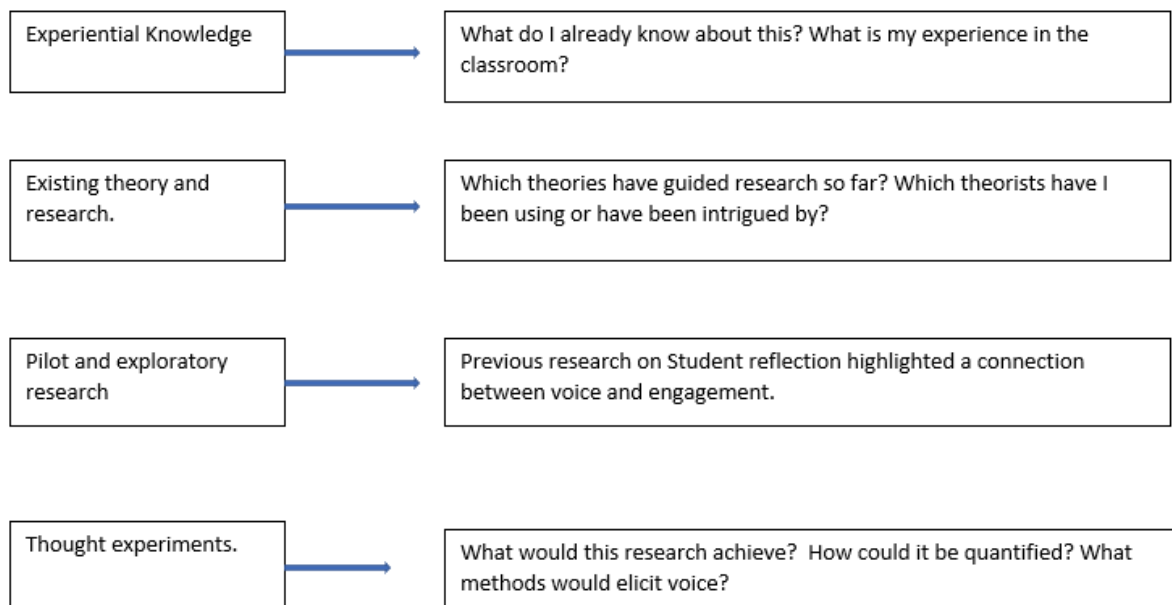
I believe that adults and young people should be treated equally in the research and should enjoy the same rights and entitlements; this belief unsettles the traditional power structures that can exist in schools. It is my belief that teachers and learners should personally benefit from participation and research should be conducted ‘with’ and not ‘about’ them, which synchronises with the ideals of the constructivist paradigm. Action research was appropriate in the research design for learners and teachers to collaborate and co-construct knowledge while accommodating different perspectives (McNiff 2013; Kennedy 2005). I am committed to the values of truth, social justice, and respect; these values penetrate the research from the type of methods used, member checking stages, as well as participants having some control in how and when they participated.

#### 4.2.3 Epistemological position.

Epistemology focuses on the origins and nature of knowing and how we come to know what we know (Crotty 1998; McNiff 2013; Maykut and Morehouse 1994). It provides a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are adequate and legitimate (Bryman 1988; Maynard 1994). Reflecting on one’s identity, social position and experiences is important as preconceived ideas will imprint on the study (Maxwell 2009). A clear philosophical stance enables researchers to justify decisions made and guide the research from broad assumptions to establishing methods of data collection (Creswell 2009; Maxwell 2009). As I possessed assumptions regarding voice emancipation, it was important to construct a concept map (Maxwell 2009) to act as a conceptual framework by working from four main sources:

- (i) experiential knowledge
- (ii) existing theory and research
- (iii) pilot and exploratory research and
- (iv) thought experiments.

Figure 4.1 shows this concept mapping in progress, presenting the questions asked to direct the research.



**Figure 4.1 Concept Mapping (Adapted from Maxwell 2009).**

The process of concept mapping exposes pre-assumed views which needed to be acknowledged (Glesne and Peshkin 1992) such as previous formal and informal research experiences relating to youth voices (Chapple 2019; Chapple and Raftery 2023). Concept mapping allows the space for reflecting on theories to frame the study which would work in tandem with this constructivist study. Previous research was an asset and something I have ‘capitalise[d] rather than exorcise[d]’ as it has given me valuable sources of insights, hypotheses, and credibility (Reason 1988, p.12). It was important to acknowledge that although previous experiences were positive, they were my experiences alone, and not everyone may share the same view. The process of concept mapping laid bare my own biases and strengths to bring to the current study.

#### 4.2.4 Axiology.

Axiology is the study and exploration of human values. This exploration enables identification of the underlying beliefs that influence perceptions and interpretations. These beliefs come from our life experiences, our decisions, and our actions and they give us an understanding in why we do what we do (Hartman 1967; McArdle *et al.* 2013). All observers view the world from their own vantage point, so the act of questioning the relationship

between the inquirer and their knowledge is an essential part of the research process (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). My Master of Education Study investigated student reflection and found links between student reflection and improvement in classroom practice (Chapple 2019). More recently, my research has evolved from research ‘on’ students to researching ‘with’ students (Chapple and Raftery 2023) as I believe that researching ‘with’ has a greater chance of creating meaningful change. I believe that a teacher as researcher is uniquely placed to carry out research and improve practices; I was twice awarded funding from the Teaching Council under the auspices of the John Coolahan Research Support Framework bursary and carried out research as a teacher-researcher. I am a member of the Teaching Council’s Research Engagement Group to support other teachers as researchers as I believe inside change has an enormous impact on practices. Constructivism shares the values that I have, as it emphasises collaboration with others with the unified goal of improvement which can benefit all participants.

#### 4.2.5 Paradigm Conclusion.

Concept mapping provided a useful display for reflecting on my values, influential theories and research and how it links to the aspirations and intentions of this research (Maxwell 2009). Figure 4.2 presents a visual replication of the connections between my ontological position and epistemological stance to the appropriateness of constructivism as a paradigm for this study.

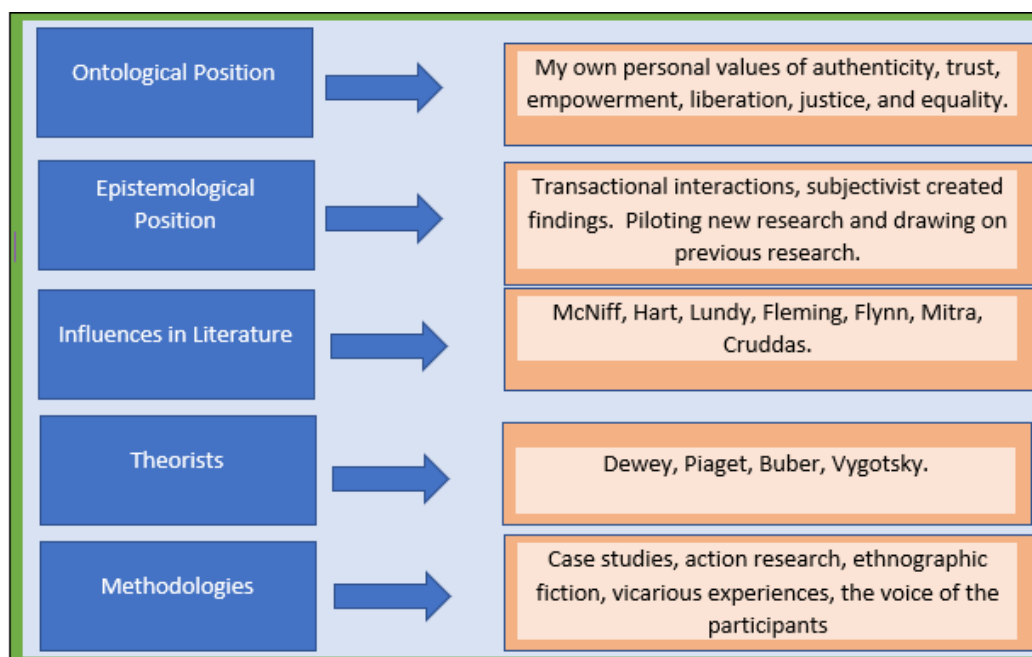


Figure 4.2 Concept Mapping of the Constructivist Paradigm in relation to this research, (Maxwell 2009).

When reviewing the ontological and epistemological views in existing literature, social constructivists such as Bruner (1960) and Vygotsky (1978) argue that knowledge is constructed from interactions with participants and other actors; knowledge is not independent of the learner but is constructed through interaction with the world around the learner (Dewey 1916; Foucault 1971; Hein 1999; Piaget 1957; Vygotsky 1978). In this research, co-constructing knowledge, places the learners' and teachers' identities at the core which provides a means to consider power as a system that is 'endlessly negotiated, re-constructed and open to change' (Taylor and Robinson 2009, p.170). In constructivist studies, the 'inquirer and the inquired into are interlocked in an interactive process' (Mertens 2005, p.14). Those interactions will lead to change; a central aim in this current study (Zehetmeier *et al.* 2015).

### 4.3 Research Design.

This research is a case study of one mid-west of Ireland post-primary school, where I was employed over one academic year between August 2021 and May 2022. The study recruited 16 teachers, to elicit the voices of learners in their classes. Voice elicitation was utilised with the majority of learners in the school. Participants were invited to share their opinions on their experiences of voicework over the course of the study. 77 learners, 16 teachers, 2 senior leaders, 3 parents and one member from the Board of Management agreed to share their views.

The aim of the research was to investigate the experiences stakeholders had when voices were elicited and if these experiences could enhance the culture of the school. The investigation looked at the methods currently in use to elicit the voices of learners, the effectiveness of different methods of voice elicitation, the assessment of the benefits and challenges of voicework, the examination of the impact of voice elicitation between teachers and learners and the perspectives of stakeholders on the value of voicework in the school.

The methods used to collate the views of stakeholders included questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, focus groups, round table discussions and reflective journaling. The next sections in this chapter will detail the rationale behind the choice of case study and action research as methodology. A presentation of the predominantly qualitative mixed methods design that was utilised in this study closes this section.

### 4.3.1 Case Study.

A case study is a popular strategy in educational settings (McNiff 2013; Wilson 2008) where the researcher observes the characteristics of an individual unit (Cohen and Mannion 1994; Langenbach *et al.* 1994; Mertens 2005; Merriam 1998; Tesch 1990; Yin 2008). This case study took place in a Gaelscoil, single-sex (girls) Voluntary Secondary School in the mid-west of Ireland. A case study was appropriate for this study as the research closely examined data within this context at a micro level (Bell 2005; Flick 2011; Silverman 2001; Zainal 2007). This close examination created further understanding about learners' voices in classrooms and the dynamic interactions between teachers and learners when aiming to amplify voices, which could be transferred to other settings (Cohen and Mannion, 1994; Silverman 2001; Stake 1978). Case studies have limitations as there is no opportunity to cross check information as the study focuses on a single setting (Bell 2005; Denscombe 2003). However, the methodologies, methods and results could be transferable (Bassey 1981; Denscombe 2003; Stake 2000). Even though each case has an individual complex historical and cultural structure, a precise description will be given to enable other reconstruction studies to take place in other settings (Ragin and Becker 1992; Stake 2005). It is worth noting that voicework was not a new concept to the setting in this study. Prior to this research, the school had taken part in an 'Investing in Children' award run by YAP Ireland where organisations that listen and respond to children are awarded a yearly certificate. This was part of a larger study where the aim was to amplify student voices in decision-making in the school. In this previous study, teachers were aware that an investigation into student decision-making was taking place but were not directly involved in eliciting voices.

### 4.3.2 Methodology: Action Research.

Action research, or research carried out by the actions of the researcher, is suitable for conducting classroom-based collaborative enquiry (McNiff 2002). Knowledge is gained by action as it is an evolving process that is never static or complete (Carr and Kemmis 1986; McNiff 2013). In action research there are no fixed answers, as answers often transform into new lines of enquiry, then they are reflected upon and further action is decided (Winter and Burroughs 1989). It is a common methodology in other voice-based research (Fitzpatrick 2016; Kemmis and McTaggart 2005; Kristmanson *et al.* 2013; Lamb 2001; Luke 2006; Sonn *et al.* 2011).

In this study, participant teachers implemented an action with the aim of transformation and improvement (Atweh et al.1998; Carr and Kemmis 1986; Fielding 2004). Critical reflection was incorporated into the action cycles to help address preconceived assumptions, habits, and predetermined ideology (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Thomas 2009). The action research in this study placed me as the lead researcher, and together with a community of participants, we examined practices that warranted change based on the voices of learners (Walker 2005).

Lewin's model of action research (1946) was employed in this study as it focuses on a spiral of steps; plan, act, observe, reflect (Kemmis and McTaggart 1990; Riding *et al.* 1995). It is a simple model for participants to follow as they were invited to incorporate new actions into their lessons. Figure 4.3 shows Lewin's (1946) model adapted to my own study.

Over the course of one year, teachers focused on eliciting the voices of learners in their classes to influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. To assess the experiences of stakeholders in the school, different methods were used to engage participants. Participants completed questionnaires at the beginning and end of the study. A mix of nineteen teacher, senior leader and parents completed semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the study. Five classes were observed to see voice elicitation in action and to record how voice interactions were taking place. Twelve learners took part in a focus group to speak about their experiences. Nine teachers engaged in a round table discussion<sup>6</sup> to speak about their experiences. Finally, two teachers completed a reflective journal to document their experiences over the year.

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'focus group' is used when there was a power differential between researcher and participants. The term 'round table discussion' is used when speaking with colleagues.

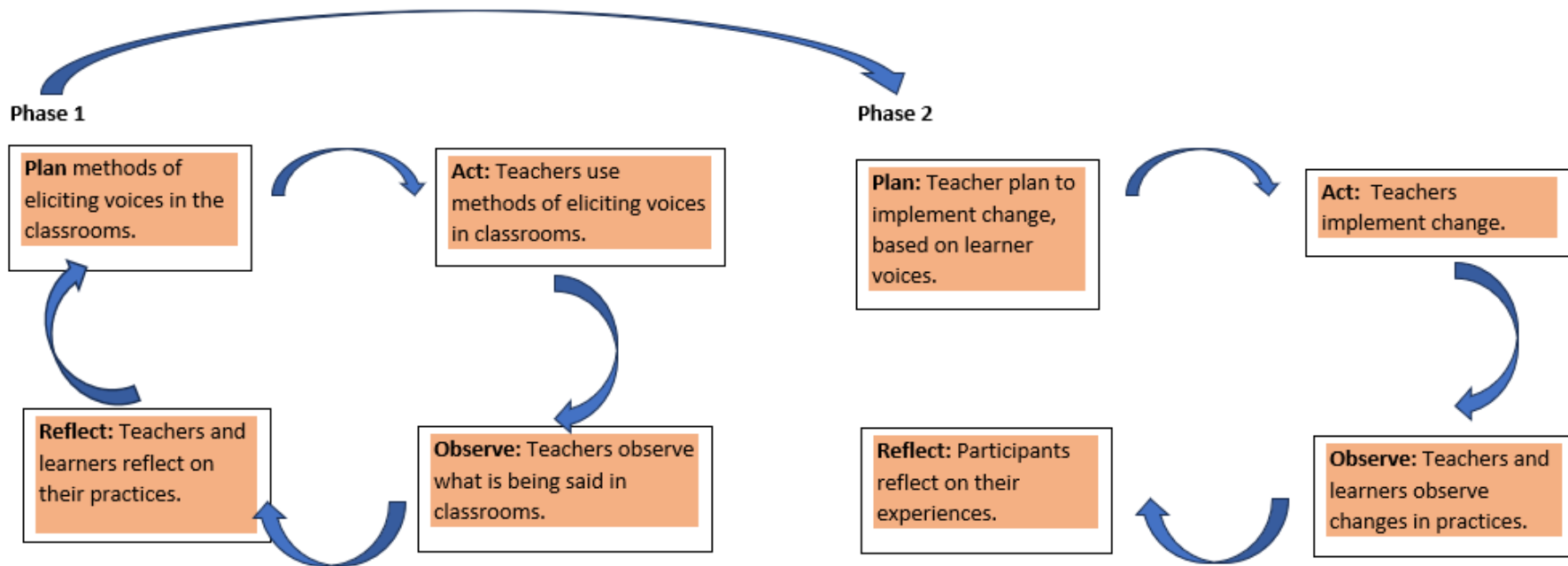


Figure 4.3 Lewin's (1946) theory of action research adapted to the current study.

#### 4.3.2.1 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a type of research that seeks to involve people in the study with the aim of supporting them to improve their practice (Jacobs 2016; Nind *et al.* 2022). In this research, participants were part of the action as teachers chose and implemented methods for eliciting learners' voices. Learners were part of action as they reflected and responded through questionnaires and focus groups. Participating teachers contributed their views of voice elicitation through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, round table discussions and in their reflective journals (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999; Donald *et al.* 1995; Freebody *et al.* 2011; Hargreaves 1999; Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Kincheloe 2003). Teachers are well placed as researchers as they have an individual and contextual and subject knowledge as well as educational theory and curriculum knowledge (Carr and Kemmis 1986). PAR suited this project as it is rooted in the culture of ordinary people and the aim is improvement, aligning with the constructivist paradigm (Fals-Borda and Ralman 1991). PAR emphasises the use of methods that allow the voices of the oppressed to be heard by using a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods, as included in this research, to create knowledge that emerges from the community (Jacobs 2016; Mertens 2005).

#### 4.3.3 Phases of action research.

As Figure 4.3 shows, this study had two phases of action research. In the first phase, participant teachers chose what methods they were interested in using and which classes they were interested in working with. In this planning stage, teachers and senior leaders were invited to participate in questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to uncover their opinions prior to using methods of eliciting learners' voices and to allay any fears or answer questions they had. Knowledge from this stage was used as a stimulus for later data collection stages, and as a means of comparison (MacBeath *et al.* 2003). Parents and the Board of Management were also invited to participate and give their views by questionnaire. In the act stage, teachers were matched with methods of eliciting voices to have representation from a variety of age groups and subjects. In the act stage, teachers implemented their method of eliciting voices in their classrooms. This phase concluded with teachers listening and reflecting on the views of learners garnered through the methods of voice elicitation. This stage may have required more negotiation and discussion with learners before deciding on which changes could be made and preparing for feedback to inform phase two of the action research cycle.

Phase two of the action research began with teachers planning how to change or adapt practices in their classrooms by implementing the feedback from phase one generated through the implementation of voice elicitation methods introduced in phase one. Participants observed these changes and during this time, focus groups with learners and observations of five classes took place. Finally, all participants reflected on their experiences of engaging with these methods over the academic year in focus groups, round table discussions, reflective journals, exit questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. A comprehensive discussion of the multi-layered methods used in this study are detailed later in this chapter.

The phases of action research ran alongside the data collection phases. The first questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted at the beginning of the study while phase one of action research was taking place. The five observations of classes took place at the end of phase one of the action research. The focus groups and round table discussions occurred when participants were in phase two of the action research. The final questionnaires and semi-structured interviews took place at the end of the phases of action research. Journaling took place throughout the study.

One of the advantages of using a method such as action research, was that it was adaptable as the study progressed. Before the study began, I outlined the above phases, but understood that I was not aware of what would happen in classrooms, or what the action research would uncover. In phase one, teachers expressed that they required more support in adapting and implementing new practices, so learning conversations for teacher participants took place on a fortnightly basis in an informal setting. Prior consent for these learning conversations was not in place so although data could not be collected, it was beneficial in supporting teacher participants.

Table 4.2 shows the stages of action research and how participants played an integral role in the co-construction of knowledge through PAR.

**Table 4.2 Lewin's (1946) theory of action research in relation to this study.**

<b>Stage of Action Research</b>	<b>Method used and participants involved</b>	<b>Data Collection used in this stage</b>
<b>PHASE ONE</b>		
<b>PLAN</b>	Teachers plan which methods of eliciting voices to use in their classrooms.	Questionnaires to all stakeholders to discover initial views on learners' voices in the school. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and senior leaders to assess the perspectives towards eliciting voices in the school.
<b>ACT</b>	Teachers implement methods of eliciting voice.	
<b>OBSERVE</b>	Teachers dialogue with learners to discover their views	Observation of classes to see the methods in action.
<b>REFLECT</b>	Teachers reflect on what learners have said	
<b>PHASE TWO</b>		
<b>PLAN</b>	Teachers decide where change can be implemented and prepare feedback for learners.	
<b>ACT</b>	Changes to classroom practices are implemented.	
<b>OBSERVE</b>	Teachers initiate further discussions to negotiate changes.	Learner focus groups and teacher round table discussions highlight the strengths and weaknesses of eliciting learners' voices.
<b>REFLECT</b>	Teachers and learners reflect on what has worked well and what has been a challenge	Semi-structured interviews recorded adult perspectives on their experiences of voicework. End questionnaires record all stakeholders' perspectives on their experiences. Teachers' perspectives are recorded using a reflective journal.

#### 4.3.4 Eliciting the voices of learners in classrooms.

The action in this study was to implement one of five methods of eliciting learners' voices. The knowledge gained from these elicitations was used to implement actions. The methods of eliciting learners' voices, the rationale for which was detailed in the literature review, are

listed in brief in Table 4.3. The methods of elicitation were based on utilising methods of learner generated questions, dialogue, and consultation with the goal of improvement and understanding the perspectives of learners' classroom experiences (Rudduck and Flutter 2000). The literature highlighted that authentic voice elicitation went beyond representation or hearing (Sutherland *et al.* 2011), so the five methods of voice elicitation used in this study presented in brief in Table 4.3, aligned with Lundy's (2007) model of child participation, the paradigm of constructivism and my ethical, epistemological, and ontological views. Aspects like having a choice in taking part, whether in the entire study or in eliciting voices in the classroom and being respected for participation or non-participation were key (Cole 1981). It was important that when learners were asked to contribute, the topic would be relevant and beneficial to them. It was also imperative that learners would have more than one opportunity to participate and, finally, that transformation would be enabled (Charteris and Smardon 2019).

**Table 4.3 Description of the methods used by participating teachers.**

<b>Name of the method</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Method employed to elicit voice</b>
<b>Learner Generated Questions</b>	The teacher focuses on learner generated questions. This can be completed orally, digitally, or in a written format.	Dialogue (oral and written) Listening to learners' perspectives Feedback Choice Autonomy Agency
<b>Learner Reflective Practice</b>	Learners reflect on their own work before submitting it for correction.	Self-assessment (written, verbal) Feedback Autonomy Agency
<b>Learner contract</b>	Learners set learning goals for themselves to critically understand their own learning.	Dialogue (written) Self-assessment Choice Autonomy
<b>Learner Led Learning</b>	The teacher asks two questions: 1. What are we doing well to support your learning? 2. What could we do more of, or do differently to support your learning? Teachers will review suggestions from learners and will adapt practice.	Dialogue (written/ oral/ visual) Learners' perspectives Feedback Autonomy Agency
<b>Negotiated Curriculum</b>	Teachers work together with learners to plan work to be completed, what will be included and how it will be assessed and evaluated.	Dialogue (written/ oral/ Visual) Collaborative decision making Learners' perspectives Choice Feedback Autonomy Agency

#### 4.3.5 Methods of eliciting learners' voices.

The five methods, informed by the literature review fulfilled the need for variety so participating teachers could choose one that appealed to them (Appendix III). 'Learner Generated Questions' required very little change in teaching style or lesson planning to implement. 'Learner Reflective Practice' and 'Learner Contract' could be completed inside or outside of classroom time. 'Negotiated Curriculum' and 'Learner-Led Learning' were more immersive and required a high level of consultation and dialogic skills from learners and teachers. The five methods are discussed in detail in the next sections.

##### 4.3.5.1 Learner Generated Questions.

For teachers or learners who had limited experience in eliciting voices, the method of learner generated questions was a good starting place. In classrooms, questions are asked, but often

those questions are teacher generated. In this study, participating teachers allocated time for learner generated questions; a powerful learning strategy which can improve recall, performance in exams, critical thinking, comprehension and improve the support systems in the classroom (Bertsch *et al.* 2007; Bugg and McDaniel 2012; Ebersbach *et al.* 2020; Mahmud 2005; Rosenshine *et al.* 1996; Song 2016; Yu 2009). Support was given to teachers on the MS Teams page, in the learning conversations and in handouts to advice on different ways learner generated questions could be incorporated (Appendix III) and with practical examples of influencing culture change (Appendix IV). Learner generated questions could be oral, written or made into an online quiz. By not focusing solely on oral questioning, provided more opportunities for learners to contribute.

#### **4.3.5.2 Learner Reflective Practice.**

Reflection is a process of reviewing an experience by describing, analysing, and evaluating to learn from it. It is the link between doing and understanding, enabling the learner to make judgements about their work so they become more self-aware of their learning (Dewey 1933; Kolb 1984; Hinett 2004; Reid 1993; Rodgers 2002). In this method, learners garner control of their learning by thinking reflectively as they assess what they know and what they need to know, and then bridge the gap between the two, aiding the learning experience and increasing academic performance, critical thinking and motivation (Cavilla 2017; Hume 2009; Schon 1987; Yen Ting *et al.* 2014; Yu-Fen 2010). In this current study, learners were supported by teachers to reflect on what they had done well in their work and what needed improvement. Participating teachers could use class time to support reflective practice or could set it as a homework assignment. Participating teachers were free to interpret this method and some invited learners to predict their grade, reflect on their strengths and weaknesses or summarise the feedback given by the teacher (Appendix V). By reviewing the reflections, teachers can gain knowledge about the learner's own personal beliefs about their learning.

A common phrase used in this method was 'Next time I will ...'. This phrase was useful for the learner to refer to before beginning a new piece of work; the learner would begin by referring to the strengths and weaknesses of previous work with the intention of improvement (Costa and Kallick 2008). A useful three questioned structure was also employed by teachers: *What* have I learned? *So, what* does this tell me about my strengths and weaknesses? *Now What* can I do to improve my understanding? These questions can be conducted orally in class to promote the catalyst for reflection (Rolfe *et al.* 2001). These questions focus on the

individual learner's voice thinking deeply about how they learn so they can be motivated towards improvement (Shirley 2015; Leitch *et al.* 2005; Ofsted 2000).

#### **4.3.5.3 Learner Contract.**

A learner contract is a 'nondirective approach to teaching' which 'moves in the direction of democracy' while working within the parameters of traditional education (Freie 1992, p.230). It is a bridge between what the learner desires to learn and what the demands of the curriculum are and is built on the interests and aspirations of the learners (Freie 1992; Gambrell 2004; Pintrich and Schunk 2002; Rogers and Freiburg 1969). Learners work on these contracts individually or have support from teachers; the goal of the contract will be to focus on goals that are individual, meaningful, and challenging (Cambourne 2002; DES 2022; Duncan 2013; Greenwood and McCabe 2015; NCCA 2018; NCCA 2019). Templates were provided to teachers (Appendix VI) to focus on goal prioritisation (Greenwood and McCabe 2015; Pearson and Gallagher 1983). Teachers could interact with the learner contract process to understand where the areas of need were (Chiang 1998). Phrases like 'by next week I will have revised ...' or 'by next week I will have completed the assignment' were followed by 'what is my plan to do this?' or 'I know I will have learned because...'. Teachers supported learners in planning for personal goals, but also were privy to areas that learners were most in need. Teachers could also use the contracts as a stimulus for dialogue in the class. It led to teachers reflecting on what may need to be revised in class or providing support in areas of need that are highlighted.

#### **4.3.5.4 The Negotiated Curriculum.**

This method involved discussing material to be covered and how it will be covered with learners (Drake 1998). The ideas resonate with Boomer's (1992) discussions on shifting teacher and student roles and relationships in the student voice movement. It is a powerful tool for shaping the curriculum, for hearing what learners have to say, and for teacher reflection (Trousdale and Henkin 1989). A key finding from the empirical base was that active collaborative methods that had connection, interest and meaning for students were the most effective and engaging (Banks and Smyth 2015; Johnson and Golombek *et al.* 2002; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009). This echoes the Chief Inspector's report which directly addresses the need for hearing the voices of students through classroom discussion (DES 2022). In this current study, learners and teachers negotiated the sequence work was covered in, how material was delivered, what classroom activities occurred and

how they were assessed; a clear example of co-construction of curriculum and elevation of voices (Peruzzi 2018). Learners were encouraged to participate by responding in oral, digital and in written ways, supported by the participating teacher (Appendix VII). In negotiations, agreed outcomes that are reached through dialogue or other methods of participation are achieved (Prakken 2005). Participating teachers were advised to begin by taking small, manageable steps and not redesigning a whole curriculum (Bovill *et al.* 2009). Central decisions were guided and supported by participating teachers through dialogue and feedback (Fitzpatrick 2016).

#### **4.3.5.5 Learner Led Learning.**

Consultation with students is a form of prefigurative democracy which aids young people to make meaningful contributions to society during and when they leave school (Fielding and Bragg 2003; Flutter and Rudduck 2004; Frost and Holden 2008; Kellett 2005; MacBeath *et al.* 2003; Sabo Flores 2007). Consultation and dialogue can lead to changes in practice which result in methods being adapted to suit the cohort, which is key for increasing engagement and enjoyment in education (Botelho 2016). The process of co-construction engages learners to take responsibility and co-create and transform learning spaces with teachers (Cook-Sather 2002; Elwood 2013; Gallagher 2015; Kuntz and Carter 2021). Learner led learning focused on the participating teacher asking learners two questions:

1. What are we (teacher and learners) doing well to support your learning?
2. What could we do more of, or do better, to support your learning?

Participating teachers were free to use oral, digital, or written methods and learners' responses gave teachers an understanding of what supports were needed and what strengths existed. Teachers were supported online and in learning conversations about how to respond using effective feedback and dialogue (Appendix VIII).

#### **4.3.5.6 Method of eliciting learners' voices conclusion.**

Once ethical clearance from MICREC (Appendix IX) was received, permission was requested and granted from the Board of Management of the School (Appendix X). Then, the five methods of eliciting the voices of learners were used by participating teachers in their classrooms during the academic year 2021-2022. The next section details the mixed methods that were used to capture the responses of school stakeholders in using these methods of eliciting learners' voices.

#### 4.3.6 Mixed Methods predominantly qualitative study.

Methods appropriate to capturing multiple perspectives in this action research study, framed by constructivism were considered. Iterative cycles of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, journaling, focus groups and round table discussions were selected (Mertens 2005). A variety of methods were utilised to triangulate data and to secure deep understanding from different perspectives (Davey *et al.* 2010; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Flick 2005). Methods used in studies in the literature review were examined to identify feasible and effective methods that could inform this study design. Table 4.4 shows the mixed methods used, the research question they were aimed at answering and whether they were qualitative, quantitative or a mix of both. It must be noted that this study is predominantly qualitative with some qualitative elements to triangulate and support the qualitative data.

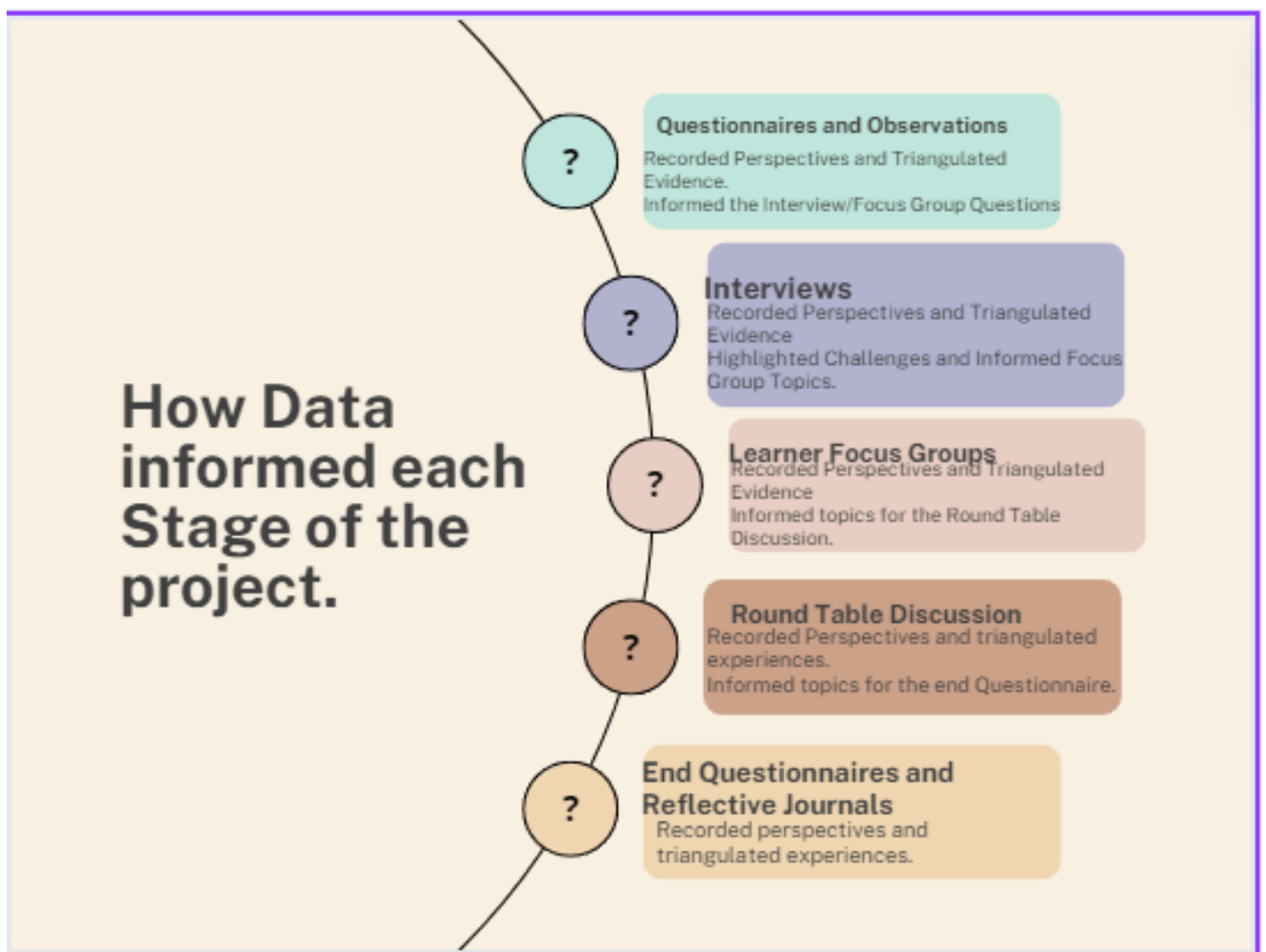
**Table 4.4: Mixed methods used in this study.**

<b>Method used</b>	<b>What was involved?</b>	<b>Qualitative, Quantitative or a Mixed Methods</b>	<b>Research Question it was designed to answer</b>
Expression of Interest forms (teachers)	MS Form (Appendix XI) Teachers expressed interest in methods, subjects, and year groups.	Quantitative	None. Designed to ensure a variety of methods, year groups and subjects were included.
Pilot questionnaires and questionnaires (All participants)	MS Form Questionnaire (Appendices XII, XIII and XIV) to gauge participants' views at the beginning of the project.	Mixed methods to allow participants to express their opinions.	Question 1: How can a culture of eliciting the voices of learners be enhanced in our school?  Question 2: What is our school doing to capture the voices of learners?  Question 3: How effective are different teaching methods in eliciting the voices of learners in our school?
Interview 1 (Teachers and senior leaders)	In-person semi-structured interviews at the beginning of the study to understand perspectives.	Qualitative.	Questions 1, 2, 3.  Question 5: What impact does amplifying voices have on teacher and learner interactions?
Pilot Observations and Observations	Classes were observed using narrative recording sheets to gather data on learners' voices in action (Appendix XV)	Quantitative	Questions 2 and 3.
Learner Focus Groups	Learners spoke about their experiences.	Qualitative	Questions 1, 2, 3 and 5.  Question 4: Does eliciting the voices of learners have a

			positive impact on teaching, learning, assessment, and engagement in our school? Question 6: What are stakeholders' perspectives on the value of the voices of learners?
Round Table Discussions (Teachers)	A teacher only discussion to garner perspectives on their experiences.	Qualitative	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.
Interview 2	Exit semi-structured interviews with teachers, senior leaders, and parents to collect their views on their experiences on the study.	Qualitative	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.
Exit Questionnaires	MS Form questionnaire to give every participant a chance to voice their experiences (Appendix XVI, XVII and XVIII).	Mixed Methods.	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.
Reflective Journals	Teachers were invited record their experiences in online or physical reflective journals.	Qualitative	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.
Contact Sheets	Sheets (Appendix XIX, XX and XXI) to summarise each contact had with each element of the project.	Qualitative	Questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

As the table shows, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were used to strengthen data in co-constructive ways with stakeholders in this study (Creswell 2015; Curtin and Fossey 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2002). The mixed methods, predominantly qualitative design offered participants a variety of ways to have space, voice, audience, and influence as underpinned by the theoretical framework (Lundy 2007) used in this study (Anderson and Freebody 2014; Fielding 2004; Morse 2002; Heron and Palfreyman 2019; Newman *et al.* 2002; Senge 2000). A variety of data sources allowed for triangulation of data to produce a credible, rigorous and transparent study which could not be thoroughly understood by one method in isolation (Bergmark and Westman 2016; Creswell 2007; Howe 2004; Mason 1996;

Mertens 2005; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2003). Questionnaires and observations established a baseline of quantitative data which was strengthened with qualitative data, which formed the preponderance of data through focus groups, round table discussions, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Morgan *et al.* 2002). Data collection took place in different stages, with some data informing the next stage; for example, the answers from the teacher questionnaire informed questions that were posed in interview 1 and data from observations informed discussion points in the focus groups and in the round table discussions as displayed in Figure 4.4.



**Figure 4.4** Flow chart showing how each stage of the project informed the next stage.

A comparative analysis of integrated data collected across strands informed the findings of the research.

#### 4.3.7 Qualitative Methods.

The main data collection approach was qualitative, where the purpose was to explore and understand meanings individuals and groups ascribed to a social or human problem (Creswell 2009; Thorpe *et al.* 1993). As Figure 4.4 shows, a sequential approach was adopted, aligning with the phases of action research, where iterative cycles of data collection informed the next phase (Lewin 1946; McNiff 2013). Furthermore, the case study approach facilitated flexibility of data collection methods in the naturalistic environment of the school (Eisner 1978; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). The sequential approach and sharing of questions in data collection stages, allowed participants the space to reflect and thoughtfully consider responses (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Participating teachers were encouraged when eliciting the voices of learners, to offer a variety of means in which learners could respond such as digitally, written or orally as well as publicly or privately, identified or anonymous (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007) in line with the ethos of this study (Appendix VII).

#### 4.3.8 Quantitative Methods.

Quantitative methods provided a baseline to supplement and triangulate the data in this study (Fielding 2004). Questionnaires provided an accessible method of reaching many participants and inviting opportunity for anonymous participation; an important factor in insider research (Cohen and Mannion 1994; Creswell 2009). Descriptive statistics illustrated by pie charts and bar charts from questionnaires, created in MS Excel were useful to provide visual representations of data. Questionnaires, taken at the beginning and end of the study, were useful to compare and triangulate data with evidence garnered from semi-structured interviews, discussion groups and reflective journals (Anderson and Freebody 2014; Bell 2005; Flick 2011); a technique utilised in similar studies identified in the literature review (Flynn 2017, Luke 2006, Dörnyei 1998, Ravenhall 2007, Fitzpatrick 2016). Observations served to capture live quantitative data showing learner and teacher voices in action in classrooms. Tick boxes on the observations served as a useful mechanism to build a tally chart as a visual representation of the results. For the final questionnaire, a t-test was used to compare data from two Likert Scales.

#### 4.3.9 Piloting.

Piloting each stage of the research was built into the design of the study. It was important in this multistage research that questions given in questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and discussion groups held a direct link to the research questions (Bell 2005; Clarke-Carter 1997;

Krosnick *et al.* 1996; Mertens 2005). One adult piloted the adult questionnaires and three young people piloted the learner questionnaires. Both pilot groups completed the pilot alone and a meeting was arranged afterwards to discuss feedback regarding timing and understanding of the questions for adaptations to be made (Kamal 2017). A pilot interview was conducted and a debriefing session was held afterwards to discuss how the interview ran (Seidman 1998). In the semi-structured interviews, recordings were listened back to ensure the interviewee was not being led and to check if the questions held ambiguities. A critical friend observed one class to trial recording in timed segments for a period and then to use narrative recording. Notes were compared and a clear formula was devised for the observation schedule (Mertens 2005). Five young people not directly involved in the study, piloted the focus group, and provided feedback directly after the pilot which clarified questions. Piloting proved invaluable in the design as it made for robust data collection methods and less ambiguity for participants.

#### 4.3.10 Sample.

Transformation, the type of which this study aimed to achieve, requires active engagement from key actors to go beyond the ‘first flush of enthusiasm’ (Fielding 2004, p.306). In this study the key actors were a convenient sample of learners, teachers, senior leaders, parents and member of the Board of Management (Cohen and Mannion 1994; Flick 2011; Henry 1990; Mertens 2005; Patton 2002). From this convenient sample, all school stakeholders were invited to volunteer, and the sample is detailed in Tables 4.5-4.9.

From the volunteers, purposive sampling took place in the initial stages to ensure there was representation from a variety of subject teachers along with learners from every year group in the school. Purposive sampling also took place in the focus groups when more learners volunteered than were needed resulting in a purposive selection of learners who experienced different methods of eliciting voices (Patton 2002; Seidman 1998). As the study progressed, a snowball sample occurred when participants volunteered on the strength of the participation of others (Kamal 2017). In short, 77 learners, 16 teachers, 3 parents, 2 senior leaders and 1 member from the Board of Management volunteered to contribute to the study. The breakdown of these groups and the total numbers that could be recruited are included in the following sections.

### 4.3.11 Identifying the sample.

Tables 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9 detail how participants were identified and recruited. In August 2021, the teaching staff was 27, senior school leaders (Principal and Deputy Principal), the student body was 384, the parent/ guardians totalled c.700, and the BOM had 9 members, three of whom were staff members. From each of these groups, participants were invited to gain different perspectives on learners' voices in our school.

**Table 4.5 Recruitment of teachers.**

<b>Name of Group</b>	<b>Total number that could be recruited</b>	<b>How participants were recruited</b>	<b>Actual number recruited</b>
Teachers (General Participants)	27	Time given at staff meeting to briefly describe the project.  An expression of interest form (Appendix IX) was emailed to all staff followed by a consent form (Appendix XXII and XXIII).  Separate emails were sent to recruit individuals.	16
Teachers (Pilot Questionnaire)	1	One teacher purposively selected to pilot and reflect on the questionnaire for all adult stakeholders.	1
Teachers (Questionnaire)	16	Participant teachers emailed a questionnaire.  Questionnaire available on MS Teams page (Appendix XIV).	7
Teacher (Pilot Interview)	1	One teacher purposively selected to be interviewed and reflected afterwards on the experience.	1
Teachers (Interview)	15	Invitation to interview was emailed to teacher participants and placed on the MS Teams page. A separate information sheet and consent form was distributed to teachers (Appendix XXIV and XXV).	11
Teachers (Member Checking Interviews)	11	A draft analysis of the main themes encountered in the semi-structured interviews was emailed to teachers who took part in the interview to add, remove or comment on within 14 days of receipt of the email (Appendix XXVI). Two teachers engaged with the member checking stage (Appendix XXXV)	2
Teachers (Pilot Observation)	2	One participant teacher was purposively selected to	2

		<p>have a pilot observation take place in their class.</p> <p>A purposively selected teacher, not part of the research, observed the class to test time sequenced intervals and written narrative. Written narrative was chosen along with tick boxes for speed of recording (Appendix XXVII).</p>	
Teachers (Observations)	16	Participant teachers were invited to participate in an observation cycle via the online teachers' Microsoft Teams page and the box ticked on their consent form (Appendix XXIII)	5
Teachers (Member Check of Observations)	5	A copy of observation notes was sent to each participating teacher and they were invited to remove, add, or comment on any part within 14 days of receipt of the email (Appendix XXVIII).	0
Teachers (Teacher Only Round Table Discussion)	16	Teachers implied interest in participation in the round table discussion on their consent form. All teacher participants were invited via email and MS Teams page and were given a new consent form (Appendix XXIX).	9
Teachers (Second Interview)	7	Teachers who did not take part in the round table discussion were invited via email and MS Teams to an interview (Appendix XXXI and XXXII).	3
Teachers (All stakeholders Round Table Discussion)	16	All teachers were invited to take part in an all stakeholders round table discussion. One teacher expressed an interest but had many time constraints. It did not happen due to a lack of numbers (Appendix XXXIII and XXXIV).	0
Teachers (Member Checking of Round Table Discussion and Second Semi-structured Interviews)	11	A draft analysis of the main themes encountered in the round table discussion and second semi-structured interviews together <sup>7</sup> was emailed to participant teachers. They were given 14 days to read and had the opportunity to add, remove or comment on the findings.	0
Teachers (Reflective Journal)	16	All participant teachers were provided with a physical journal and a pen and invited to journal and share what they felt comfortable with sharing. Two teachers engaged with this process in an online journal	2

<sup>7</sup> Analysis of the round table discussion and the second interview was completed together as the interviews were only offered to those who were not present at the round table discussion to include their voices.

		(Appendix XXXVI).	
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**Table 4.6 Recruitment of Learners.**

<b>Name of Group</b>	<b>Total number that could be recruited</b>	<b>How participants were recruited</b>	<b>Actual number recruited</b>
Learners (General Participants)	352	Teachers spoke to their classes about the study and distributed consent/ assent forms (Appendix XXXVI and XXXVIII).	<b>77</b>
Learners (Pilot Questionnaire)	3	Three purposively selected learners completed the questionnaire (Appendix XVI) and provided feedback.	<b>3</b>
Learner (Questionnaire 1)	77	All participant learners were invited to participate in a questionnaire.	<b>60</b>
Learners (Member Checking of Questionnaire)	60	A draft analysis (Appendix XXXIX) of the main themes encountered in the questionnaires was made available on the students MS Teams page. All learners <sup>8</sup> were invited to add or comment on any part of the questionnaire analysis but were not allowed to remove what any other participant had said. They were given 14 days to do so.	<b>1</b>
Learner (Focus Group)	19	Learners ticked a box on their consent form (Appendix XXXVIII) and were invited on the MS Teams page (Appendix XL) to attend a focus group. In a separate consent form (Appendix XLI, XLII and XLIII) they were asked to state their preference to be in a focus group with juniors only, seniors only, or a mix of juniors and seniors.  19 learners expressed an interest in taking part. 16 of these were purposefully chosen to have a focus group with juniors only <sup>9</sup> , one with seniors only and one with a mix of learners from junior and senior school. On the day of the focus group, two learners were absent and two did not return consent forms.	<b>12</b>
Learner (Member Checking of Focus Group)	14 <sup>10</sup>	A draft analysis of the main themes encountered in the learner focus group was made available to all who took part. Each participant was made aware of their	<b>0</b>

<sup>8</sup> The questionnaire was shared with all 77 learners as it was anonymous so those who did not take part could not be identified.

<sup>9</sup> Six learners requested to be in a Focus group with Juniors (First to Third Year)

<sup>10</sup> The member check analysis was made available to the 12 learners and to the two learners who had given consent forms but were ill on the day it took place. The member check analysis was not made available to the two learners who expressed an interest in taking part but did not return the consent form.

		pseudonym and were given 14 days to read and had the opportunity to add, remove or comment on any of the findings.	
Learner (All Stakeholders Round Table Discussion)	3	19 learners expressed an interest in taking part in the learner focus group and 16 were purposely chosen. The remaining three learners were invited to the 'all stakeholders round table discussion'. All 3 agreed to participate but the 'all stakeholders round table discussion' did not go ahead due to lack of numbers interested.	<b>0</b>
Learner (Final Questionnaire)	77	Learners were invited to take part (Appendix XLIII) in an anonymous online MS Form questionnaire (Appendix XVI) was posted on the Teams page.	<b>41</b>
Learner (Member Check of Final Questionnaire)	77	A draft analysis of the main themes uncovered in the final questionnaire was made available to all learner participants on the MS Teams page. Learners were given 14 days to read and comment on any of the findings.	<b>0</b>

**Table 4.7 Recruitment of Senior Leaders.**

<b>Name of Group</b>	<b>Total number that could be recruited</b>	<b>How participants were recruited</b>	<b>Actual number recruited</b>
Senior Leaders (General Participants)	2	Time was given at the first staff meeting to speak about the study. A MS form was emailed for senior leaders to express interest (Appendix XI).	2
Senior leaders (Initial Questionnaire)	2	Senior leaders were invited by email to take part in an anonymous online MS Forms Questionnaire (Appendix XIV)	0
Senior leaders (Semi-Structured Interviews)	2	Senior leaders were invited to a semi-structured interview by email (Appendix XLIV and XLV).	1
Senior leaders (Member Check of Interview)	1	A draft analysis of the main themes encountered in the semi-structured interviews was made available to the senior leader. They were given 14 days to add, remove or comment on any of the findings.	1
Senior leaders (All Stakeholders Round Table Discussion)	2	Senior leaders were invited to the 'all stakeholders round table discussion'. One senior leader agreed to participate but could not attend on the dates specified. It did not go ahead due to lack of numbers.	0
Senior leader (Interview 2)	2	As the 'all stakeholders round table discussion' did not go ahead, the school senior leader participants were invited to interview.	1
Senior leaders (Member Check of Interview 2)	1	A draft analysis of the main themes uncovered in the teacher round table discussion and second semi-structured interviews was made available to all participants. Each participant was separately emailed and given their pseudonym <sup>11</sup> . They were given 14 days to read and had the opportunity to add, remove or comment on any of the findings.	0

<sup>11</sup> As there was one senior leader and one parent in this member checking stage participants were given the participant pseudonyms 'Participant 1, 2' etc. to not be identified in the member checking stage.

**Table 4.8 Recruitment of Board of Management Members.**

<b>Name of Group</b>	<b>Total number that could be recruited</b>	<b>How participants were recruited</b>	<b>Actual number recruited</b>
Board of Management (General Participants)	9	Time was given at the September 2021 Board of Management meeting to invite members to volunteer to participate in the study (Appendix XLIV and XLV). When there were no respondents, a reminder email was sent from the principal.	1
Board of Management (Initial Questionnaire)	1	An online MS Forms questionnaire was emailed to the participant (Appendix XXII)	1
Board of Management (All Stakeholders Round Table Discussion)	1	The participant was emailed and invited to take part in the 'all stakeholders round table discussion'. A reminder email was sent. There was no response. The 'all stakeholders round table discussion' was cancelled.	0
Board of Management (Final Questionnaire)	1	A MS questionnaire was emailed to the participant (Appendix XVIII). They did not respond.	0

**Table 4.9 Recruitment of Parents.**

<b>Name of Group</b>	<b>Total number that could be recruited</b>	<b>How participants were recruited</b>	<b>Actual number recruited</b>
Parents (General Participants)	c.340 <sup>12</sup>	Students were given information and consent forms to bring home and discuss with their parents (Appendix XXXVII and XXXVIII). On this form there was a box to tick for parents to become involved. Four parents ticked this box. All four were contacted with a separate consent form (Appendix XLVI and XLVII) and three responded.	3
Parents (Initial Questionnaire)	3	Parent participants were emailed an online anonymous MS Form questionnaire (Appendix XII).	2
Parents (All Stakeholders Round Table Discussion)	3	Parent participants were invited to take part in an ‘all stakeholders round table discussion’. One parent responded but could not attend. As there were too few participants for the ‘all stakeholders round table discussion’ it was cancelled <sup>13</sup> . The parent participant agreed to be interviewed instead.	0
Parents (Interview)	1	As the ‘all stakeholder round table discussion’ did not go ahead, one parent was invited to be interviewed (Appendix XXXI).	1
Parents (Member Checking Interview)	1	A draft analysis of the main themes encountered in the teachers’ round table discussion and the second semi-structured interviews was emailed to the parent participant with their pseudonym. They were given 14 days to read, add, remove or comment on any of the findings.	0

#### **4.3.11.1 Recruiting teachers.**

Teachers and senior school leaders were informed about the study in the August 2021 staff meeting. All staff were sent a MS Expression of interest form (Appendix XI) which generated eleven teacher participants and two senior leader participants. The expression of

<sup>12</sup> c.340 parents as (i) there was only room for one parent to sign the form and sign up to be part and (ii) there are over 40 students who have at least one sibling in the school.

<sup>13</sup> The ‘all stakeholders round table discussion’ was cancelled as no parents or Board of Management member could attend. The perspectives of teachers and learners had been recorded in the discussions. There were no ‘new’ voices to add to the discussion, so a decision was made to cancel it. One senior leader and one parent participant agreed to be interviewed.

interest form invited participant teachers to give information regarding what method they were interested in using, what year group they were interested in working with and what subject area they wished to use the method in as shown in Table 4.10. The teacher participants are labelled a-k below to remove any connection with the pseudonyms used later in the thesis.

**Table 4.10 First teacher responses.**

Teacher	Method(s) of Interest	Year group	Subject
A	Learner Led Learning Learner Contract Learner Reflection	1, 3, 4, 5, 6.	Language
B	Negotiated Curriculum Learner Contract Learner Reflection	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.	Arts
C	Learner Led Learning Learner Generated Questions	1, 5.	Science
D	Negotiated Curriculum Learner Reflection	2, 5, 6.	Language
E	Learner Led Learning	1	Science and Maths
F	Learner Generated Questions	2	Humanities
G	Learning Led Learning Learner Reflective Practice	3	Humanities
H	Learner Reflective Practice	4	Languages
I	Learner Contract	2	Science and Maths
J	Learner Generated Questions	4	Science and Maths
K	Negotiated Curriculum Learner Led Learning	3	Humanities

All five methods of eliciting voice were present in this initial data received through the expression of interest (Appendix XI) form, as were all year groups and a range of subjects. A problem arose in senior cycle where learners were grouped into subjects which meant that if teachers were using these methods in art or biology, the participant learners may encounter these methods more than once, and some learners may not have the experience of using them at all. Some teachers (a, b, and d) expressed interest in using more than one method with more than one class group- this was granted in cases where the same learners were not

encountering the same method. Table 4.11 highlights the methods and year groups used. The highlighting shows the method that was chosen for the teacher and the year group selected.

**Table 4.11 Selection and deletion of methods and year groups.**

Teacher	Method(s) of Interest	Year group	Subject
A	Learner Led Learning Learner Contract Learner Reflective Practiee	1, 3, 4, 5, 6.	Language
B	Negotiated Curriculum Learner Contract Learner Reflective Practice	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.	Arts
C	Learner Led Learning Learner Generated Questions	1, 5.	Science and Maths
D	Negotiated Curriculum Learner Reflective Practice	2, 5, 6.	Language
E	Learner Led Learning	1	Science and Maths
F	Learner Generated Questions	2	Humanities
G	Learning Led Learning Learner Reflective Practice	3	Humanities
H	Learner Reflective Practice	4	Languages
I	Learner Contract	2	Science and Maths
J	Learner Generated Questions	4	Science and Maths
K	Negotiated Curriculum Learner Led Learning	3	Humanities

Data from the expression of interest form were used to build tables as it was important that different methods were being used in different class groups. Table 4.12 shows a simplified version of the methods of voice elicitation nominated by teachers in the expression of interest form and the class groups they wished to use the methods with.

**Table 4.12 Frequency of methods used.**

Name of Method	Number of class groups using the methods
Learner Generated Questions	2
Learner Reflective Practice	3
Learner Contract	3
Negotiated Curriculum	3
Learner Led Learning	3

In addition to the methods of eliciting voices being used, the aim was to reach every learner in the school. Once Table 4.12 was constructed, a corresponding Table, 4.13, was made to document which year groups were included and where gaps were using data gathered from the expression of interest form. Table 4.13 shows that there were two groups omitted in first year, one in second year and in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year, as learners are grouped not by class but by subject, there were learners who would not have the opportunity to participate.

**Table 4.13 Year groups represented in the study after first 11 teacher responses.**

Year Group	Class groups included and omitted.
1	One group included ( <b>two groups omitted</b> )
2	Two groups included ( <b>one group omitted</b> ) <sup>14</sup>
3	Three groups included (None omitted)
4	Two groups included (None Omitted)
5	Two groups included ( <b>Learners omitted</b> )
6	Three groups included ( <b>Learners omitted</b> )

These two tables (Table 4.12 and 4.13) highlighted two main challenges in the study: first the method of Learner Generated Questions was under-represented and second, there were learners in years 1, 2, 5 and 6 that were omitted from the study. A decision was made to purposively select teachers and ask if they were willing to participate, as the rationale behind this decision was to include all learners in the school. This resulted in a further five teachers joining the study and it changed the demographic of the sample as shown in tables 4.14 and 4.15.

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<sup>14</sup> Three teachers had opted to conduct methods of eliciting learners' voices with second years. One group engaged twice but with two different methods and was counted as one group.

**Table 4.14 Increase in teacher participants and methods.**

<b>Name of Method</b>	<b>Number of classes using the method</b>
Learner Generated Questions	4 (Increased by 2)
Learner Reflective Practice	4 (Increased by 1)
Learner Contract	3
Negotiated Curriculum	4 (Increased by 1)
Learner Led Learning	4 (Increased by 1)

**Table 4.15 Revised year group table.**

<b>Year Group</b>	<b>Class groups included and omitted.</b>
1	Three groups included (None omitted)
2	Three groups included (None omitted)
3	Three Groups included (None omitted)
4	Two groups included (None Omitted)
5	Three Groups included (Students omitted) <sup>15</sup>
6	Four Groups included (Students omitted)

The extra teacher participants strengthened the project as most learners in the school were included in utilising methods of eliciting voices. However, due to the division of classes in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year, 32 learners did not have any contact with the project. This left a total of 352 learners who had direct contact with using methods of eliciting learner voices in their classrooms.

#### 4.3.11.1.1 Support to teacher participants.

Once recruited, teachers received a welcome pack containing:

1. A participant information sheet (Appendix XXII) detailing what was expected of them,
2. A brief description of the different methods (Appendix III) with ideas on how they could be used,
3. A consent form (Appendix XXIII) where they could tick different activities they consented to be involved in,

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<sup>15</sup> Some learners were still omitted in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year as they are separated by subject rather than class group for many subjects.

4. A journal and pen (Appendix XLVIII) to use as a reflective journal,
5. A chocolate bar/ treat /soap as a thank you gift (Appendix XLVIII).
6. A personalised 'thank you' card (Appendix XLVIII).

A MS Teams was set up to store digital copies of information sheets, links to techniques, along with articles and videos to support teachers in eliciting learners' voices (Bergmark and Westman 2016; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Information was posted on the MS Teams page about how to use consultations and dialogue, the importance of reflection, feedback and how to avoid bias and tokenism (Appendix L). In the first semi-structured interviews and in the anonymous questionnaires, teachers voiced that they needed more support so informal learning conversations were established. They offered an opportunity for participant teachers to speak about the challenges they encountered. As they were not part of the original research design, data could not be collected. However, some topics that were discussed were later raised in the semi-structured interviews and in the round table discussion. The learning conversations took place fortnightly in the staff room over lunch and were a space where insights were shared. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires also proved to be mechanisms of support where teachers could contribute and have their voices heard.

#### **4.3.11.2 Recruiting senior leaders.**

Senior leaders were recruited at the same time as teacher participants. There were two school senior leaders who were eligible to take part and both agreed to participate. Neither responded to the initial online questionnaire response. One senior leader agreed to be interviewed and their data was added to the teachers' data gathered for interview 1 for the member checking stage. This senior leader engaged with the member checking stage, clarifying what they had said. One senior leader was interested in taking part in the all-stakeholder round table discussion but was not available on the dates provided. One senior leader took part in interview 2 but did not contribute to the member checking stage.

#### **4.3.11.3 Recruiting learner participants.**

Information sheets with detachable consent/assent forms (Appendix XLI, XLII) were given to participant teachers to distribute to students. By removing myself from this interaction, I aimed to lessen any pressure a student may feel to participate. Teachers used their own discretion in distributing consent/assent forms; some teachers handed each learner the form, some teachers gave it to learners who asked for it directly and some teachers left them on the

desk in the classroom so that learners could take the form if they wished to. Two locked boxes were available for learners to return their forms; one was placed in the reception area and one in a communal lunch area. However, most learners returned their forms directly to their teachers. Some teachers reminded learners to return the forms and some did not. In total, 77 forms were returned and a MS Teams group for participating learners was set up (Appendix LII). A total of 60 learners completed the first questionnaire and 41 learners completed questionnaire two. One learner contributed to the member checking of the questionnaires. A total of 19 learners expressed an interest in participating in the learner focus groups and 12 were purposively selected to have representation of different year groups, methods used and subjects voicework took place in. Of the learners who were not selected to participate in the focus group, three volunteered to participate in the all-stakeholder round table discussion, which did not go ahead due to lack of numbers.

#### **4.3.11.4 Recruiting parent participants.**

For parents who wished to participate, a box was placed on the learner information sheet (Appendix XLI, XLII). Four parents indicated their interest in being involved and they were contacted via the email provided and separate information/ consent forms (Appendix XLVI, XLVII) were sent to them detailing what was required for participating in the project. Three parents returned the form and each was sent an online Microsoft Form anonymous questionnaire to which two parents responded. The three parents were contacted later in the year and were invited to be part of a round table discussion. One parent replied to the email, but due to lack of numbers the round table discussion did not go ahead and that parent consented to an interview.

#### **4.3.11.5 Recruiting Board of Management participants.**

Following a presentation about the research in the September BOM meeting, members from the BOM were invited to participate in the study. No BOM member responded to this initial call. A reminder email was sent by the principal which resulted in one member volunteering to participate. This one member completed questionnaire 1 but did not respond to invitations to interview, the all-stakeholder round table discussion or to questionnaire 2.

## **4.4 Methods of Data Collection.**

This section discusses the varied data collection methods that were used: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, focus groups, round table discussion and reflective

journals. The methods of data collection were varied to triangulate and compare data for a credible and trustworthy study (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Flick 2002). They were also methods that aligned with the constructivist paradigm – interactive, iterative, hermeneutical, and dialectical to obtain multiple perspectives and comparatively analyse these to arrive at a shared understanding (Mertens 2005). Data collection procedures were sequential, with data informing further stages of data collection. The methods of analysis, the rationale for using the instrument, and for each stage of the research differed as Table 4.16 explains. A discussion of each data collection methods follows Table 4.16.

**Table 4.16 Methods of Data Collection synopsis.**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Method of Data Collection</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Rationale for using this method.</b>	<b>Which research question is this answering?</b>
<b>August – September 2021</b>	Teachers ‘Expression of Interest’ MS questionnaire.  (Appendix XI)	All teaching staff ( $n=27$ ) emailed an ‘Expression of Interest’ Microsoft Form.	Teachers were asked what method(s) of elicitation they wished to use, which year groups they wished to work with and what subjects they taught.	This questionnaire was used to ensure a variety of methods, year groups and subjects.
<b>August 2021</b>	Pilot: teacher questionnaire (Appendix XIV)	One teacher completed questionnaire and provided feedback.	To provide rigor, to ensure that misunderstandings were uncovered.	No data collected.
<b>September 2021</b>	Questionnaire 1: Teachers (Appendix XIV)	Sixteen participant teachers were emailed a questionnaire. Seven participants teachers responded to it.  77 participant Learners	To discover: (i) what is the culture regarding the voices of learners in the school, (ii) what challenges may be faced in the study, (iii) what is working well in the school, (iv) what are the areas that need	Q1: How can a culture of eliciting the voices of learners be enhanced in our school from the perspectives of stakeholders? Q2: What is our school doing to capture learners’ voices from the perspectives of teachers and learners? Q3: How effective are different teaching methods in eliciting the voices of learners in our school from the perspectives of stakeholders?

	<p>Learners. (Appendix XIII)</p> <p>Senior leaders. (Appendix XII)</p> <p>BOM (Appendix XII)</p> <p>Parents (Appendix XII)</p>	<p>were invited to complete a MS Questionnaire. 60 Learners responded to it.</p> <p>Two senior leaders were invited to complete a MS questionnaire. Neither senior leader responded.</p> <p>The BOM member was invited and responded to complete a MS questionnaire.</p> <p>Four parents invited to take part in a MS Questionnaire. Two parents responded.</p>	<p>changing/adjusting/enhancing.</p>	
<b>September 2021</b>	Pilot Interview	One teacher took part in a pilot interview and provided feedback.	The pilot interview was audio recorded and listened back to with the participant.	No data collected.
<b>September</b>	Semi-structured	Sixteen participant	To investigate:	Questions 1, 2 and 3

<p><b>2021-October 2021</b></p>	<p>Interview: Teachers and senior leaders.</p> <p>Separate participant consent forms, which contained the interview questions, were given to the teacher participants at least 4 days before the interview (Appendix XXIV, XXV).</p>	<p>teachers were invited to a semi-structured interview. Eleven teachers' semi-structured interviews were audio recorded.</p> <p>One senior leader agreed to be interviewed.</p>	<p>(i) individual perspectives on the culture of eliciting learners' voices in the school,</p> <p>(ii) to allay fears,</p> <p>(iii) to work on strengths,</p> <p>(iv) to triangulate data from the questionnaire.</p>	<p>Question 4: Does eliciting the voices of learners have a positive impact on teaching, learning, assessment and engagement from the perspectives of stakeholders?</p>
<p><b>October-November 2021</b></p>	<p>Member Checking teacher and senior leader,</p>	<p>Eleven teachers who took part in the semi-structured interviews were emailed the draft analysis of the</p>	<p>This process allowed participants to have control of their data. The process showed accountability and offered opportunities to listen and</p>	<p>Questions 1, 2 and 3.</p>

	semi-structured interviews. (Appendix XXXV).	most popular themes derived from the semi-structured interviews and given ten days to amend, change or remove any of their own data.	respond to participants.	
<b>November 2021</b>	Observation (Pilot) (Appendix XXVII)	One class observed with two methods of analysis used: (i) timed sequences and (ii) narrative recording.	The purpose of the pilot was to rehearse the observation data collection method with a critical friend. The first 20 minutes was recorded using a timed sequencing method and the final 20 minutes was recorded using a narrative written recording.	No data collected.
<b>November - December 2021</b>	Five Observations (Appendix XXVIII)	Classes observed and recorded with a narrative and tick box approach.	To provide numerical and narrative data and to observe methods of eliciting voices in action.	Questions 2 and 3.
<b>December 2021</b>	Member Checking Observations. (Appendix XXVIII)	Each participating teacher was sent a scanned copy of the observation sheet.	This allowed teachers to have control of the data being added to the study. It provided rigor and accountability.	No new data generated.

<p><b>January 2022</b></p>	<p>Focus Group Pilot.</p>	<p>Learners were purposefully selected to participate in a pilot focus group and provide feedback.</p>	<p>This pilot was used to clarify the instructions and questions. The pilot was not audio recorded.</p>	<p>No data collected.</p>
<p><b>February 2022</b></p>	<p>Three Learner Focus groups.  Separate consent/assent forms distributed to the 16 participants. This contained the structure of the focus group and the questions that would be asked.  (Appendix XLI, XLII)</p>	<p>19 learners volunteered to participate in focus groups.  16 learners purposefully chosen to represent a variety of age and experiences.  One focus group was Juniors only (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year) one was seniors only (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> year) and one was a mix of learners from all years. The focus groups were held during school time in one 40-minute class period.</p>	<p>The focus groups offered an opportunity to speak with learners and listen to their perspectives.</p>	<p>Questions 1, 2 3 and 4.  Q5: What impact does amplifying voices have on teacher and learner interactions?  Q6: What are our stakeholders' perspectives on the value of the voices of learners?</p>

<b>March 2022</b>	Learner Focus Group Member checking stage.	A draft first analysis of the main themes was emailed to focus group participants.	This allowed participants to have control of their data. It provided rigor and accountability.	No new data generated.
<b>May 2022</b>	Teacher Round Table Discussion (RTD).  A separate consent form was sent to participants (Appendix XXXIII, XXXIV)	Nine teachers volunteered to take part in the round table discussion.	The RTD offered participant teachers the opportunity to speak about their experiences. Aspects from the learner focus group and the semi-structured interviews informed some of the talking points. The RTD also was an opportunity to speak with the participants and discover what worked well and what was a challenge. It was a space for the transfer of knowledge and for perspectives to be shared.	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.
<b>May 2022</b>	RTD/Interview 2 Member checking stage.	Participants from the RTD/ Interview 2 were invited to engage with a member checking stage.  No participant responded.	This allowed participants to have control of their data. It provided rigor and accountability.	No new data generated.
<b>May 2022</b>	Interview 2:	Five teacher participants	This offered any adult participant	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

	<p>Five teachers, one senior leader and one parent.</p> <p>A separate consent form was given to participants.</p> <p>(Appendix XXXI, XXXII)</p>	<p>who could not attend the round table discussion agreed to be interviewed.</p> <p>One senior leader who could not attend the all-stakeholder RTD was interviewed.</p> <p>One parent agreed to be interviewed online (audio recorded).</p>	<p>the chance to have their perspectives recorded.</p> <p>Questions used in the semi-structured interview were given beforehand so that participants had the chance to review and consider their responses.</p>	
<b>May 2022</b>	<p>Questionnaire 2: (Learners, Board of Management, and parents)</p> <p>(Appendix XLIII)</p>	<p>Questionnaires were distributed to all learners, senior leaders, and parents who were participating in the study by email and on MS Teams.</p>	<p>As all participants could not be individually interviewed or participate in discussions, a MS questionnaire was distributed.</p> <p>The same questions that were posed in the RTD and Interview 2, were asked in Questionnaire 2 to compare responses.</p>	<p>Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.</p>
<b>September 2021- June</b>	<p>Reflective Journals</p>	<p>Sixteen teacher participants were given a</p>	<p>The aim of journaling was to collect responses from participant teachers</p>	<p>Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.</p>

<b>2022</b>	(Appendix XXXVI)	physical notebook and pen to use as a reflective journal. Two teachers kept a reflective journal using an online format.	in real time as the study progressed. Stimulus were provided on the MS Teams site (Appendix LII).	
<b>October 2021- June 2022</b>	Contact Sheets (Appendix XIX)	Contact sheets were used to track my initial responses and reflections to data collection.	These were useful to capture my own reflections and to provide summaries about interactions.	Personal Reflection

#### 4.4.1 Questionnaires.

Questionnaires elicited many voices in a time efficient and anonymous way (Cohen and Mannion 1994; Davey et al. 2010; Rowley 2014). Confidentiality was very important as learners, colleagues, and parents were known personally. Participants were invited to complete the questionnaire during a three-week period (Bryman 2016; Creswell 2009; Roberts and Allen 2015). The questionnaires took less than ten minutes to complete and were user friendly with rating scales, tick boxes and spaces for oral or typed contributions (Cohen et al. 2018; Flick 2011). There was space to answer open ended questions so those that wished to expand on their answers had a chance to do so (Cohen and Mannion 1994; DCEDIY 2021; Moser and Kalton 1971). The questionnaires established a baseline that informed the next cycle of data collection (Newell 1993).

#### 4.4.2 Observations.

Observations provided formative feedback in a natural setting (Adler and Adler 1994; Cohen and Goldhaber 2016; Hill *et al.* 2012; Nava *et al.* 2018; Werner and Schopfle 1987). A list of possible expressions of voice where the learner answered a question or asked a question (Appendix XV) were on one side of the page with space for a tick box (Clark-Carter 1997; Flanders 1970). Non-verbal cues, quotation and observations were recorded in a narrative report (Angrosino 2005; Spradley 1980; Wragg 1999). The piloting stage refined the process and a hybrid tick box and narrative report was used (Denscombe 2003)<sup>16</sup>. A single observation was unlikely to reflect a true snapshot of data so one pilot observation and five observations across two weeks in December 2020 were undertaken to observe voices in the classroom (Cohen and Goldhaber 2016). Observations were completed by hand and typed up later (Lofland 1971) along with a contact sheet completed after the observation to immediately reflect and to try to paint a vivid picture of the event so it would make it easier to recall after it occurred (Bodgan and Biklen 1992; Rossman and Rallis 1998). After the observation, the observation sheet was photocopied and shared with the participating teacher to show what was recorded; participating teachers were given one week to comment or amend any piece of information on the observation sheet. Figure 4.5 shows one of the completed observation sheets (observation 3) with identifiers removed.

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<sup>16</sup> In the pilot phase two methods were trialled: structured timed observations and free narrative commentary (Bell 2005; Flick 2011; Wragg 1999). Free narrative commentary worked well as the class time was short (40 minutes) and recording took place simultaneously as the class progressed.



interviewee and with many conducted during free periods or directly after school. Recordings were listened back to, to ensure a neutral tone was used which allowed participants to express their views (Babbie 1990; Fowler 2002). Each interview was transcribed (Appendix LIII) which allowed time to intimately understand the data (Gray 1998).

#### 4.4.4 Learner Focus Groups.

Key empirical studies informing this research used focus groups as a data collection method (Howard 2004; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Vaughn *et al.* 1996; Wilson 2008). Focus groups are an efficient way of gleaning rich qualitative data from a small number of people, ideally between four and eight people, simultaneously (Kitzinger 1995). Prior to conducting the focus group, an information sheet (Appendix XLI, XLII) was given to the participants which detailed the schedule and the questions to be asked (Davey *et al.* 2010). Group sizes were capped at six participants to encourage discussion; too many participants can limit contributions and too few can compel participants to speak for longer periods (Kamal 2017). To try and make learners feel comfortable, they were given the choice to be in a focus group with peers of a similar age (Flick 2002). Three focus groups were conducted, one with juniors (first to third year), one with seniors (fourth to sixth year) and one with a mix of age groups. Focus groups took place in a 40-minute class period in the board room of the school which gave the work a formality and an importance (Watchel 2016). The learner focus groups began by reminding participants that their contribution was voluntary and, in their responses, to focus on their own experiences and not what they thought other people had experienced. In the first part of the focus group, each learner was invited to speak about the method(s)<sup>18</sup> they engaged with. Time was given for them to express what they believed were the positives and negatives in using this method. The second half was a general discussion, where learners were encouraged to debate, consider, and question their experiences and views on voicework (Anderson 1999; Fielding 2004; Forde *et al.* 2018; Kruegar and Casey 2000).

#### 4.4.5 Round table discussions.

A round table discussion (RTD) is a form of academic discussion where participants are given an equal opportunity to contribute (Bridgeman 2010; Cocoate 2011). Before the RTD, participants were given an information sheet (Appendix XXXIII, XXXIV) which outlined the discussion topics (Felt and Fochler 2010; Renn 2105). The shared agenda aimed to create a climate of trust (Cook-Sather 2002; MacBeath 1999) and acted as a catalyst to keep the

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<sup>18</sup> In some cases, learners engaged with two different methods of eliciting voices.

discussion moving as time was limited (Kolar 2016). Teachers were invited to share their experiences in using the method(s)<sup>19</sup> of voice elicitation. The second half of the RTD was focused on discussion on the merits and drawbacks of using the methods of voice elicitation. In the original research design, two RTDs were planned: one with teachers only and a second one with members from each stakeholder group. For the second RTD, learner and teacher participants were recruited, but it did not suit the BOM member, the parent, or the senior leader so it did not go ahead. These adult participants were offered an interview to capture their experiences; two teachers, one parent and one senior leader agreed to this.

#### 4.4.6 Reflective Journaling.

Participating teachers in this study were invited to keep a reflective journal to document their experiences of eliciting learner voices in their classrooms. A physical journal was given to each teaching participant in their 'welcome pack' but teachers were given the freedom to write an online Microsoft Word document if they preferred. Reflective journals were used to triangulate data received from other sources in this study. They were intended to capture the data to day reactions from the participating teachers and to provide teachers with a space to teachers with time to reflect on their own practice as an educative experience for purposeful learning (Applebaum 2014; Dewey 1933, 1938; Dreyer 2015; Khosa and Volet 2014; Raterink 2016; Valli 1992; Zeichner and Liston 1987). This data collection method was intended to assist teachers in gaining insight and self-awareness to improve teaching and learning (Boyd and Fales 1983; Bulman and Schutz 2004; Desautel 2009; Gadsby and Cronin 2012; Glaze 2001; Moon 2006; Scanlon *et al.* 2002; Thorpe 2004). Participating teachers were given suggestions to support the writing of reflection as it is a skill than needs to be honed over time (Epp 2008; Raterink 2016). Prompts were posted at intervals on the MS Teams page and suggestions of what to write were included in their welcome pack (Appendix LII). Teachers were free to choose if they reflected by describing a situation that happened or writing a reflection on what happened or thoughts about what they were going to do in the future or as a device to gain meaning from their experiences (Boud 1991; Brookfield 1998; Hubbs and Brand 2005; Kolb 1984; Moon 2003).

Taken on its own, reflective journals are not without criticisms as there are issues to consider like bias, hindsight, and inaccurate recall (Rolfe *et al.* 2001; Hannigan 2001). They can also be viewed as a technique that facilitates creativity, critical thinking, analysis, and innovative

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<sup>19</sup> Some teachers decided to use more than one method of eliciting voices.

discovery (Jasper 2005; Rogers and Freiberg 1969). It is a process that can act as a mirror which represents an inner voice that is not captured in an interview. In this study, two teachers engaged with this method of data collection; both used online dairies and both recorded two entries.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis.

As a mixed methods participatory action research study, quantitative data were analysed using inferential and descriptive statistics (Clark-Carter 1997) and qualitative data using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021). As there were many stages of data collection with different methods of data collection, Table 4.17 highlights the methods and processes of analysis along with the connection the data had to the research questions. The different aspects of the action research cycles are highlighted by different colours (Plan = Green, Act = Blue, Observe = Yellow, Reflect= Red).

**Table 4.17: Data collection methods.**

<b>Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Brief explanation of the process of analysis</b>	<b>What Research question did this address?</b>
<b>PLAN</b>		
<b>‘Expression of interest’ MS questionnaire. (Appendix XI)</b>	This questionnaire asked teachers which methods of eliciting voices they were most interested in using, what subject(s) they wished to use the method in, and what year group they were willing to use it with.	None-administration only.
<b>Piloting questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, and focus groups.</b>	Pilot stages were used to provide rigor and to ensure that misunderstandings were uncovered. Some changes were made to improve the data collection method before it was used in the study. In the interview, changes were made to the style of delivery and to the timing of questions to ensure every question was asked. Listening back after each interview highlighted how much I was speaking so I spoke less and listened more. In the pilot observation two methods were trialled and a tick box approach with room for narrative commentary was selected over a timed sequential recording.	None – Piloting stage.

	<b>ACT</b>	
<p><b>Teacher questionnaire (Appendix XIV)</b></p> <p><b>Senior leader questionnaire (Appendix XIV)</b></p> <p><b>BOM questionnaire (Appendix XII)</b></p> <p><b>Parent questionnaire (Appendix XII)</b></p>	<p>This MS questionnaire asked five questions about the participant’s understanding of ‘voice’, how they rated the level of ‘voice’ in the school, how learners could influence their own learning, what the school currently does to support learner voices and what challenges they say in facilitating the voices of learners in the school.</p> <p>Numerical answers were collected, analysed, and transformed into visual representations. The narrative answers were transferred to a MS Word document and uploaded to NVivo12 software to sort it into themes using Braun and Clarke’s (2021) reflexive thematic analysis.</p> <p>The responses from questionnaires were collated and a draft summary was provided to participants in a member checking stage.</p>	<p>Questions 1, 2, 3 and 5.</p>
<p><b>Questionnaire 1 (Learners) (Appendix XIII)</b></p>	<p>The questionnaire for learner participants asked questions to gauge the level of ‘voices’ in the school. Learners were asked to give examples of how elements of school life helped learning. Finally, learners were asked what could be enhanced or changed to aid improvement. The numerical data was used to create visual representations, while the narrative data were transferred to a MS Word file and uploaded to NVivo12 software. In NVivo12 they were sorted into draft themes using Braun and Clarke’s (2021) reflexive thematic analysis. The draft analysis was sent to participants in a member checking stage.</p>	<p>Questions 1, 2, 3 and 5.</p>
<p><b>Semi-Structured Interviews (Teachers and Senior leader) (Appendix XXXIV,</b></p>	<p>Teacher and senior leader participants were invited to a semi-structured, audio recorded interview. The questions asked in this data collection method built on those asked in the questionnaires about the level of perceived voice in the school, what the school does to enhance it and what challenges would be associated with eliciting voices in the school.</p> <p>The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, removing identifiers, and uploaded to NVivo12 software</p>	<p>Questions 1, 2, 3 and 5.</p>

<b>XXXV)</b>	where it was sorted into themes using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis. The main themes from the semi-structured interviews were collated, pseudonyms are added and a draft was circulated to interviewees in a member checking stage.	
<b>OBSERVE</b>		
<b>Methods of Eliciting voices</b>	Teachers focused on methods of eliciting the voices of learners in their classes and observed what the learners had to say, implemented changes based on what they had said, or enhanced practices based on feedback.	<b>No data collected.</b>
<b>Observations (Appendix XXVIII)</b>	Five classes were observed and written notes were taken in the form of tick boxes and narrative report. The tick boxes were used to create a tally chart presented in the findings. Handwritten notes were transcribed verbatim, eliminating any identifiers to a MS Word document, uploaded to NVivo12 and sorted into themes using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis. Participating teachers were given a photocopy of the handwritten notes in a member checking stage.	<b>Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5.</b>
<b>REFLECT</b>		
<b>Learner Focus Groups (Appendix XLII, XLIII)</b>	The focus groups were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim removing any identifiers. This transcription was sorted into themes with the aid of NVivo12. The most popular themes were arranged into a first draft and shared with the focus group participants in a member checking stage.	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.
<b>Teacher Round Table Discussions (Appendix XXXIII, XXXIV)</b>	The round table discussion was audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim removing any identifiers. This was added to the transcriptions from the four interview 2's and sorted into themes with the aid of NVivo12. The most popular themes were arranged into a first draft and shared with the participants of the RTD and interview 2 in a member checking stage.	Question 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.
<b>Semi-Structured Interview 2: 2 teachers, 1 senior leader, 1 parent.</b>	The two teacher semi-structured interviews were conducted during school hours and were audio recorded. The semi-structured interviews with the senior leader and the parent took place outside of school hours via zoom with the participant's camera turned off and was audio recorded. The interviews were transcribed verbatim removing any identifiers. This transcription was added to the round table discussion transcription and was sorted into themes with the aid of NVivo12. The most popular themes were arranged into a first draft and shared with the	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

<b>(Appendix XXXI, XXXII)</b>	participants in a member checking stage.	
<b>Member Checking (Appendix X)</b>	After the questionnaires, observations, interviews and round table discussions, first draft analysis was made available to participants. In the questionnaire member checking, the main themes were collated and posted on the MS Teams Page for all participants to comment whether they had responded to the questionnaire or not. For the interviews, focus groups and round table discussion, only those directly involved were invited to take part in the member checking stage. Each participant was emailed individually and their pseudonym was shared. Participants were given up to ten days to respond by amending, adding, or deleting any of their own data. Participants were made aware that they were not allowed to change another person's data and, once the member checking stage was complete, they were not permitted to withdraw their data.	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.
<b>Questionnaire 2 (Appendix XVI, XVII, XVIII)</b>	MS Questionnaires were distributed by email and on the MS Teams site to all participants.  The same questions that were used in the RTD, interviews and focus groups were given so that all participants could have a say on their experiences of the study. A summary of the findings was made available on the MS Teams sites for any participant to respond in a member checking stage. Adult questionnaire responses were grouped separately from learner responses. Data were transferred to a MS Word document and uploaded to NVivo12 software, removing any identifiers.	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.
<b>Reflective Journals (Appendix XXXVI)</b>	Two teachers engaged with the reflective journal and both kept an online copy with two entries. As the reflective journals were already in MS Word, transcription was not necessary, however, some identifiers had to be removed. The two teacher participants were told to only share with me what they were comfortable in sharing. The journals were uploaded and sorted into themes with the aid of NVivo12.	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.
<b>Contact Sheets (Appendix XIX)</b>	Contact sheets were handwritten. These notes were transcribed into a word document and sorted into themes with the aid of NVivo12.	Questions, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

### 4.5.1 Analysis of Qualitative Data.

Qualitative data analysis, emerging from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, round table discussion and reflective journaling, shown in Table 4.16, required different skills of analysis. It was important to follow a clear schedule and treat each piece of data in a similar way so the utilisation of a step-by-step guide made the process of dealing with each part of this multi-stage project easier. The process of data collection occurred at different intervals of the academic year 2021-2022, and each data set were analysed separately after they were collected. However, at several points, data were revisited as new themes were generated and new ideas were formed. Braun and Clarke's (2021) six step guide, shown in Table 4.18 was a reliable tool for reflexive thematic analysis of qualitative data.

**Table 4.18: Six Step Analysis guide from Braun and Clarke (2021, p.69) adapted.**

Steps	Description
1. Familiarise yourself with the data.	Transcribe, read, and re-read. Jot down notes.
2. Create initial codes.	Code interesting features of the data in a coherent and organised manner.
3. Search for themes.	Collate codes into potential themes.
4. Review themes.	Check if the themes relate to the coded extracts by creating a Code Map.
5. Define and name the themes.	Begin to reveal clear definitions of themes. Refine the specifics of each theme.
6. Produce a report.	Extracts selected for final analysis should relate back to the research question.

Reflexive thematic analysis allows the researcher to prioritise creative scholarship over theoretical engagement and use the six-steps as an approach while identifying patterns which are generated into themes (Braun *et al.* 2014). As a user of reflexive thematic analysis, I remained alert to my relationship with the analysis; the themes did not exist separately from me as a researcher, but were generated by my skill, experience, and training so I needed to be aware of my potential bias in the process (Braun and Clarke 2021). The process of data analysis provided a useful reflective tool and the member checking stages provided accountability (Mertens 2005). The following sections outline the six-step approach and its relationship to the research.

**4.5.1.1 Step 1: Familiarise yourself with the data.**

Once data were collected, notes were annotated in a contact summary sheet (Appendix XIX) (Miles and Huberman 1984). The contact sheet provided a summary of the contact and answered questions such as:

- (i) What are the main themes or reflections from this contact?
- (ii) What research questions did this contact focus on?
- (iii) What new hypotheses are suggested by this contact?
- (iv) Is there anything that needs to be changed before the next contact?

A copy of one of the contact sheets with the identifier removed is shown in Figure 4.6. This contact sheet was completed after one of the round one interviews and shows the main ideas from the interview that were importance directly after the interview had ceased.

<b>Contact Sheet</b>	
What people, events or situations were involved?	<del>XXXXXXXXXX</del> Interview.
What were the main themes or issues in the contact?	SV in the main school - The fb doesn't loop - No idea where SV is going.
Which research questions did the contact bear most centrally on?	Embedding the curriculum
What new hypothesis, speculations or guesses about the field situations were suggested by the contact?	Need the top down & bottom up approach.
Where should the fieldworker place more energy during the next contact, and what sorts of information should be sought?	Share Leadership examples with participating teachers. Update the HS Tennis page ↑

**Figure 4.6 Contact Sheet Example.**

In this stage of reflexive thematic analysis, any thoughts, or feelings towards what was emerging, along with notes on what to change or tweak before the next contact (Braun and

Clarke 2021). In this example, a note is made to update the MS Teams page with leadership examples for the participating teachers. In later stages of the research, these notes ‘served as a reminder’ of the contact (Miles and Huberman 1984, p.51) and proved to be an excellent basis for data analysis as they helped divide the data into coherent and relevant themes with codes in stage two (Rowley 2014; Silverman 2001).

Once the data were reviewed, they were transferred to a MS Word document so that it could be uploaded into NVivo12 software to be divided into smaller units (Mertens 2005).

Qualitative answers from the questionnaires, the narrative commentary from the observations, and the audio recordings from the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and the round table discussion were transcribed to MS Word documents verbatim, removing only any identifiers and adding pseudonyms, (Saunders *et al.* 2014) indexing and making notes on tone of voice, silence, and auditory expressions (Attride-Stirling 2001; Bryman 2006; Neale 2016; Pope *et al.* 2000; Sim 2001). Both reflective journals were submitted in a MS Word format. This process aided familiarisation with the data and prepared the data for uploading to NVivo12 software. In step one, no interpretation took place; the voices were transcribed in an unaltered state (Clarke *et al.* 2011; McCracken 1988; Wolcott 1990).

In reflexive thematic analysis, responses are read and aspects of potential interest or ideas to explore further are noted (Braun and Clarke 2021). In these further familiarisation stages, it was important to record my reflections in a reflexive manner as the transcription was underway. With each transcription or repeated listening of data, I read analytically and critically, trying to unpick my own assumptions to what I saw; familiar and unfamiliar, expected, and unexpected (Braun and Clarke 2021).

#### **4.5.1.2 Step 2: Create Initial Codes.**

The process of creating initial codes was aided by NVivo12 software. Codes came from words, phrases, or sentences and each response was coded comprehensively and systematically. It was necessary to have several rounds of coding in this study as new codes were created as the study advanced. In the first stage of coding, the process was mechanical and descriptive. Subsequent coding involved integrating codes that were related and prioritising codes that were emerging as stronger, more popular beliefs (Cohen *et al.* 2018). As coding progressed, meanings started to be identified with perspectives of stakeholders building to strengthen one another. Some of the data answered research questions directly and some established additional themes and categories (Creswell 2009; Yin 2008).

The following screenshots show this process in action in the early stages of coding. This piece of data was generated from the first learner questionnaire. The question ‘What does using your voice to help you learn mean to you?’ is noted and the answer is shown in Figure 4.7.

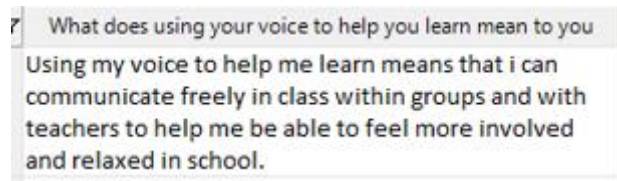


Figure 4.7: Screenshot: Questionnaire 1 response.

The next screenshot (Figure 4.8) taken from NVivo12, shows that the sentence is not coded with one code. The first part of the sentence ‘I can communicate freely’ is being sorted into a code and labelled ‘Communication’.

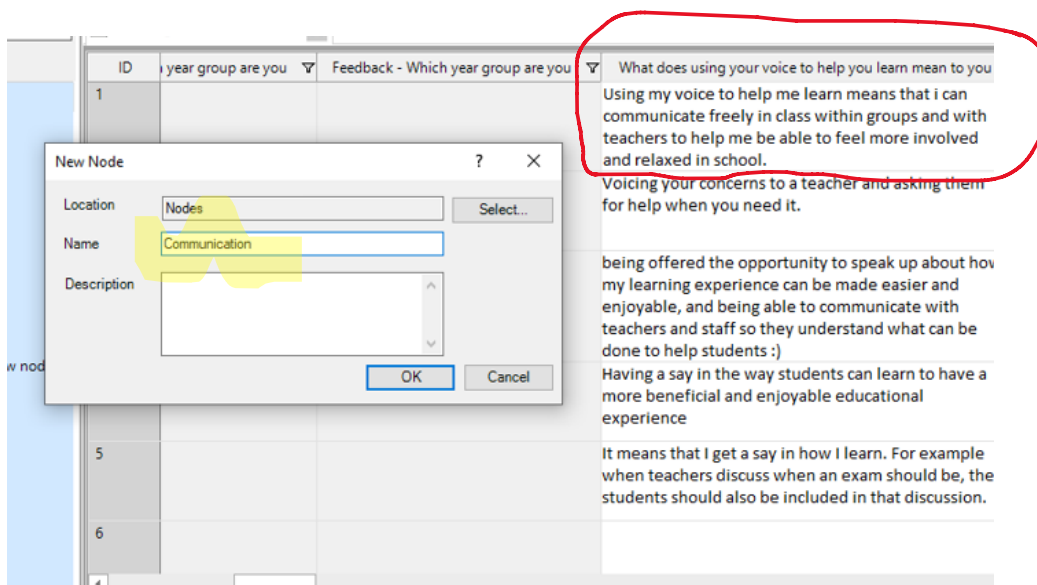
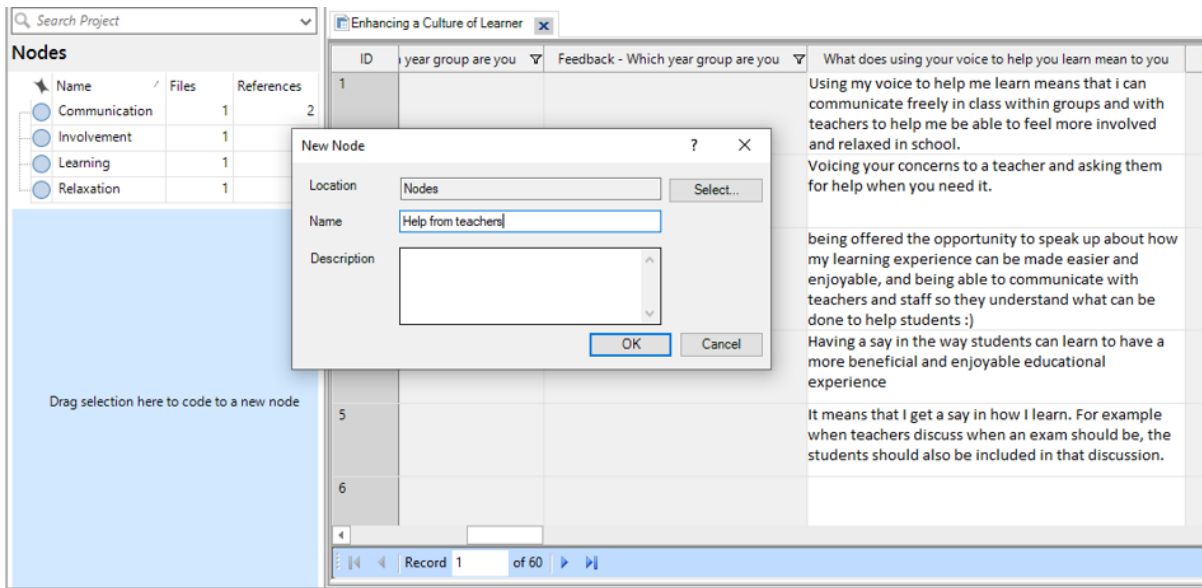


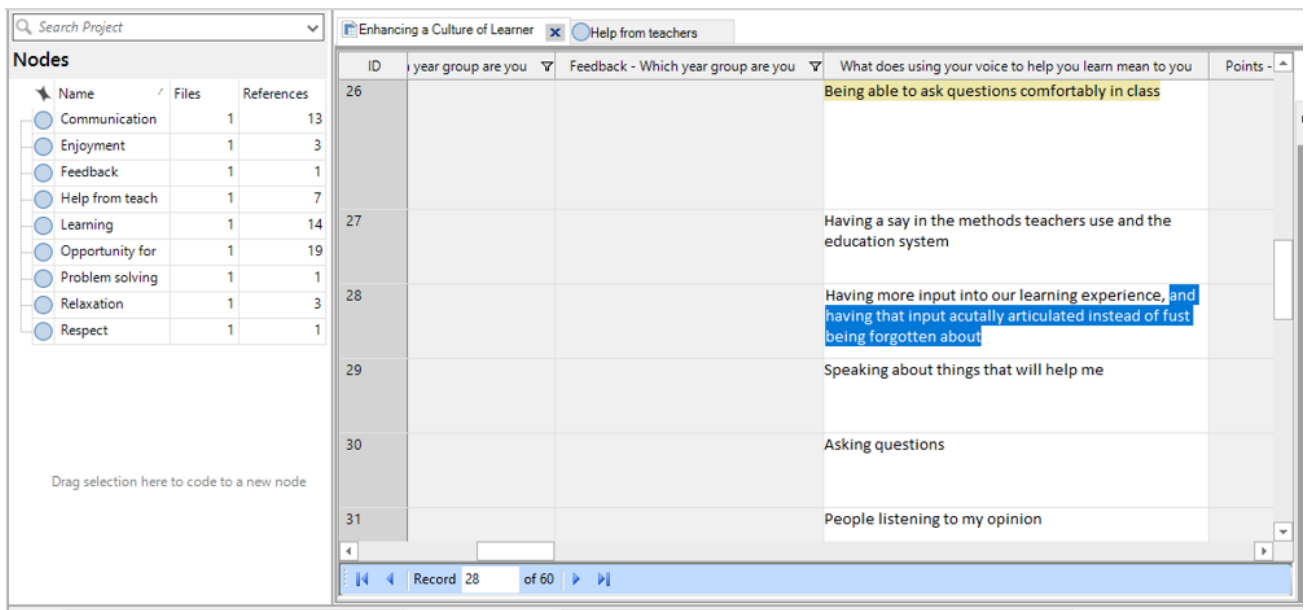
Figure 4.8 Screenshot: First codes emerging.

In reflexive thematic analysis, the coding had to be open and organic where the number of codes was not restricted. The top left of Figure 4.9 shows how the same sentence was coded into ‘communication’, ‘involvement’, ‘learning’, and ‘relaxation’. The centre of screenshot shows another code ‘help from teachers’ being created.



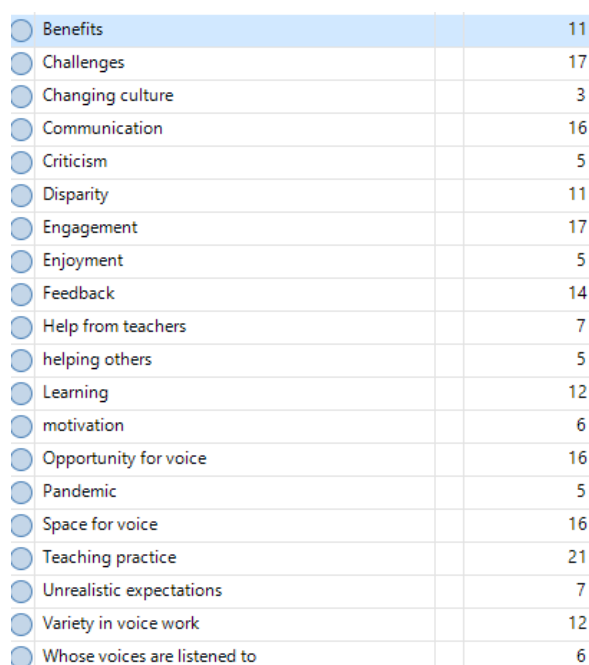
**Figure 4.9 Screenshot showing many codes using reflexive thematic analysis.**

This process continued through and codes began to build. Figure 4.10 is a screenshot taken during the coding process at entry 28 of the 60 learner questionnaires. At this stage there are nine codes shown on the left side of the screenshot: communication, enjoyment, feedback, help from teachers, learning, opportunity for voice, problem solving, relaxation and respect. The most popular codes at this point of the coding process are ‘opportunity for voice’ with 19 separate references and ‘learning’ with 15 separate references. At a later stage these codes were separated further; ‘opportunity for voice’ was separated into two categories to distinguish between the barriers and the catalysts for voices to be heard. Further sub-divisions occurred when describing the types of barriers and catalysts.



**Figure 4.10 Screenshot: Building codes.**

The transcripts from the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and round table discussion were coded in a similar way. Recordings were repeated to listen for tone of voice, pauses and audible cues to ensure transcripts were coded in a way that honoured what the respondents were saying (Mishler 1986; Perry *et al.* 2014). Using a sequential, multi-stage design, an iterative thematic analysis process was essential. As new data were collected, they were transcribed and uploaded to NVivo12 software for coding. As this process was completed over the academic year, it provided the space to connect with the data, witnessing themes grow and strengthen. Figure 4.11 is a screenshot showing the list of twenty most popular codes that were generated from the data.



Benefits	11
Challenges	17
Changing culture	3
Communication	16
Criticism	5
Disparity	11
Engagement	17
Enjoyment	5
Feedback	14
Help from teachers	7
helping others	5
Learning	12
motivation	6
Opportunity for voice	16
Pandemic	5
Space for voice	16
Teaching practice	21
Unrealistic expectations	7
Variety in voice work	12
Whose voices are listened to	6

**Figure 4.11 Screenshot: Most popular Codes from qualitative data.**

#### 4.5.1.3 Step 3 Generating initial themes.

As the data grew, new codes were created. Often codes would be related to one another, for example, ‘opportunity for voice’, ‘variety in voice work’ and ‘whose voices are listened to’, had many cross references. Creating a thematic Table (4.18) assisted in organising the data to see which themes were emerging stronger than others. This thematic map was useful also in helping identify areas that needed to be developed in further data collection stages. As a reflexive thematic analysis, it was important to review older data from earlier data collection stages such as interview 1 or questionnaire 1, to see if there were potential missed

opportunities from earlier coding (Table 4.19). This process allowed time to compare the codes and themes, refine them and discover patterns within them (Mertens 2005; Seidman 1998; Yin 2008). It also allowed time to ‘clean’ the data – to correct any mistakes, search for omissions, create sub-codes, and become very familiar with the data (Rice and Ezzy 1999; Rowley 2014).

**Table 4.19 Thematic Mapping.**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Making Space for voice</b>
Improved Communication	How can a culture be changed?	Variety in methods of elicitation
Improved engagement	Student Voice as a term	Who is listening?
Help From teachers	Feedback is difficult	Who is allowed to speak?
Helping Peers	Learners are unrealistic	Anonymity
Motivation is improved	Pandemic	
Improved teaching practice	Threat of voice elicitation	

#### **4.5.1.4 Step 4 Reviewing Themes.**

The process of building themes from initial codes was not a straightforward one. Questioning the construction of these by analysing what meaningful data supported it was important. The data collected totalled just over 80,000 words so the process of thematic mapping helped in finding order and meaning from the data. At times, some codes and sub themes did not fit with overall themes so a small number of frames were tried to locate meaning from the data. Sorting sub-themes was essential as there were aspects such as ‘learning’ that were too large to make meaning on its own so it was split into ‘positive for learning’ or ‘negative for learning’ and further subthemes such as or ‘academic’ or ‘personal’ learning; a process of grouping and re-grouping into themes and sub-themes were undertaken (Attride-Stirling 2001; Pope *et al.* 2000). NVivo12 software aided categorisation as user-friendly features such as listing the references was available and easy to manipulate (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Figure 4.12 presents a screenshot from the sub-theme ‘Feedback’ and the list of references from learner questionnaire 1.

<Files\\Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice- Student Questionnaire(1-59)> - 5 references coded  
 [3.43% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.83% Coverage

Being able to tell the teacher our opinions and then taking it on board

Reference 2 - 0.82% Coverage

Speaking up about our perspective as a student of the school problems that we have con across

Reference 3 - 0.83% Coverage

For teachers to step out of their comfort zone when it comes to suggestions given by students on how to learn something as sometimes it can be effective and to realise that it is okay to have trial and error when it comes to these suggestions.

Reference 4 - 0.46% Coverage

Giving feedback to teachers on their teaching methods (constructive criticism)

Reference 5 - 0.48% Coverage

Teachers should be open for feedback- not unnecessary or harsh comments- jut saying what aspects of their teaching that we really enjoy.

Figure 4.12 Screenshot: References related to the sub-theme ‘Feedback’.

As new sub-themes were created, a hierarchal tree of themes and sub-themes developed (Neale 2016). NVivo12 has a feature where sub-themes can be added under over-arching themes which made the organisation of themes much easier to manage which Figure 4.13 illustrates. To the left of the theme ‘Communication’ shows a ‘+’ which reveals the subtheme of ‘Relationships’ nested under the larger theme.

Changing culture	3	4
Communication	16	75
Relationships	11	18
Criticism	5	10

Figure 4.13: Screenshot: Organisation of themes and sub-themes.

#### 4.5.1.5 Step 5: Define and name the themes.

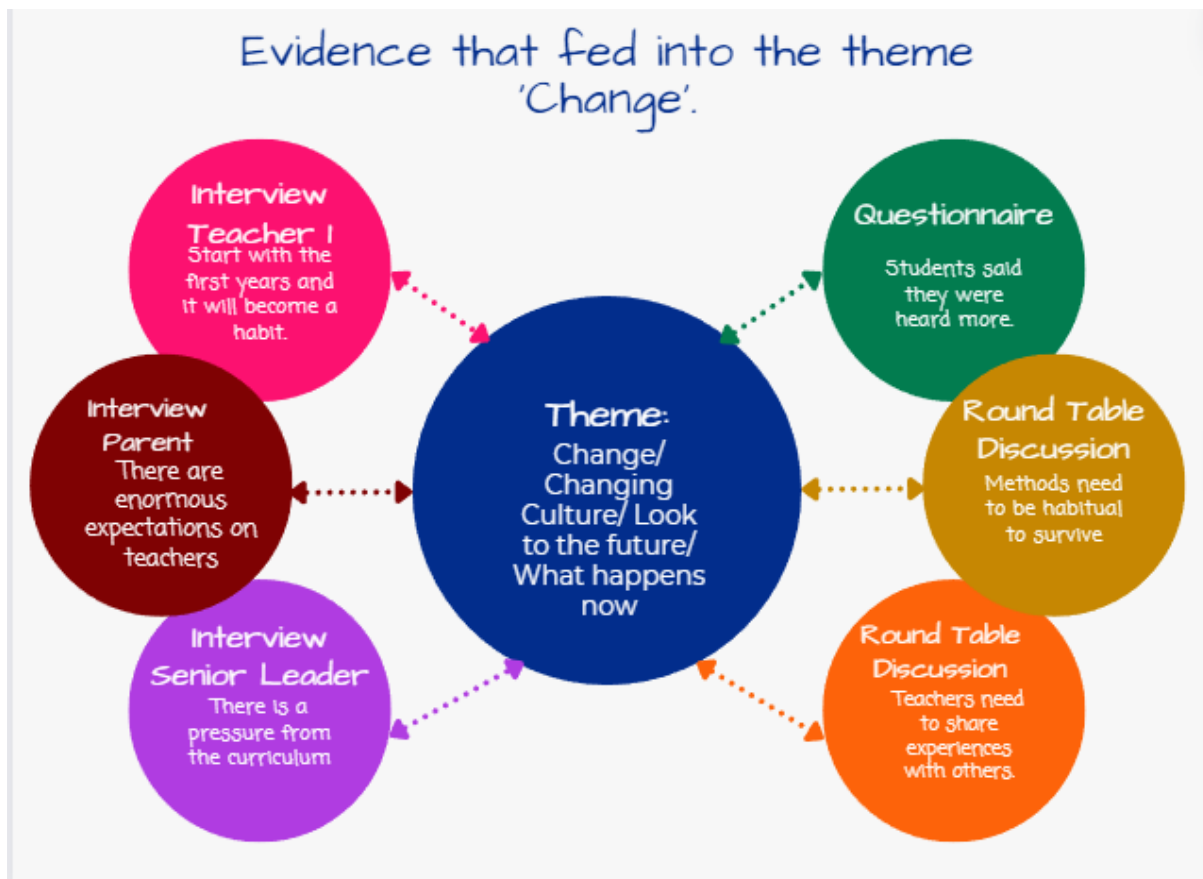
At step 5, a total of twenty themes and seven sub-themes were extracted from the data. The next stage was to organise these in terms of importance. One approach was to look at the number of references that there were to each of these themes. However, outliers and other views were not excluded but incorporated into the themes and sub-themes that were the best fit so that all data were honoured and represented in the final report. Figure 4.14 shows the

theme ‘Benefits’ has a total of 42 references from 11 different files. The most common theme, highlighted, is ‘opportunity for voice’ with 77 references from 16 different files.

Name	Files	Referen
Benefits	11	42
Challenges	17	69
Changing culture	3	4
Communication	16	75
Criticism	5	10
Disparity	11	18
Engagement	17	44
Enjoyment	5	29
Feedback	14	31
Help from teachers	7	23
helping others	5	13
Learning	12	75
motivation	6	8
Opportunity for voice	16	77
Pandemic	5	6
Space for voice	16	23
Teaching practice	21	39
Unrealistic expectati	7	10
Variety in voice work	12	19

**Figure 4.14 Screenshot: Main themes with the number of references and files.**

The quotations and references were transferred out of NVivo12 to a MS Word document and reviewed. The review process allowed data to be sorted into final themes and sub-themes. Figure 4.15 demonstrates how the theme of ‘Change’ was generated by collating the different pieces of evidence from different data sources to form a coherent evidence-based section. At this stage in the analysis the refined theme name of ‘Change’ had yet to be settled on and was left with many options before being finally defined as ‘Change’ to include all references.



**Figure 4.15 Evidence feeding into the theme 'Change'.**

Bringing the data together that had been collated in NVivo12 helped redefine the themes. Next, Figure 4.16 shows some of the sub-themes which were under the over-arching theme 'Challenges'. In the redefinition stage, it was found that many of the challenges were wide ranging and some were so complex, like the sub-theme of 'Managing Expectations' that a new theme needed to be created.



**Figure 4.16** Sub-themes that made up the overarching theme ‘Challenges’.

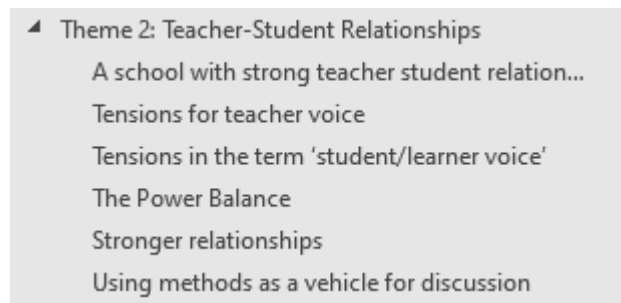
Some sub-themes settled under different themes such as ‘the challenge of negative feedback’ was grouped with other information in the theme ‘the importance of feedback’. At this stage, themes needed redefinition which meant returning to the data for refining evidence. Table 4.20 illustrates the same sub-themes as shown in Figure 4.16 but this time they are grouped into different categories to understand where they best fit. This table was convenient as it allowed for comparisons between themes and it highlighted repetitions so data could be presented in an effective way (Lee *et al.* 2015).

**Table 4.20** Grouping of Sub-themes.

Challenges	The Importance of Feedback	Space and time for voice	Opportunity for voice	Teacher-Student Relationships	Change	Managing Expectations
Covid 19	Dealing with negative feedback	Eliciting voice is time consuming	Listening to overy voice	The balance of power in the classroom	Teachers finding it difficult to change	Students have unrealistic expectations
Curriculum Overload				Tensions in the term ‘Student voice’		
Reliance on teachers						

Themes were brought together as in Figure 4.17 which shows the broad theme of ‘Teacher-Student Relationships’ (Originally titled ‘Communication’) and underneath the sub themes

concerned with this main theme. This redefined theme was made up from references found in ‘Challenges’, ‘Power’, ‘Relationships’ and ‘Communication’.



**Figure 4.17: Screenshot: Theme of ‘Teacher-Student Relationships’.**

At this stage of the analysis process, it was important to return to the original sources of the data to listen to audio and re-read full transcripts to ensure the evidence being used was honouring the theme it was attached to (Leidy and Wyrwich 2005).

#### **4.5.1.6 Step 6: Produce a Report.**

Originally the data were formed into many different themes and it took time to review and understand how these themes related to one another. One draft of the findings chapter divided the data into benefits and challenges, but the findings were more nuanced. Simply slicing the data into equal halves didn’t tell the real story of the research journey and didn’t give justice to the words, thoughts, opinions, feelings and ideas that had been elicited. The data were finally organised into three overarching themes:

- Theme one: Voicework empowered teachers and learners.
- Theme two: Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions.
- Theme three: Making Space for voices: Key Learnings using Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation.

These three themes and their sub themes form the findings chapter. I remained disciplined in keeping the participants’ words and views in their original form, whether in the Irish or English language, and to include all of what was said, relevant to the study, including those voices that were critical or challenged by the project; these rich individual experiences reveal the individual stories and strengthen the data through transparency (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Eisenhart and Graebner 2007; Levitt *et al.* 2018; Hampshire *et al.* 2017). The report

went through many revisions; the final version exposes the key learnings that were exposed from this study.

#### 4.5.2 Analysis of Quantitative Data.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires and observations were useful data sources. At the beginning of the study, an expression of interest form asked teachers to nominate the method of voice elicitation they were interested in using, the subject they would most like to use the method in, and the year group they would most like to work with. These parameters gave the foundation to the study as they numerically presented data on which to base the data collection and implementation of voice elicitation methods. Quantitative data from the questionnaires gave numerical information on the participants including what year learner participants were in and a Likert scale which invited participants to rate the level of learner voices in the school at the beginning and at the end of the study. Participant numbers were converted into Pie charts using MS Forms to show the breakdown of stakeholder engagement. To present information on learners positive and negative experiences, quantitative data from the tick boxes were converted into bar charts using MS Excel to visually represent the data. Ratings from the Likert scale were interpreted by a T-test to understand if the changes from beginning and end of the study were significant. Quantitative data was generated from the five observations of voice elicitation in action. In these observations, tick boxes were used to count the amount of voice expressions and these are presented in a tally chart to highlight the levels of learner and teacher voices.

#### 4.6 Ethical Considerations.

Ethical considerations in this research were an integral part of the planning and implementation process (Holbrook *et al.* 2017; Mertens 2005). Each stage of this research was considered for ethical dilemmas; the context, the procedures to be adopted, the methods of data collection, the sample, and the collections and storage of data (Cohen and Mannion 1994). As this was a study with teachers eliciting the voices of learners in their classrooms, it was essential to have human participants. In doing so, the four principles of ethical research: (i) nonmaleficence (ii) beneficence (iii) autonomy and (iv) justice were adhered to and that procedures were transparent (Flick 2011; Murphy and Dingwall 2001). Table 4.21 gives a snapshot of how these were realised in the study.

**Table 4.21 The four principles of ethical research as realised in this study.**

Nonmaleficence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval received from Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (Appendix IX).</li> <li>• No participant was named or identified by subject taught or role.</li> <li>• Permission sought and received from BOM.</li> <li>• Information and Consent/Assent Forms signed by parents/guardians and all participants (Alderson 2009; McNiff 2013).</li> </ul>
Beneficence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The aim was to improve teaching, learning, assessment, and engagement.</li> <li>• Eliciting voices has many proven benefits as exposed in the literature review.</li> </ul>
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers were free to choose which method of eliciting voices they wished to use, in whatever way they wanted to use it, as often as they wanted to use it.</li> <li>• Volunteer participants could engage as much as they wanted. Teacher participants were free to choose<sup>20</sup> to complete a questionnaire, to be interviewed, to take part in the RTD or to keep a reflective journal.</li> <li>• Questions were shared with participants in advance of the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and the RTD, and participants had the right to refuse to answer any question.</li> </ul>
Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits and risks in taking part in the study were printed on the information sheet.</li> <li>• Member checking stages gave participants transparency and control over their data.</li> <li>• Anonymity and Confidentiality</li> <li>• The right to refuse to answer, the right not to participate and the right to withdraw up to the completion of the member checking stage.</li> </ul>

#### 4.6.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality.

Participants in this research had the right to privacy and were not identified by name or role in the school apart from the terms parent, senior leader, BOM, teacher or learner to ensure they did not suffer harm or embarrassment as a consequence of the research (McNiff 2013; Punch 1994). Anonymity can empower participants to speak out about their experiences in a way that may be impossible if they were identified publicly (Shulman 1990). Participants were given pseudonyms such as ‘Teacher 1’ and their code name was known to themselves,

<sup>20</sup> Teacher participants were required to use one method of eliciting voices with one class and reflect on it in one or more of the following: questionnaire, interview, round table discussion, and/or reflective journal.

myself, and my supervisors (Anderson and Freebody 2014; Flick 2011; Saunders *et al.* 2014). Some stakeholder groups in this study were small; the BOM and school senior leaders had just seven members each. Members from these groups would be easier to identify so two members from these smaller groups were sought. However, in both cases, one participant engaged with the research so, at times their data were added to other adult participants to ensure anonymity. While the anonymous questionnaire identified no individuals (Creswell 2009) and those taking part in semi-structured interviews, focus groups and the RTD were given pseudonyms, participants who attended the same in-person data collection sessions were privy to what others had said (Saunders *et al.* 2019). In each of these sessions, participants were reminded that the sessions were confidential<sup>21</sup> and that all participants had the right to withdraw any data up until the member checking stage was complete. All identifiers were removed in the transcription of data. Subjects were grouped into categories so that no individual subject was named as this could potentially identify a teacher in the school. Participant learners were identified by junior (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year age 13-15) and senior (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> year age 16-18). Teacher participants who kept a reflection journal were asked only to share with the researcher what they felt comfortable in sharing.

#### 4.6.2 Transparency and Informed Consent.

Ethical approval was received from MIREC (Appendix IX) and approval from the BOM was received before the study began (Appendix X) (Bell 2005; Mertens 2005; Monaghan *et al.* 2013). It was important that all participants felt safe to participate; free from rebuke or reprisal (Lundy 2007; Tangen 2009). Informed consent/assent (Appendix XXXVII) and information sheets (Appendix XXXVIII) were written in plain English using the European Union's guide to creating child friendly documents (EU 2021). This information sheet informed participants about their volunteer role and how they could withdraw at any time up to the completion of the member checking stage (Anderson and Freebody 2014; Cohen and Mannion 1994; Diener and Crandall 1978; Fielding 2004; Mortari and Harcourt 2012; O'Brien *et al.* 2022; Schnell and Heinritz 2006; Seidman 1998). These forms (Appendix XXXVII, XXXVIII) also explained why the research was important, what the benefits and risks were, how it was envisaged that learners' voices would have influence and what would be done with the data once the study had completed (Anderson and Freebody 2014; Clarke *et al.* 2011; Kent 1996; Mahar *et al.* 2007). The largest group of participants were under 18 years so consent forms had to be signed by parents/guardians and were also signed by the

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<sup>21</sup> This was stated on the information sheet given to participants prior to the session (Appendix X).

participant themselves (Flick 2011; Seidman 1998). Teachers distributed forms and ten days were given for the return of forms to the teacher or into a locked box in the cafeteria or in the reception thus lessening the power-dynamic of saying no to a teacher (Alder and Sandor 1990; Hamilton 2017; Hart and Bond 1995). In advance of in-person sessions, the questions that would be asked and the schedule for the session was shared with participants, along with a reminder of the volunteer nature of their participation, their right to withdraw up until the completion of the member checking stage and their right not to participate (Heath 2004). Before each in-person session began, participants were verbally informed of the volunteer nature of their participation, their right to withdraw up until the completion of the member checking stage and their right to not participate (Forde *et al.* 2018).

#### 4.6.3 Ethical Position as an Insider Researcher.

There has been increased engagement in Ireland with teachers committing to continued professional development and research (Bognar 2013; Hamilton 2017). This may be due to the development of the national framework for teachers' professional development and focus on fostering a culture of research among teachers in practice (Teaching Council 2011). Educational action research engages, extends, and transforms the self-understandings of practitioners by involving them in the research process. Insider researchers are an integral part of educational research as they can identify and expose aspects of the social order and then pursue a way to overcome injustice (Carr and Kemmis 1986). The teachers as researcher is not necessarily an insider or an outsider as they encompass elements of both; in this research I was an insider as a teacher in the setting but an outsider from teachers utilising methods of voice elicitation for the first time, learners utilising their voices and I was not a participant, but an observer and data collector (Davies 1999 in Hodkinson 2005; Milligan 2014; Silverman 2001). I had the dual role of investigator and employee; it was important to draw boundaries to make it clear where the research stopped and normal school life began by having dedicated days on which research was conducted (Mercer 2007). Data were recorded outside of communal areas so the staff room and cafeteria were always spaces that the research did not enter, to aid participants in feeling at ease.

The type of research engaged with in this study, where the participants were actively engaged in the research and where researcher and participants are known to one another is not uncommon (Bognar 2013; Hodkinson 2005; Taylor 2011; Travers 2001). Being an insider in this research had many advantages; I was familiar with the organisation and had primary

access, able to make efficient use of time as I was present every day, I had rapport with colleagues and was able to recruit participants with ease (Brannick and Coughlan 2007; Griffith 1998; Mercer 2007; Hamilton 2017; Hodgkinson 2005). The position of the insider as researcher was advantageous as it gave participants a genuine reason to get involved as the aim was to improve the organisation and individuals themselves (Anderson and Freebody 2014; Nielson and Repstad 1999; Sieber 1998).

It must be acknowledged that insider research can have a tendency for biased findings, insider blindness, over-rapport and there is a potential for power dynamics to interfere in the research (Innes 2009; Taylor 2011). At every stage of the research, I engaged with reflexive methods like using contact sheets, piloting, and speaking to critical friends. Being an active reflexive thematic researcher helped view the methodology and data through different lenses. In each session with my critical friend, we focused on questions such as: Who held power in the interaction? How were the voices of the learners facilitated? How were the voices of participants analysed? Did I infer meaning? How authentic were the voices? (Cruddas 2007; Fielding 2004; Mitra 2004). These questions were integral for engaging with learners who cannot be regarded on equal terms as adults as there is potential for an abuse of power (Cohen and Mannion 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; McNiff 2013). Lundy's model of child participation (2007) framed the study by focusing on the rights associated with voice in a space where they have an audience, and in a place where they can have influence. As a teacher and a researcher, it was my role to provide that space and audience so that our setting could be influenced by the power of learners' voices. Transparency and accountability had to be considered in the selection process for the learner focus groups; even when I knew some young people may contribute more than others. In these cases, it was important to have a clear rationale for selection<sup>22</sup> and to be accountable by providing member checking stages and the right to withdraw. All information regarding the role of the learner participants was shared as Article 13 of the UNCRC and Article 11 of the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union states that they have a right to receive information and Article 12 of the UNCRC and Article 24.1 of the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union states that young people are better able to exercise their voice when they have information they can understand.

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<sup>22</sup> Volunteer learner participants were selected to ensure a variety of ages, subjects, and engagement with a diverse range of methods of voice elicitation.

#### 4.6.4 Researching with Colleagues.

In any research, the protection of participants should be at the forefront of the researcher's mind (Mertens 2005). In this research, I was aware that learners would be invited to give their opinions on classroom practices which could uncover criticisms that teachers could find hurtful or undermining. To protect the self-esteem and dignity of the teacher participants, the benefits and challenges gleaned from existing literature of each method were discussed with each participating teacher before they completed their consent forms. It was advised that methods of eliciting voice that are less public allow teachers to review what has been said before sharing it publicly (Cohen and Mannion 1994). In that way, learners could have their say and teacher participants shared only what they wished the class or the researcher to be privy to. Creating trust through sharing questions before in-person sessions and member checking post data collection were vital in this research space, where relationships must be maintained once the study is completed. Adult participants in this research were not solely informants but some were friends who shared a genuine interest in the research (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Foster 1979; Sieber 1998). It was important to set clear boundaries; data was collected in pre-determined spaces. Even though there was access to the setting, I did not have access to all data in the environment so private conversations or any views expressed in the learning conversations<sup>23</sup> did not form part of the research (Cohen and Mannion 1994; Griffiths 1985 cited in Mercer 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). It was also important that the labour of colleagues was not exploited and goodwill was not abused (Cohen and Mannion 1994; Creswell 2009). Relationships will continue long after the research has been completed so it was important that participants had a positive experience which respecting the rights, dignity and worth of all participants (Ethical Guidelines from the Sociological Association of Ireland; Isreal and Hay 2006; Preedy and Riches 1988; Taylor 2011).

#### 4.6.5 Storage of Data.

Signed consent forms were stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. The semi-structured interviews, focus groups and round table discussions were recorded on a device that was used only for this study. These files were transferred to my computer which is password encrypted. Each document was given a code name to ensure that the participant is not named on the file and a link could not be made between the consent forms and the

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<sup>23</sup> The learning conversations were set up in response to a need expressed from participating teachers. As they had not consented to data being taken in this space, no data was taken. However, notes were taken by me to return to topics in the semi-structured interviews and in the RTD.

audio recorded data. Any information which could be used to identify participants by name or subject taught was not included in the final report. In line with the Data Protection Act (2018) and MIREC, data will not be retained for longer than the duration of the project plus five years as this study involves postgraduate research, at which time, data will be destroyed.

#### 4.7 Quality in the research.

It is important to acknowledge that I had already formulated biases and values which impacted on the research (Taylor and Robinson 2009). Other participants would have pre-conceived notions about the project or about voicework in general. As participation was voluntary, participants involved may have had a belief that voicework was worthwhile or may have been actively engaged and interested in improvement. To address these biases, I created autonomy for participants at different stages which has strengthened this study by ensuring that it is credible, trustworthy, and transferable.

The volunteer sample was not limited to a certain group; it was open to all participants. To ensure every participant had the opportunity to engage, a variety of methods to elicit voices and several data collection methods were employed (Clarke *et al.* 2011; Corbett 1998; Correia and Harrison 2019; Lewis and Porter 2007; MacBeath *et al.* 2003; Ravitch and Riggan 2016; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Silverman 2001; Sinclair 2004; Whitehead and Clough 2004). While I had selected the five methods in which voice would be elicited in the school, the teacher participants chose which method to use and which class group to use it with. Anonymous questionnaires were included to encourage participants to give honest answers. Piloting stages offered the opportunity to engage reflexively on my own biases in comments made or audible approvals at certain points, which I strived to eliminate in data collection (LeCompte *et al.* 1993).

To make the research accountable and honourable to all participants, member checking was integral. They gave participants control of their data as they could see that their views were taken seriously (Birt *et al.* 2016; Doyle 2007; Iivari 2018; Mertens 2005; Merriam 1998; Silverman 2001). After every data collection stage, a first draft thematic analysis for qualitative data, with identifiers removed, was presented to participants who had ten days to check for accuracy, amend, remove, or comment on the data (Carlson 2010; Mertens *et al.* 1995; Mertens 2005). After the member checking stage was complete, data could not be withdrawn. The process showed participants that their data were appropriately and ethically

collected, interpreted, analysed, and reported (Carlson 2010; Creswell and Miller 2000; Curtin and Fossey 2007; Mercer 2007; Merriam 1998). Member checking contributed positively to this research as the participants were co-constructors of knowledge as per the paradigm in this study (Caretta 2015; Iivari 2018; Lagesen 2010). Member checking documents (Appendix XXXIX) were written in a child-friendly way (EU 2021) to make sure learners were able to participate fully in the process. It also gave a space for participants to raise any issues or miscommunications which can arise from the unpredictable nature of action research (Carlson 2010). Participants were given a draft analysis of findings rather than a transcript so they could see what patterns were emerging and what emphasis was being placed on their or other participants' words (Creswell 2009; Fossey *et al.* 2002). The member checking process served as a validity and transparency check as participants were permitted to check if an accurate reflection of their views were being presented (Cho and Trent 2006; Doyle 2007). A five-step (Blaikie 2007) strategy to member checking was used for those who wished to amend or add to data as shown in Table 4.22.

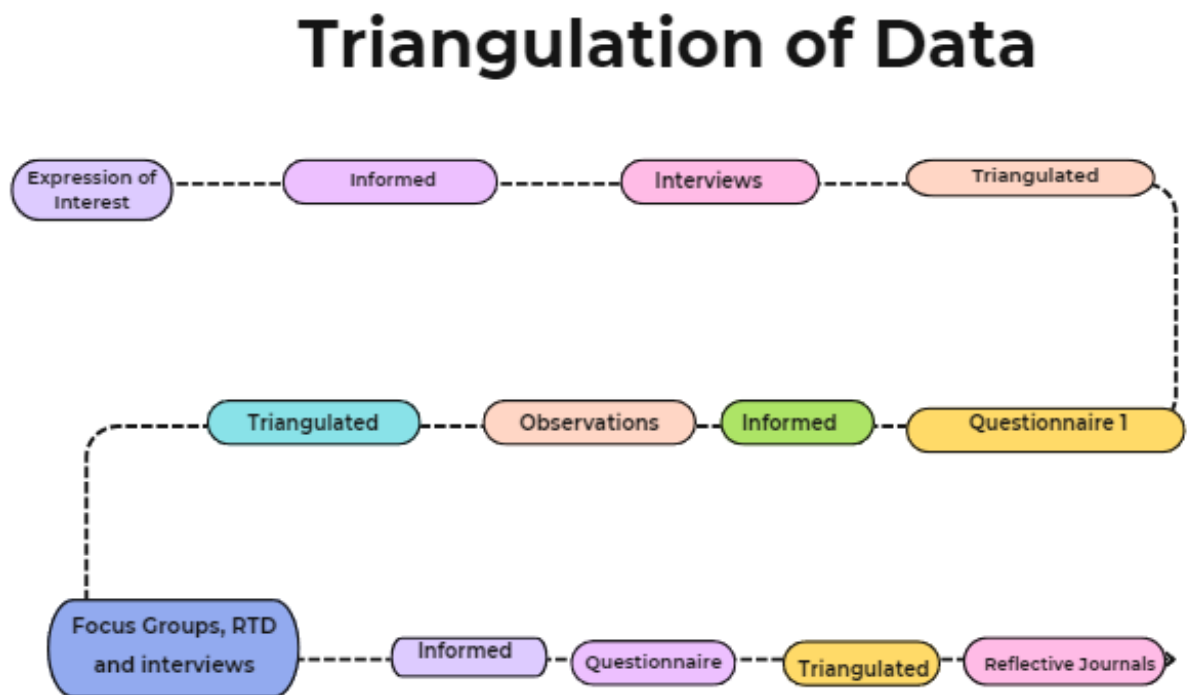
**Table 4.22: Five-step approach to member checking (Blaikie 2007).**

Step	Description
1	First draft of most popular themes is created.
2	Participants, directly involved were emailed a copy in plain English (EU2021) of the draft along with their pseudonym (where appropriate).
3	Participants had ten days to amend or add to the data.
4	If participants responded, their response was filed separately. Their views were added to the draft.
5	Once the time had elapsed, an executive summary was shared with the larger participant group.

This five-step approach worked well for the semi-structured interviews, RTD and the focus groups. As the anonymous questionnaires could not be sent to individuals a summary of the main findings was posted on the MS Teams pages for participants to comment or add new information in case any additional thoughts or feelings had been omitted (Bygstad and Munkvold 2007, 2011; Hallett 2013; Walsham and Sahay 1999). The member checking stages served as a catalyst for conversations in the learning conversations with teachers (Madill and Sullivan 2017; Moss 2004). Finally, this process of member checking allowed participants to be confident that their contributions were included and they were given the chance to be content with what they shared (Gray 1998).

### 4.7.1 Triangulation.

The design of this study included multiple methods of data collection, used to triangulate, check and compare findings, which added to the credibility of the research (Carlson 2010; Creswell and Miller 2000; Curtin and Fossey 2007; Denzin 1989; Heesen *et al.* 2019; Leech 2007; Lincoln and Guba 1985; McMillan 2004; Mertens 2005; Miles and Huberman 1994; Oliver-Hovo and Allen 2006; Richards 2015; Tuckett 2005). The triangulation of data improved the rigor as it assessed the integrity of the data from more than one vantage point (Denzin 1989; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Schwandt 2001). Figure 4.18 shows how the methods of data collection worked together in triangulating this study.



**Figure 4.18 Triangulation of data.**

Figure 4.18 details how in each step of the research either informed the next stage or helped triangulate another stage. For example, in the initial teacher survey, teachers were asked what they hoped to gain from participating in the project and what they perceived would be a difficulty. This information helped to form one of the key areas of probing in the interview schedule. Information given by teachers was used as a conversation topic to troubleshoot and

support participating teachers while involved in the research through the MS Teams page or in the learning conversations. It was also very useful to ask the same questions to all stakeholders in the questionnaires so that comparisons could be made in their answers. The mixed methods approach, where one method of data collection was not solely relied upon made for a reliable and trustworthy study (Charteris and Smardon 2019a).

#### 4.7.2 Reflexivity.

At a very basic level, reflexivity is a personal review of one's own past experiences to make sense of what is happening in the present (Alley *et al.* 2015; Blatchford and Blatchford 2006; Hamdan 2009). At a deeper level, reflexivity encourages the researcher to question the assumptions they have about the wider world and social and political contexts (Freshwater and Rolfe 2001). Reflexive practice as a methodological tool provided increased self-awareness, enabled close critical examination of personal values, assumptions and beliefs and gave a full and honest account of how those examinations influenced the research (Alley *et al.* 2015; Basit 2012; Door 2014; Edwards 2002; Hopkins 2008; Issit 2003; Lockyer *et al.* 2004; Mosselson 2010; Reay 1996; Vernon 1997; Yip 2006). The constructivist paradigm in this research mirrors personal values of engaging with others for collaborative improvement (Greenbank 2003). In the research design, the inclusion of teacher autonomy, choice, volunteerism, member checking and use of plain English showcased personal values in this research.

#### 4.7.3 Critical Friend.

Adults, working together using critical reflection to learn and improve has been demonstrated to improve practice (Bryk 2010; Capers 2004; Danielson 1996; Evans 2015; McLoughlin and Talbert 2006; McNiff 2013). Post primary teachers are familiar with the concept of critical friends through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, working with other teachers in Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings and working on school improvement projects. It is a natural part of the process to have consultation with those inside or outside a faculty group to make sure that the conclusions reached are fair and accurate and to provide alternative perspectives on situations, even when those perspectives are challenging or opposing (Bambino 2002; Goodnough 2003; Handal 1999; McNiff 2013; Macbeath and Mortimore 2001; Swaffield 2007). In the context of this research, I have engaged with several critical friends; my supervisors, colleagues, fellow PhD students, senior school leaders and those outside of education working in business, physical labour, social

care and in NGOs. Critical friends in this research have provided advice, rigour, formal and informal feedback throughout the research journey ranging from correcting grammar to deep insightful reflection (Deuchar 2008; Fahey 2011; McNiff and Whitehead 2010; Swaffield and MacBeath 2005). Critical friends have made suggestions on how to revise research ideas, include features such as the contact sheets and have strengthened the study by offering their own perspectives and to help me check my own biases and values to guide the next stage of the study (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Foulger 2009; McNiff 2013; Keller 1993).

#### 4.7.4 The importance of the *unadulterated* voice.

Interpreting the voices of learners brings with it a power differential where teachers have a 'natural' right to exert power over young people (Qvortrup 1954, p.3 cited in Marshall 1996, p.95). As a teacher-researcher, I am not invisible; I have had to acknowledge my own identity and power when I speak on behalf of students (Cruddas 2007). There is a line between the adult having too much control, which can lead to dictatorship or tokenism (Hart 1992), and the adult having too little control, which can result in a directionless elicitation of voices (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Cruddas 2007). Each voice has a history and has views that may be prejudiced, racist, sexist, classist or homophobic (Alcoff 1992; Bakhtin 1981). I had no control in what young people may say and I understood that voices who differ from my own views had a right to be heard (Cruddas 2007). In voicework, traditionally some voices have been amplified and some silenced and it is often the articulate, confident, high achieving voice that has the greatest cultural resources that are disproportionately listened to, while incomprehensible, obnoxious, or unsavoury voices are silenced (Ellsworth 1992; Lincoln 1993; Noyes 2005; McIntyre *et al.* 2005; Taylor and Robinson 2009). I addressed this by championing variety in elicitation and in analysis, honouring participants' words and not one homogenised mythical norm (Bragg 2001; Ellsworth 1992; Taylor and Robinson 2009). The richness of the individual experiences strengthened data (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). Voice is rarely pure, even with the best of intentions. In eliciting learners' voices there can be challenges in uncovering authentic voices. Researchers can unwittingly or deliberately contribute to the continuing of oppression by presuming to speak for the groups represented in research (Fine *et al.* 2000). It was important in this research to provide a space for the articulation of voices but to acknowledge that voicework can include gestures, body language and other non-verbal communications (Ross 2003 cited in Henderson 2011) even though they are filtered through the researcher (Atweh and Burton 1995). To be respectful to the voices of

the participants, their own words appear in the findings of this research to present their exact ‘unadulterated’ words (Mazzei and Jackson 2012, p.746).

## 4.8 Limitations of the Study.

There were three limitations in this study; bias because of my previous views, the use of the single case study and the use of a volunteer sample. These three aspects are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

### 4.8.1 Bias.

In any research, bias must be acknowledged as research is contaminated in some way by the values of the researcher (Cohen and Mannion 1994; Weber 1946). Being invisible is not realistic, the researcher is entangled in the research interview as they bring with them their biases, context, and personal history (Bell 2005; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Selltiz *et al.* 1962). It is impossible to view research an uncontaminated manner, as researchers are searching for particular answers (Palaganas *et al.* 2017; Wolcott 1999). I have taken steps to reduce bias such as including teacher autonomy, piloting, member checking stages, using critical friends, journaling, contact sheets and using reflexive thematic analysis (Gray 2000; Van Heugten 2004). These aspects have supported me in remaining open to differing opinions and views and have resulted in a credible and transferable study (Coghlan *et al.* 2014; Mason 1996; Silverman 2001).

### 4.8.2 A Single Case Study.

Single case studies have much to offer but do possess clear limitations; they can come under criticism because of subjectivity and lack of external validity (Willis 2014). A single case study does not have the opportunity to be directly compared to other cases given the same circumstances (Gustafsson 2012). To address these limitations, a mixed methods, predominantly qualitative research design was employed in this research along with member checking stages, a voluntary sample some of whom had autonomy in how they engaged with the study which improved the credibility of the research. Single case studies also offer the opportunity for in depth analysis and understanding of a subject and focus on improving it (Quinn and Owen 2016). While the study is unique, there are opportunities to contribute to theory and may be useful to other practitioners.

### 4.8.3 The limitation of using volunteer participants.

Stakeholders made their own decisions to volunteer to participate in the research (Aldridge 2017; Pearce and Wood 2019). While it was important that all participants volunteered freely, caution must be taken as volunteers may have different motives for participating; wanting to help, preconceived ideas about the research, wanting to benefit society or simply friendship to the researcher and may not represent the wider population (Cohen *et al.* 2000; Flick). Friends too may originate an act within the same culture and are likely to share the same opinions and values (Taylor 2011). On the other hand, the research is filled with those who are interested and willing to be part of the study (Rozalia 2007). Volunteering engages with many who are willing to engage and may not be representative the whole population (Charteris and Smardon 2019a; Keddie 2015; Risquez *et al.* 2015; Thomson and Gunter 2007). Volunteering can have a negative effect on those that are in the minority as the act of volunteering may exclude or disempower them (Kennedy-Lewis 2015; MacBeath 2006; Slakmon and Schwartz 2014). This is not an easy limitation to address as the right to take part or not to take part is embedded in my own ethical way of researching. Only those who volunteered to take part were included in the study, but by using a variety of methods, removing myself from the learner recruitment stage and making sure that people felt safe to participate were paths to improve uptake.

### 4.9 Conclusion.

This chapter reveals who I am as a researcher and how I am inextricably linked to the aims, design and ethical collection, analysis, and reporting in this study. The research aims, deeply based in emancipation and improvement, sought to investigate empowering learners' voices in one post-primary setting. The study aimed to engage with representatives from the school community as co-constructors of knowledge to understand the value placed on learners' voices in an educational setting. This chapter discussed the rationale for utilising the constructivist paradigm as key actors in the study worked together towards the common goal of improvement. My own ontological, epistemological, and axiological views were shared which shows how I am deeply rooted in this research.

This single case, action research study used predominantly qualitative mixed methods, in multi-stage data collections. The design of the research included piloting stages and member checking stages to increase the trustworthiness of the study. In utilising methods of voice elicitation, teachers had autonomy in choosing the method of voice elicitation they wished to

use and how much they wanted to engage with it. Volunteer adult participants were free to choose how they participated by selecting to be interviewed or be part of a round table discussion or use a reflective journal. Volunteer learner participants could also choose to participate or not participate in any part of the research. A thorough outline of the analysis of the data was detailed where reflexive thematic analysis was used to sort and code the data, aided by NVivo12 software and predominantly descriptive statistical analysis was used for quantitative data. The chapter concluded with a robust disclosure of the steps taken to ensure a credible study, along with the limitations which this study was bound by.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion.

### 5.0 Introduction.

*'We were able to use our voice to speak up about our perspective as a student of the school and the problems that we have come across that teachers wouldn't know about because they have not [experienced] the same as us' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

The opening quotation summarises identifies that young people have different perspectives to adults and these perspectives can be uncovered through voicework. The purpose of this chapter is to outline findings from the analysis of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, learner focus groups, a round table discussion and reflective journals and to integrate the literature to critically analyse the findings. Qualitative data were analysed in stages using Braun and Clarke's (2021) framework for reflexive thematic analysis.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires and observations were analysed using predominantly descriptive statistics and are represented by graphs and charts. A T-test was also undertaken with a small amount of data to test relationships between variables. Three overarching themes were generated from the analysis of both datasets which are:

Theme one: Voicework empowered teachers and learners.

Theme two: Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions.

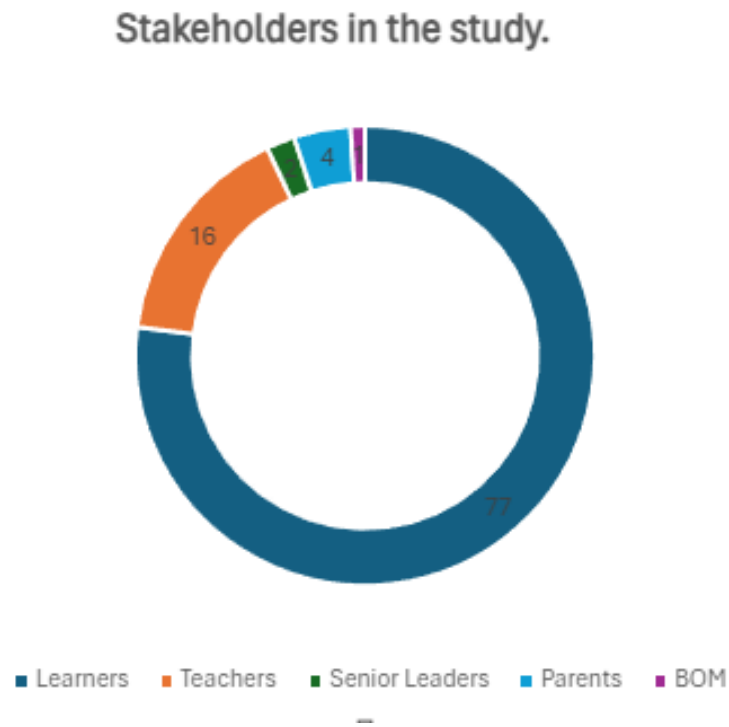
Theme three: Making space for voices: Key learnings using Lundy's (2007) model of child participation.

This research analysed the perspectives of stakeholders on eliciting the voices of learners in one school setting. The study's main research question was 'How can a culture of eliciting voices be enhanced in our school?' and five embedded questions investigated:

- (i) What is our school doing to capture the voices of learners from the perspectives of stakeholders?
- (ii) How effective are different teaching methods in eliciting the voices of learners in our school from the perspectives of teachers and learners?
- (iii) Does eliciting the voices of learners have a positive impact on teaching, learning, assessment, and engagement in our school from the perspectives of stakeholders?

- (iv) What impact does amplifying voices have on teacher and learner interactions?
- (v) What are our stakeholders' perspectives on the value of the voices of learners?

The stakeholder participants who engaged with the study are represented in the pie chart: Figure 5.1.



**Figure 5.1: Stakeholders in the study.**

The pie chart demonstrates that the majority stakeholders in this research were the learners ( $n=77$ ) representing 78% of the stakeholder participant group. Teachers ( $n=16$ ) were the next largest group, followed by parents ( $n=4$ ), senior leaders ( $n=2$ ) and one member from the Board of Management. Perspectives from these stakeholders were gleaned through a variety of sources which are listed as reminder in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Methods used to collect data with corresponding stakeholder group numbers.**

Method used	Stakeholder group	Number of participants involved
Questionnaire 1	All	7 teachers, 60 learners, 2 Senior leaders
Interview 1	Teachers and School Senior leader	11 teachers, 1 School Senior leader
Observations	Teachers and Learners	5 classes observed
Learner focus groups	Learners	12 learners
Round Table Discussion	Teachers	9 teachers
Interview 2	Teachers, Senior Leaders, Parents	5 teachers, 1 school Senior leader, 1 parent.
Questionnaire 2	All	4 teachers, 41 learners, 0 Senior leaders, 0 BOM, 0 parents.
Reflective Journals	Teachers	2 teachers

The three overarching themes in this chapter are divided into several sub-themes. As these themes are discussed, the literature that is relevant to the findings is woven into the chapter. Theme one discusses the rationale teachers gave for becoming involved with this study; the primary focus on improving their practice and empowering learners. Participant learners recognised that voice elicitation was a positive experience and teachers noted that voicework uncovered a greater understanding of individual need, a deeper engagement with their learning, enhanced collaboration, and enjoyment of classwork.

Theme two demonstrates that eliciting voices can uncover complex tensions. Teachers disclosed their reasons for a reluctance in participating as well as their motivations for their dislike of the term ‘student voice’. This section discusses the many challenges faced by teachers regarding the power balance in the classroom, learners’ over-reliance on teachers and the difficulties in adapting to new methods of teaching and learning. There were also other negative influences such as working in a curriculum heavy, time poor environment that focuses on state examinations. There were challenges too in working post-Covid-19 lockdowns that impressed negatively on this study. In this section, the perspectives of participants gathered before the implementation of elicitation began, on how learners would contribute to the study are contrasted with the reality of youth participation as experienced in this research.

The final over-arching theme uses Lundy's (2007) model of child participation to frame the key learnings under each pillar: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. Participants considered the importance of physical space in the voice elicitation process in addition to the methods utilised to incorporate voices in classrooms. The sub-theme of the importance of positive classroom relationships as a factor of progressing voicework is examined. Variety, choice, and anonymity are identified as catalysts for obtaining authentic voices. Feedback and open, honest dialogue are considered as helpful pathways to progress voicework. The changes that took place which were fuelled by empowering learners' voices are catalogued. The section finishes with a consideration of two crucial elements to the future success of voice elicitation: that it be habitual and collaborative.

## 5.1 Theme One: Voicework empowered teachers and learners.

*'You feel more recognised knowing that your voice is being heard.'*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

The power of voices to be acknowledged through elicitation, as inferred in the opening quotation, was a catalyst for empowerment in this current study. This study found that voicework is a powerful positive force for teaching and learning. Theme one explores several sub-themes: firstly, findings are presented which demonstrate that teacher participants showed a great interest in engaging with the study with the view to improve their practice. The chapter explores data which demonstrates that eliciting voices is powerful for teaching and learning. It includes findings which show that voicework facilitates a better understanding of the needs of individual learners, deep and meaningful engagement and increased collaboration experienced by participants and the increase in learner confidence and enjoyment of the education process.

### 5.1.1 Teacher self-improvement.

*'If the teacher listens to us we can then as a class work together to help the teacher to adapt their way of teaching and it'll be better for everyone' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

The learner in the opening quotation exemplifies the essence of using Lundy's (2007) model of child participation which frames this study – to elicit voices for improvement of classroom practices. Teachers participating in this study had an opportunity to examine and improve

their practice (Deal and Paterson 2016; Hargreaves and Fullan 2015) and identify pathways to ease learner participation (DYCA 2015) and to focus on the process of change (MacBeath 1999). Newly qualified teachers (teachers 2, 5, 6, 11 and 16) who had entered the profession in the previous five years, noted that it was important to develop their ‘skill set’ in classroom management and improve their teaching style (Interview 1, teacher 11). Teachers with more than 5 years’ experience, welcomed the chance for reflection on their own teaching practice (Interview 1, teachers 1 and 10) as there is ‘a danger of slipping into a comfort zone’ (Interview 1, teacher 1). Participating teachers also revealed that taking part in the study offered them the opportunity to focus on teaching and learning in an ‘intensive way’ (Interview 1, teacher 8) to improve practice (Interview 1, teachers 1 and 6) and to develop education (Interview 1, teacher 5). Using the voices of learners to identify areas to improve differentiation as a mode of enhancing learning, was another important factor for teacher participants as ‘what works well for the majority might not be great for certain clusters’ (Interview 1, teacher 1). These reasons echo Freire’s (1973) teachings where education is a praxis, a combination of action and serious reflection.

Teachers also cited individual reasons for participation in the study. Teacher 2 stated that they were ‘not comfortable with [their] ‘in charge’ role in the classroom (Interview 1, teacher 2). Teacher 8 highlighted the changes in the education system and in their teaching career and noticed that learners ‘were not as vocal as they had been’ (Interview 1, teacher 8) and teacher 8 wanted to use this study to investigate what they could do in their own classroom to amplify voices. Teacher 8 was curious to see if something had changed due to a subject change, a teaching style or ‘had learners become quieter [less vocal] due to other factors?’ (Interview 1, teacher 8). Participation in the study enabled teachers to take the time and reflect and improve their practice in addition to fulfilling their interest in amplifying the voices of learners in their classrooms (Interview 1, teachers 3, 4, 5, 8 and 11). This process involved looking back to their own post-primary and university experiences. Teacher 3 noted that in their initial teacher education, the focus was on teaching and learning from the perspective of the teacher, ‘not on what the students thought’ (Interview 1, teacher 3). Teacher 2, reflecting on their own experience as a student, said ‘I think I knew [when I was a student] that it makes a difference when every voice is [...] taken into account’ (Interview 1, teacher 2).

Teachers also welcomed the opportunity to engage in professional learning conversations with their colleagues, with teacher 1 saying that speaking with others gave teachers a moment

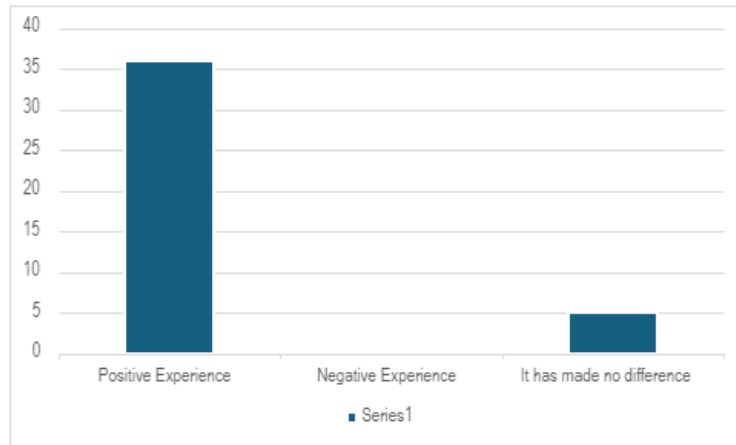
to ‘draw breath’ and ‘vocalise what we have learned’ (Interview 1, teacher 1). These professional learning conversations, introduced to support teachers after the project began, were vital to the life of the project as it gave the study a transformative effect from engaging with others; an attribute that was evident from the literature (McGregor 2007; Reinius *et al.* 2022). The learning conversations were reflective of Freire’s (1973) teachings as an important part of transformation where reflective dialogue takes places with others who are in the same position. Sharing knowledge was also experienced in the round table discussion where participating teachers discussed learnings gained across the study; a positive impact in creating professional capital as featured in the literature review (Cibulka and Nakayama 2000; Given *et al.* 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). This collaborative culture fits well with the constructivist paradigm of this current study and with Vygotsky’s (1934) socio-cultural cognitive theory where knowledge is created through shared means. The learning conversations offered support and built confidence (Bauch and Goldring 1998 cited in Mitra 2003). This deliberate action of creating discussion spaces supported teacher participants in transforming learning and cultures in the school (Freire 1973; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; McGregor 2007).

### 5.1.2 Eliciting voices empowered teaching and learning.

*‘When we are using our voices, teachers might have to step out of their comfort zone when it comes to suggestions given by students on how to learn something because sometimes what we say can be effective and it’s ok to have trial and error when it comes to these suggestions.’*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Eliciting voices was a positive experience for the learners in this study. The opening quotation from an anonymous learner in questionnaire 1, demonstrates an understanding that suggestions from learners can be valuable and worthy of inclusion. Eliciting voices was a positive experience from the perspectives of learners in this study. In questionnaire 2, at the end of the study, learners were asked if using methods of eliciting voices had been a positive or a negative experience or if it had made no difference. Figure 5.2 illustrates responses from 36 learner participants out of the 41 learner participants who completed the questionnaire (88%), reporting that engaging in methods of voice elicitation was a positive experience. No learners reported that it was a negative experience and 5 learners (12%) reported that the methods made no difference to their learning experience.



**Figure 5.2 Learners' positive/ negative experiences.**

The following sub-sections delve into the reasons behind these positive experiences reported by participant learners to understand how spaces and people were empowered through the elicitation of voices. Participants in this study found that eliciting voices enabled teachers to understand learners' needs. Learners too gained a better understanding of their own needs, where there were gaps and what they needed to revise. Voicework was also helpful in facilitating deep, meaningful engagement, enhancing collaboration, boosting confidence, and increasing the enjoyment in lessons as the next sub-sections exhibit.

#### **5.1.2.1 Voicework facilitated gaining a better understanding of learners' needs.**

*'You can use your voice to express your level of understanding of the subject.'*

*(Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

From both teacher and learner participants, the connection between eliciting voices and gaining understanding was highlighted as a key feature as expressed by the anonymous learner in the opening quotation. Learner responses included a perspective on voicework being valuable: 'we get to voice our opinions on whether a certain method of learning was working [...] to make sure that we are learning efficiently' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). Other learner responses indicated the practicalities of voicework: 'you can tell the teacher if you are struggling with a certain topic' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response) with other learners observing that eliciting voices led to a 'better understanding' of [learners'] needs (Questionnaire 2, anonymous teacher response) and 'expressing your opinions help to clarify things' to 'help you understand' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learners' responses). After eliciting the views of learners, lessons were adapted to include learners' interests or included aspects that learners found helpful. Learners recognised

that when teachers elicit their voices, the teachers can learn valuable insights into what learners are ‘struggling with and [they] can concentrate more on those topics’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). The Board of Management also valued the notion of ‘deciphering the best manner of teaching [by] taking the students’ voices into consideration along with practicalities’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous Board of Management response).

Participating in this study empowered learners to understand their personal learning needs and to be aware of what they needed to ‘study for tests’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response; Learner focus group, participants 1 and 2). Moreover, voicework improved learners’ time management and general organisation (Learner focus group, participants 2, 6 and 15) correlating with empirical studies where results demonstrated that voicework had positive results for learners’ personal learning (Graham 1995; Neilsen and Arber 2018). Reflection also gave learners the opportunity to meaningfully engage with their work as ‘sometimes [when the teacher corrects the work] you might ignore it’ or not ‘pay attention’ to it and ‘reflecting on it shows you where you lost marks and how you can improve’ (Learner focus group, participant 4). Through voice related discussions teachers found that learners are astutely aware of what methods of teaching and learning work for them: ‘more aware than we give them credit for’ (Round table discussion, teacher 3). This finding concurred with studies in existing literature where teachers who engaged in dialogue with learners found that learners understood and had insightful opinions about their learning (Creech *et al.* 2020; Mantie *et al.* 2021; Shier 2001). Participating in this study enabled both teachers and learners to have an opportunity to understand individual learning and abilities (Dennis *et al.* 2008; Mitra 2003). Using these methods helped teachers to find out smaller issues like what format a test was preferred in, or even what day of the week suited best (Round table discussion, teacher 13). Parents noted that these methods had the potential to reveal what ‘learning styles work for young people’ (Questionnaire 1 anonymous parent response). Teachers found that learners still achieved and reached high standards but were ‘getting other skills that are more suited to third level’ (Interview 2, teacher 15) as in third level they need to be able to ‘think for themselves’ (Interview 1, parent 1).

### 5.1.2.2 Voicework enabled deeper learner engagement and reflection.

*‘When I was using my voice, I was engaging and that helps me remember more.’*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Findings in this PhD research, such as the expression of the learner in the opening quotation, concurred with studies in the literature review where voicework had a positive impact on learning and engagement (Abdalla *et al.* 2020; Bergmark and Westman 2016; Bovill *et al.* 2010; Dennis *et al.* 2008; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Lewis *et al.* 2018; Mitra 2003, 2006; Parkes 2008; Wong *et al.* 2020). In questionnaire 2, there were 24 anonymous references from learners regarding voice elicitation and increased learning, 7 references to improved understanding and 6 references to motivation. In questionnaire 1, one learner stated that when:

‘the teacher takes our voices into account; it can make the student more invested in their education as they feel that they are part of it and are gaining something from it. It can motivate people to learn and engage in school because they feel that they will not only be heard but be listened to’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).

Similarly, other learners noted that discussion makes you ‘learn quicker’ and ‘you’ll pay more attention in discussion because you are involved in what the teacher is saying’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner responses). Discussion in the learner focus group, uncovered links between voice elicitation and deeper understanding (Learner focus group, participants 2, 4, 6 and 10) as well as increased interest and engagement (Learner focus group, participants 1, 3, 9 and 16). The process of reflecting on work gave learners the time to ‘formulate questions’ (Learner focus group, participant 10) and ‘pick up where they went wrong themselves’ (Learner focus group, participant 11). Reflecting on work means that ‘you have to do a bit yourself’ rather than ‘letting the teacher do that job’ (Learner focus group, participant 4). One teacher spoke of how the learners ‘hated taking marks off themselves [during reflection on work]’ because ‘it really hurt’ so they were extra connected and invested in their work to avoid losing marks (Round table discussion, teacher 13). Writing reflective notes showed learners how to improve (Learner focus group, participant 5) as learners could ‘actually see’ where they went wrong instead of getting a paper back with ‘crosses and circles’ on it without fully understanding what those crosses and circles meant (Learner focus group, participant 11). In engaging in reflective methods one teacher found that it identified clearly where marks were being lost and got discussion going on how learners could increase marks (Interview 2, teacher 6). Reflection processes in this study

helped learners to be aware of their own mistakes (Round table discussion, teachers 3 and 4). Teachers noticed that learners were more engaged and found that the methods of eliciting voices led to learners taking more responsibility for their learning (Interview 2, teachers 1, 4, and 11, Round table discussion teachers 6, 12 and 13). The reflection method of eliciting voices was seen to be very helpful on an individual level as learners noted that ‘when you correct your work [with guidance from the teacher] you kind of remember the mistakes that you made and you noticed and you remember not to do them again’ (Learner focus group, participant 1). Engaging in methods of voice elicitation allowed learners to think about the way they were taught and they were ‘able to think about how I learned and it made me see things more thoroughly’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). These responses from learners and teachers concur with Rudduck and McIntyre’s (2007) study stating that when learners engage in reflection work it can engage learners in deep meaningful ways. Giving learners the time to reflect on their work in class was valuable as they ‘invariably [did] better next time’ (Round table discussion, teacher 8). In interview 1, teacher 13 felt that using methods to elicit the voices of learners, such as learner self-reflection, increased engagement and described the situation when learners receive a test result; ‘if it’s satisfactory, they do not review it. If they are disappointed with the result, they tend not to review it either, they just look at the mark and not the feedback’.

Using the method of learner self-reflection changed the process of simply looking at the result to having a greater interaction with the learning. Having the time to focus on their work regarding improvement facilitates learners have a chance to access their previous knowledge (Round table discussion, teacher 5). This finding concurs with studies in the literature review and policy that reflective voicework improves engagement and leads to meaningful learning (Fitzpatrick 2016; Kristmanson *et al.* 2013; NCCA 2018, 2019). It was clear that learners who engaged, benefitted (Round table discussion, teachers 4 and 8) as they had performed ‘much better’ in certain tasks (Round table discussion, teacher 8). This is summed up in the words of participant teachers: ‘if the learners feel a part of it, they are more likely to be engaged with it’ (Interview 2, teacher 1), ‘if you feel that your voice is heard more, you are going to feel like participating more’ (Interview 1, teacher 4). This link between listening to learners and including their needs in the classroom was evident in several studies in the literature review where it was found that the interest of learners peaked when teachers focused on eliciting voices (Bryan 2012; Correia and Harrison 2019; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018;

Kristmanson *et al.* 2013; Leahy *et al.* 2005; Luke 2006; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Sebba and Robinson 2010; Strong *et al.* 2004; Wallace and Kang 2004).

### **5.1.2.3 Voicework enhanced collaboration and empathy between learners.**

*'I will use my voice to ask a question to the teacher because maybe others are thinking it too and don't want to talk out loud' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

The process of eliciting voices brought many opportunities for discussion about what was taught in the classroom and how it was taught. One common feature from the data from learners, was their understanding and sensitivity towards their peers, as expressed in the opening quotation. One learner highlighted the importance of 'putting forth opinions on the wellbeing of students due to the work given and how effective learning techniques are' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response) and recognised the connection between teaching, learning and the wellbeing of learners. Another learner noted that 'by speaking up and asking about anything you don't understand, it's beneficial for others as well as yourself' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). Teacher 8 noted in their reflective journal entry that using learner generated questions and a success criteria had created a discussion and helped motivate learners (Reflective journal entry undated, teacher 8). Listening to the voices of fellow learners was highlighted in teacher 8's interview where an instance was recalled where a learner had created an excellent piece of humorous writing which had a tremendous impact on the whole class: 'it really upped the ante and everybody became much more aware of their voice in their writing that their work improved massively' (Interview 2, teacher 8). In the learner focus groups, learners related the importance of hearing the goals of their peers in the elicitation method Learner Contract and this motivated them to work on improving their own goals (Learner focus group, participant 2). Another learner noted that 'speaking up in class and expressing our voices and opinions out loud with our peers means that we can learn from our classmates and the teacher can learn from us as well' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). Teachers were aware of the 'tremendous influence' that peer learning can have in benefitting education (Interview 1, teacher 8). In the observation stage of this project, the power of peer learning was evident when learners listened to one another to co-construct knowledge. This was evident in a creative arts subject by working together giving their ideas to reach an end goal and again in a practical science class where in the informal chatter learners learned from one another about what they needed for their own individual experiments (Observation Notes). The following are excerpts from the observation notes.

*The students are setting up an experiment having been given guidance from their teacher. They are working in pairs and threes and have got their own equipment to start up the experiment themselves. One student approaches another and asks ‘An feidir liom an weighing scales a thógáil?’ (Can I take the weighing scales) to which another student replies, ‘That’s not a weighing scales, it’s a hotplate. You’ll need that later in the experiment’ (Observation 2).*

Observation 2 shows that students were teaching each other about the equipment in an informal way having been given the time to work on their own experiments. The next two observations showed learners collaborating on improving each other's answers:

*In a language class, the teacher is leading a class to support learners to self-reflect on a homework assignment. The class are working in small groups of up to four and they must pick a sentence from one copy and work on it together to improve it. One student asks another ‘What can you add to that?’ and the peer replies ‘I could have put in a quotation’. Another group are looking at where the drama was heightened in a scene of a play, each taking a different section. They talk about their ideas. One student reports to the class and student from a different group says: ‘That’s a good idea, can I take that?’ (Observation 3).*

*In a science class the students are working in pairs. They are peer correcting together. The teacher comes around to each table. She says things like ‘an bhfuil tú sásta le an freagra seo?’ (are you satisfied with that answer?) to get the student to think deeply about the best answer they can create and the students are speaking about the answer and improving it (Observation 4).*

These observations exhibited learners collaborating for improvement, aware of their own needs and the needs of others. It also highlights Vygotsky's (1935) teaching where skilled learners are paired with less skilled learners to co-create knowledge. Learners remarked in the questionnaires that ‘listening to others builds a nice atmosphere’ where the conversations are ‘engaging’ and where ‘we can all help each other’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner responses). Learners frequently referred to ‘helping others’ by using different ‘teaching/learning techniques’ (Questionnaire 1, 8 anonymous learner responses). Learners were also aware that their peers have varied ‘learning goals’ and some learners ‘learn differently’ to others (Learner focus group, participant 2). Participant learners were aware that some of their peers were quiet and may not wish to contribute aloud or ‘orally speak out’ (Learner focus group, participants 11) and called for other methods to be employed other than oral voice forums. The findings presented here contribute to the literature which demonstrates

that voicework leads to empathy for others (Flynn 2013; Lynch and Baker 2005; Noddings 2005).

Collaboration with peers as a method of learning was favoured among learners in this current study, as it gave them agency; an aspect evident in the literature review (Fielding 2004; Pedder and McIntyre 2006). Learning with and from one another was also present in a number of class situations; for instance in a language class where, guided by the teacher, learners improved their sentences after reflecting on their own individual work, in a humanities subject where their own experiences informed the learning, and in a maths class where a group led mind map helped to focus individual learners for exam revision (Observation Notes, Observations 3, 4 and 5). Teacher 6 stated that learners could be more objective when reflecting on someone else's work which was helpful for peer learning (Round table discussion, teacher 6). As one interview (Interview 1, teacher 5) was being recorded, an announcement about anti-bullying week was heard on the intercom system where a student outlined the goals of the week. It spurred a comment from teacher 5: 'it's so nice to hear the students on the intercom- because they listen to each other much more [...] and it's the same in the classroom' (Interview 1, teacher 5). Teacher 8 expressed similar views saying: 'I feel that the greatest learning can take place when a student has learned something from [a peer] rather than from me' as sometimes 'students 'don't realise they can learn as much from each other as they can from the teacher' (Interview 1, teacher 8). These findings of learners using their voices to influence each other's learning, reflect findings in existing literature demonstrating that voicework encourages learners to develop empathy and awareness for their learning and the learning of others (Checkoway 2001; Ginwright and Cammarota 2007; Lynch and Baker 2005; Noddings 2005; Sherrington 2019; Shier 2001; Smyth *et al.* 2010).

#### **5.1.2.4 Voicework enables increased confidence in learner participation.**

*'I used my voice [to give my] opinion and [discuss] different topics with others to see different aspects from different points of view. I got better at doing it as time went on.'*

*(Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

The anonymous learner in the opening quotation explains how they used their voice in this study and how their ability to do so improved over the life of the study. Through voice elicitation, learners' confidence to participate in class increased. One learner described that using their voice helped them share their 'ideas, so [you're] heard amongst everyone' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). Teachers noted that voicework 'got a lot of

discussion going' (Round table discussion, teachers 6 and 11) and assisted learners in becoming more 'self-reliant' and '[confident] in themselves' (Interview 2, teacher 13) surmounting their oppression (Freire 1970); a finding that concurs with numerous studies in the literature review where connections were identified between being heard and the wellbeing and self-worth of the individual (Anderson and Ronson 2004; Flynn 2013, 2014; 2017; Holdsworth *et al.* 2007; Lynch and Baker 2005; Noddings 2005; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Sonn *et al.* 2011; Shier 2001; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Smyth 2016; Wilson 2008). In a learner focus group, participant 10 spoke about their experience in gaining more confidence over the course of the research saying that 'it was really helpful because I find a lot of the times, people are just too scared to ask questions, so [self-reflection] gave us time to get better at asking [questions]' (Learner focus group, participant 10). This statement is reminiscent of Freire's (1970) work where the oppressed, the learners in this case, use their experiences and language to explain and surmount their oppression. Teacher 8 noticed that when learners started reflecting on speeches, that learners were not only looking at grammatical and mechanical errors but the self-reflection process was a catalyst for discussion about other topics 'like did they connect with the audience' and the confidence in reflecting helped that discussion flourish (Round table discussion, teacher 8).

#### **5.1.2.5 Voicework encouraged a more enjoyable educational experience.**

*'I liked being offered the opportunity to speak up about my learning experiences and how it can be made easier and more enjoyable. I liked being able to communicate with teachers so they now understand what can be done to help students like school more.'*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Enjoying the learning experience, such as the sentiment in the opening quotation, was a strong theme in the literature review where firm links were made between happiness in the classroom and learning (Butler *et al.* 2021; Kincheloe 1991; Kristmanson *et al.* 2013; Halliday *et al.* 2019; Postlethwaite and Haggerty 2002; Simmons *et al.* 2015). The theme of enjoyment was uncovered in questionnaire 1, with 22 learners referencing its importance, some of which included: 'having a say in our learning might make subjects I don't like, more enjoyable', 'we can make sure that we are having fun and enjoying ourselves while still learning', 'we will enjoy it', 'it could lead to an enjoyable educational experience', 'we can enjoy it more while still doing the coursework', 'you could find things more interesting and fun if it's your own idea for how something is being taught', 'it will increase [our] enjoyment' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learners' responses). Teachers reported that learners 'enjoyed

engaging' in these methods (Round table discussion, teachers 3 and 5) noting that 'they had fun with it and learned more' (Round table discussion, teacher 12). New teaching strategies which were explored in learning conversations were used by other teachers such as using small white boards, 'post its' or 'Mentimetre<sup>24</sup>' to have their say and teachers reported that they made the learning experience more enjoyable (Round table discussion, teachers 1 and 3).

### 5.1.3 Conclusion Theme One: Voicework empowered teachers and learners.

*'I want to listen to their voices to ensure they are getting exactly what they need.'*

*(Interview 1, Teacher 1).*

This theme discussed the many aspects of voicework using Lundy's (2007) model of child participation, that make it powerful for transformation of learning spaces and the people within those spaces. Teacher 1 in the opening quotation expressed the view that voice elicitation hones classroom experiences to suit the learners. By participating in this research, teachers were empowered to reflect and improve their teaching practices. Learners and teachers saw that eliciting voices was a positive, empowering experience where teachers and learners gained a better understanding of the learning needs, deep meaningful engagement was enabled, collaboration was enhanced and learners became more confident in the classroom. The learnings concur with Vygotsky's (1934) socio-cultural theory of cognitive development where scaffolding and support from key players in education will aid young people to complete tasks independently.

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<sup>24</sup> Interactive digital presentation software.

## 5.2 Theme two: Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions.

*'I have the confidence to speak and I'm not embarrassed about what others think. I don't care if the teacher disapproves or undermines my question, now, I'm going to ask it anyway.'*

*(Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

Participants in this study revealed that eliciting voices uncovered many complex tensions and challenges as the opening quotation from an anonymous learner hints at. While Lundy's (2007) model of child participation was valuable, it is not a recipe for instant success; there were many tensions and challenges uncovered while using the framework. This section discusses the fears teachers had about participating in the research and the tensions that were exposed when reviewing the mechanisms in which students were heard in the setting at the time of the study's commencement. Over the course of the research project, the elicitation of voices had many challenges including various difficulties engaging fully with voicework. This study exposed the high value that school communities place on summative state examinations and the difficulty that teachers and learners have in engaging with voice elicitation in conjunction with a curriculum that is described as overloaded. Covid-19 brought some challenges to the study also, inhibiting engagement in some cases. This section ends by revealing the preconceived ideas that participants had regarding learners' voices and, on reflection, what was experienced over the course of the study.

### 5.2.1 Teacher fears in relation to participating in the study.

*'Teachers should take the students' suggestions into account and make students comfortable to ask questions without belittling them. [Teachers should give] students the opportunity to make change and teachers should take action on the issues or complaints that [students have] instead of dismissing them' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

The above response from a learner alludes to a tension that exists in the teaching and learning space. The learner uses the verbs 'belittling' and 'dismissing' in relation to the teacher who is hearing the voices of learners. This type of criticism from learners presents the rationale for the fear that teachers had in relation to participating in the study. In questionnaire 1, four teachers out of seven who completed the questionnaire, cited anxiety about the possibility of negative feedback learners may give them. This topic was discussed in teacher semi-structured interviews to tease out this perspective more. Most fears were in relation to criticisms of 'practice that might make [teachers] uncomfortable' (Interview 1, teachers 1 and 3) a sentiment that was present in the literature review (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Davey *et al.* 2010; Peruzzi 2018; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). It was important to acknowledge that

negative criticism may be part of the process, especially in methods that require learners to evaluate teaching styles and methods (Henderson 2011). Moreover, for authentic dialogue ‘you do need a certain level of honesty about what works and what doesn’t’ [and even though] ‘I am a little anxious about what might be thrown up [...] I want to do it’ (Interview 1, teacher 1).

The literature review revealed that teachers can be reluctant about participating in voicework as it places them in a vulnerable position where criticisms can hurt emotions (Mooney *et al.* 2019; Thomson and Hall 2008). Teacher 15 expressed the need to support teachers as some feedback from learners is bound to feel like criticism but added, that in their experience ‘ I don’t think the students mean it in a criticising manner’ and often ‘it is not a personal attack on teachers, this is not an attack on students or on the school, it’s about students saying “this is how I feel right now” [and] how they are feeling about something is very valid’ (Interview 1, teacher 15). Teacher 15 suggested that support sessions<sup>25</sup> for the participating teachers would be useful as there is a challenge to ‘recognise and validate how they are feeling’ and then support them with ways to act or respond (Interview 1, teacher 15).

There were concerns from participating teachers about using some methods of eliciting the voices of learners as there were some groups that were passive and some that were more naturally engaged (Interview 1, teachers 1 and 2). Teacher 1 expanded on this saying:

‘I’m thinking in particular of my [group of students] and they by nature are particularly quiet. I’m not sure if that is because of the dynamics within the group. They don’t seem to gel brilliantly as a group. They don’t tend to discuss or put themselves forward orally in class’ (Interview 1, teacher 1).

Teacher 2 noted a similar view:

‘I have a class that doesn’t really engage in conversation. They are [...] passive and consume rather than engage. [...] The [Leaner Contract method] I have selected doesn’t involve [public discussion as] they won’t engage’ (Interview 1, Teacher 2).

The words of the teachers in this excerpt from interview 1, show that by encouraging participating teachers to choose which method of eliciting the voices of their learners operated well here as the teachers were aware of what would function best with their classes.

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<sup>25</sup> Informal learning conversations were established mid-way through the semi-structured interview 1 stage. These took place at lunchtime in the staffroom and were not obligatory. As no prior consent was obtained for these sessions, no data were collected. However, my own notes were taken (Appendix X) to remind me to include items for discussion in the second interview cycle and in the round table discussion.

Teacher 11 voiced concerns about the majority ruling when using The Negotiated Curriculum saying:

‘what if the negotiation goes against one student the whole time? Yes, they are giving their opinion but if the majority rules against them every time- will they give up? They are not all going to agree [...] you are not going to please everyone’ (Interview 1, teacher 11).

Teacher 8 who had decided to use learner self-reflection with a group of Transition Year (Age 16) students was concerned about the flow and progression as Transition Year can be very busy and they ‘can be doing other things and the continuity [may be affected]’ (Interview 1, teacher 8). This issue with continuity was a difficulty as verbalised by teacher 6 when she said that Transition Years just ‘fell off a ledge after Christmas [last year], I didn’t see them, I didn’t have people on seats’ and with these methods you need a sustained contact’ (Round table discussion, teacher 6).

### 5.2.2 Tensions for teachers in eliciting voices and in the term ‘student voice’.

*‘Where is the teacher’s voice in this? It shouldn’t be ‘student voice’ because we are meeting them (students) halfway’ (Interview 1, teacher 5).*

While positive relationships are important for voicework to thrive, as will be discussed later in this chapter, there were existing tensions regarding current practices in the setting which were raised in this current study, as exemplified in the opening quotation from teacher 5. Teachers believed that staff meetings were so ‘learner centered’ (Interview 1, teachers 4, 8 and 10) they ‘drown out’ (Questionnaire 1 anonymous teacher response) the ‘teacher voice’, (Interview 1, teacher 10). Teacher 3 identified that learners may not discuss matters with their subject teachers and instead choose to speak to senior leaders rather than dealing with their teacher directly:

‘I think that I am on the lower end of the scale because I am not in a managerial position so students don’t come to me, even if I am their class teacher, they will be a bit ‘Karen-y’ and want to speak to the manager’ (Interview 1, teacher 3).

This was echoed by teacher 10 stating that ‘students have no problem in going right to the top’ with an issue that could be resolved through dialogue with a subject teacher (Interview 1,

teacher 10). These practices were noted as damaging to student-teacher relationships in the school.

Teachers in this study expressed a dislike of the term ‘student voice’ as they felt that ‘the emphasis is on the student’ (Interview 1, teacher 5). Teacher 5 explained saying:

‘it feels like that the student says something and we [teachers] have to change and if we don’t change then they think that we are not listening’ (Interview 1, teacher 5).

Similar sentiments were raised by teachers saying that ‘there are things I might be uncomfortable with and I don’t want that perceived as though I am not listening’ (Interview 1, teacher 1) and ‘some of the things they suggest may not fit the subject’ (Interview 1, teacher 12). To tease this issue out, it was raised for discussion in succeeding semi-structured interviews, learner focus groups and in the round table discussions. The term ‘student-teacher dialogue’ was one that was preferred by both learner and teacher participants as it highlights the important role of negotiation and places each member of the dialogue on equal terms: ‘It’s better because it’s not just all one voice’ (Learner focus group, participant 4), ‘everyone [including teachers] needs to have a say’ (Learner focus group, participant 8). Teachers noted that voicework is not represented by the term ‘student voice’ as it suggests that when young people speak, the onus is on the adult to change and while ‘there may be a necessity to act on some of [what is being asked for] it is more important to open a dialogue to explain why something can or cannot be done’ (Round table discussion, teacher 12) which is reflected more in the term ‘student-teacher dialogue’ (Round table discussion, teacher 3). This was mirrored by teacher 15 saying:

‘we may not agree with or invest in or do whatever is required but [we have] to be open and honest with the learners and say why something can’t happen (Interview 2, teacher 15).

In interview 1, teacher 2 explained that in their view the learners’ perspective of voice is different to the teacher’s view:

‘Sometimes I think that students think that student voice is “whatever we make verbal here, we should get and if you don’t get it, then you are not listening to us” but it should be more

constructive rather than just getting what you want [as] ‘it’s dialogue rather than just voice’ (Interview 1, teacher 2).

Examples of this dialogue in action were when teacher 11 engaged in discussion about rescheduling a test (Interview 2, teacher 11) and teacher 2 discussed with their class why a sample answer would not result in better answers as they wanted the learners to build their own answers creatively and not copy the sample (Round table discussion, teacher 2). Both examples demonstrate how the term ‘student-teacher dialogue’ is appropriate as it promotes the idea of compromise and discussion. Also, the term ‘dialogue’ moves away from the idea of one homogenous student ‘voice’, as that term suggests that learners are all in agreement and one voice speaks for all (Arnot and Reay 2007). There are many voices that need to be listened to in a student-teacher dialogue as ‘it feels like we are meeting each other half-way’ (Round table discussion, teacher 5). The action through dialogic means echoes Freire (1973) where he argues that education must move beyond discussion to action to affect the critical consciousness.

### 5.2.3 The complex tensions in the balance of power in learner/educator relationships.

*‘I think there needs to be an overhaul and teachers need to become facilitators in the classroom.’*

*(Interview 1, teacher 4).*

This study found changes in the power balance in the classroom a challenge to manage. In Freire’s (1970) work, society is characterised by those in power, oppressing the powerless. In this study, school is the society and teachers the ones in power and the voices of young people were seen as a threat to power systems. Voicework is more than speaking (Angus *et al.* 2013), it is radically transformative as it challenges the traditional power structures that are in place in institutions. Incorporating voices can be a difficult challenge as students are having a say in places that they have traditionally been excluded from (Beattie 2012; Butler *et al.* 2021; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Mitra 2018). In this PhD study, teachers were prepared to listen to voices but they found tensions in the balance of power in the classroom. This idea of the ‘power equilibrium is just not in Irish schools in general [and when models from Finland or Australia are considered where there is a focus on instructional leadership] we are a bit behind’ (Interview 1, Senior leader 1). To participate in eliciting voices ‘in a sense you are relinquishing some of the teacher power that you think you have (Interview 1, teacher 1).

This response, given by teacher 1 was not unique in the literature where the shift in power presented a challenge to many teachers (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Freire 1970). The challenge of surrendering power was repeated by teacher 2 saying ‘you’re leaving yourself a bit more vulnerable’ (Interview 1, teacher 2); a sentiment found in the literature review (Freire 1970; Hart 1997; Morrow 1999). Teacher 15 noted that there is a traditional view of ‘how teachers *should be*, how teachers should communicate, how teachers are never off duty’ [and that there is a traditional perception of the classroom where] ‘the teacher is the main leader in the room’ (Interview 1, teacher 15). This perception exhibited by teacher 15 may hold with the way teachers see their role in the world, and the elicitation of the voices of learners can seem to alter that perception (Morrow 1999; Sargeant and Gillet-Swan 2019). A tension regarding the teacher, the ‘main leader in the room’ may have to change their practice from ‘leader to facilitator’ (Interview 1, senior leader 1) was perceived as a monumental shift in teaching practice that some teachers may not be willing to do; a factor exposed in the literature review (Sargeant and Gillet-Swan 2019).

However, eliciting voices does not mean that the role of leader in the classroom is removed (Hart 1997). Teachers in this PhD study acknowledged that in voicework, teachers were still the experts with teacher 5 saying that learners ‘might think that an assessment might be better done one way but I, from experience, know that it wouldn’t’ (Interview 2, teacher 5). Concurring, teacher 11 explained that ‘any decision made, [is to improve learning] not to make this easier on me’ (Interview 1, teacher 11). Teacher 1 affirmed that the teacher is the leader: ‘you are the one teaching’ and ‘[learners need a leader to support them] to achieve their goals’ (Interview 1, teacher 1) and teacher 12 affirmed that ‘I know the way I do it is probably best’ (Interview 2, teacher 12). Teachers have expertise and this can be used when listening and responding to learners using Lundy’s (2007) model; the adult is the one who has the power to introduce change (Angus *et al.* 2013; Brough 2012; Luke 2006). The relationship between learner and educator is not equal, but voicework can attempt to upset that traditional association which can be a challenge.

#### 5.2.4 Engaging in voicework was challenging for teachers and learners.

*‘I think that students are so disengaged, particularly the junior years, I don’t see that there is any scope for fun things [like voicework]. I just really have to get on with the teaching.’*

*(Interview 1, teacher 7).*

The opening quotation from teacher 7 reveals a challenge that was evident; voicework is identified as something that is fun, or an optional extra as the teacher must 'get on with the teaching'. This quotation alludes to some difficulties that both learner and teacher participants found in this study. Teacher 6 found that learners had difficulty identifying 'individual needs' and needed support from the teacher 'almost telling them where they need help' (Round table discussion, teacher 6). Teachers also noted that learners had trouble in marking accurately when assessing their work (Round table discussion, teacher 8; Interview 2, teacher 11) needing 'too much support' from the teacher (Round table discussion, teacher 9).

To discuss the various difficulties, the next section is divided into four sub-themes: (i) the over-reliance on teachers, (ii) the difficulty learners and teachers had in adapting to new practices, (iii) the perspective from learners and teachers that the curriculum is overloaded and (iv) the challenges brought by Covid-19.

#### 5.2.4.1 An over-reliance on teachers.

*'They might be over-reliant on me because I am definitely guilty of doing far too much.'*

*(Interview 1, teacher 10).*

Learners revealed that they relied on teacher's input admitting that if the teacher is not going to correct a piece of work, learners may not complete it to a 'high standard' (Learner focus group, participant 3) or put in 'the same effort' (Learner focus group, participant 5). Learner 2 had a similar view saying:

*'If it is done in class with the teacher watching there is more chance of it being done well. If people think that the teacher is not going to see it, they might not even do it' (Learner focus group, participant 2).*

Teachers who assigned reflective methods of elicitation for homework found that some learners did not complete it: 'they don't see it as important because it's not actual work' that will be corrected by the teacher (Round table discussion, teacher 12). Learners too felt that if they were given reflections to do as a homework exercise, it was not as beneficial as doing the reflection in the class with the support of the teacher (Learner focus group, participant 5).

Teachers 1 and 2 revealed that beyond establishing the method of voice elicitation they had chosen to use with their class, they did not have time to engage with it fully:

*'I wasn't checking up because I said: "this is your own personal thing". I did mean to give it time at the end of a few classes to do it, but I don't think they did it' (Interview 2, teacher 1).*

Learners acknowledged that teachers should remind them about reflecting as they 'might have difficulty remembering if it is not talked about in class' (Learner focus group, participant 3). Learners noted that while self-reflection was beneficial, it needed the support of the teacher because 'the teacher is the expert' (Learner focus group, participant 8). This sentiment was expressed again with learner 11 saying: 'we haven't gone to college to teach the subject [so it is important that the reflections or self-assessment is supported by the teacher]' (Learner focus group, participant 11). Learners in this study are highlighting the importance of what Vygotsky (1962) labels 'More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)' where young people receive support from those more knowledgeable and through that support, they become independent learners a finding present in the literature review (Bates 1994; Luke

2006; Roche 1999; Vygotsky 1934). The Chief Inspector has championed the use of self-assessment and classroom discussion to empower students to review progress and make quality judgements (DES 2022) making it clear that this area needs careful support.

Teacher 4 explained that to prompt reflection, she sometimes gave a starter sentence such as *what I found difficult was ...* and then would give an example, but she refrained from doing so as ‘the students will just repeat back the same examples to you’ (Round table discussion, teacher 4; Contact sheet notes, *nodding agreement from the other teachers present*). Teacher 6 recalled a similar experience where learners repeated the examples given by the teacher ‘rather than engaging with it themselves’ (Round table discussion, teacher 6). Teacher 4 reported that when discussions were taking place, learners looked to their teacher to be the lead opinion and repeated the teacher’s opinion when asked to give their own views (Round table discussion, teacher 4). This process of supporting learners on their learning journey fits with Vygotsky’s (1934) socio-cultural theory of cognitive development which indicates that scaffolding is a key aspect of effective learning. Vygotsky’s (1934) theory was distributed via the MS Teams page (Appendix LIV) to demonstrate to teachers how the learnings could be applied to the classroom. Senior leader 1 explained that often students present themselves to school senior leaders either individually or through mechanisms like the student council with problems about issues and difficulties that they were experiencing in school (Interview 1, senior leader 1). Rarely did students arrive with any ‘pathway for solutions’ but relied on senior leaders to solve these issues (Interview 1, senior leader 1). However, senior leader 1 reflected that dialogue was not initiated to help students towards resolving difficulties for themselves or ‘in tandem’ with school personnel (Interview 1, senior leader 1); a practice that would be reviewed in the future.

#### **5.2.4.2 A challenge for teachers and learners to adapt to new practices.**

*‘I want to include [voicework] but it’s hard to get into it straight away. I think it’s the fear of the unknown’ (Interview 1, teacher 5).*

The opening quotation from teacher 5 noted the difficulty in adjusting and adapting to new practices in the classroom. Teachers reported being ‘full of gusto’ at the beginning of their participation in the research project but this waned as time moved on (Interview 2, teacher 1, Round table discussion, teacher 6). In collaborative activities where learners came together to grade one another’s work, teachers found that learners were over critical of themselves and less critical of their peers’ work as ‘maybe as they didn’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings’

(Round table discussion, teacher 12) so the method lost its impact as they were too lenient on their peers and too harsh on themselves. Teacher 8 raised the issue that learners were not capable of accurately predicting grades when they engaged with methods of self-reflection scoring themselves much lower than their grades were in reality: ‘I wonder are they bashful or nervous to be wrong or is it just an Irish thing to be incapable of saying “I did a good job”’ (Round table discussion, teacher 8). Teacher 8 wrote in their reflective journal:

10 learners predicted a full grade lower than they achieved, 6 predicted correctly and gave accurate reasons, 7 did not predict their grade even though 5 of these had reviewed the work and given accurate reviews. (Reflective journal teacher 8, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021).

No-one predicted a higher grade than was achieved. 6 predicted the band below (my gut feeling is that they were being a little bashful rather than genuinely unable to predict their grade accurately) (Reflective Journal teacher 8, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).

Teacher 8 is revealing the difficulty learners had in adjusting to this new way of teaching where learners used their voices to reflect on their work and make accurate judgements. Learner 15 described a similar experience to teacher 8 when commenting on the difficulties in engaging in The Negotiated Curriculum as they found it hard to make judgements about curriculum as the teacher is the expert who ‘has taught the course multiple times and this is only our first time doing it so we don’t know how it’s supposed to be’ (Learner focus group, participant 15).

In the round table discussion, in teacher 13’s experience learners were ‘switched off’ when it came to self-reflection. However, using the same method, teachers 4 and 8 found that learners were highly engaged. Teachers found that when practice was sporadic it did not work well, as teacher 8 explained: ‘my group were in [Transition Year] and they are very busy with other activities; the continuity was affected’ (Round table discussion, teacher 8). Discussion on the influences from outside of the school arose in interview 1 where the culture of notes been given in grind<sup>26</sup> schools and learners having little input or thinking for themselves: ‘our school has the reputation of being a very academic school’ and the knock-on effect from grind schools is that ‘learners are expecting more notes than discussion’ and are not engaging with methods that elicit and include voices (Interview 1, teacher 8). Learner 15 thought that

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<sup>26</sup> Fee-paying schools that offer one-to-one or group intensive preparation for examinations.

goal setting would be ‘hard to stick to’ explaining that ‘if I [don’t reach a goal] I would feel disappointed with myself and [learning] should be about building confidence not taking it away’ (Learner focus group, participant 15). Teachers also found that small aspects like having a ready-made template<sup>27</sup>, having more support sessions or having clearer or more definite instructions during the life of the project would have made it easier for teachers to keep using the methods (Interview 2, teacher 1). There was a feeling that you must be brave to try something new and this may be easier for those who have a permanent teaching contract as sometimes creativity is muffled by the fear of something going wrong (Interview 2, parent 1).

Many of these challenges were revealed in other studies in the literature review where it was noted that voice initiatives are not always introduced seamlessly, with students needing guidance, support, and training to introduce them successfully (Kristmanson *et al.* 2013; Lamb 2011). Ambitions like shared leadership and co-construction of knowledge are adult themes and it is wise to expect that they should be adult dominated when being introduced (Mitra 2006; Moorhead and Griffin 1998; Morrow 1999) with young people taking time to fully engage with them.

#### **5.2.4.3 The tensions of examinations, an overloaded curriculum, and a time-poor environment.**

*‘I think that time needs to be given to students to give them the chance to speak up during class [to create] more of a comfortable environment so the students don’t feel nervous speaking up to a teacher’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

Exams and curriculum overload were on teacher’s minds and there were expressions of concern regarding meeting learners’ needs (Interview 1 teachers 1, 7, 8, 13 and 15). Participants were concerned that eliciting learners’ voices in their classes may take up ‘too much time’ and there was a concern about veering ‘away from the work I am supposed to be doing’ (Interview 1, teacher 5). Teacher 13 was anxious that the elicitation of voices would take time and ‘as teachers we can’t fall behind or be a poem or a chapter behind [other teachers]’ (Interview 1, teacher 13) revealing a fear about what teachers, students or parents would perceive, should they be behind another class. There were also difficulties in timetabling as some teachers lost subject time to accommodate wellbeing hours<sup>28</sup>, some were playing catch-up due to time lost during the Covid-19 pandemic and this meant that time was precious and needed to be curriculum orientated rather than taking the time to ‘indulge’ in

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<sup>27</sup> Templates and support material were made available on the MS Teams site but the participant had not seen it. Support sessions were offered at lunchtime in the staffroom, but this participant was not able to attend.

<sup>28</sup> An initiative in post-primary schools where more time is given to Wellbeing.

these methods (Interview 1, teachers 5, 6, 9 and 12; Interview 1, senior leader 1). Teacher 8 spoke about their own experience saying:

‘The business of school life, the curriculum overload, my own subject has seen huge changes and the course is very long. That is presenting serious challenges in terms of student voice. There is just so much to get through’ (Interview 1, teacher 8).

Learners echoed what teachers said and noted that using these methods of voice elicitation did take time in a curriculum that has few moments for pause and reflection (Learner focus group, participant 16). Teacher 5 had the same concerns explaining ‘I want to include this but it can’t take time away from class to hear their voice’ (Interview 1, teacher 5). Likewise, teacher 7 had related reservations saying, ‘there is no room for this or any fun stuff as the course is too large’ (Interview 1, teacher 7) and teacher 13 declared that ‘time is where we are failing, there is just no time’ (Round table discussion, teacher 13).

Initiative overload lies in contrast to the constraints of the curriculum and new strategies can inhibit what teachers must cover for state examinations (Interview 1, teachers 6, 7 and 13). While there is a desire for teachers to try new things to improve practice there is also a pressure, demonstrated by teacher 10: ‘once you are teaching for a few weeks, there is a pressure to get things covered so innovative methods can go out the window’ (Interview 1, teacher 10). The disconnect between the policy of promoting the autonomous learner and the reality of being ‘strained by the curriculum’ was one difficulty experienced by teacher 7 (Interview 1, teacher 7).

It was acknowledged that it can be very difficult to try new things, to take a chance on something different because there are still courses to be covered and examinations to prepare for (Interview 2, senior leader 1; Interview 1, teachers 6, 7 and 8). Learners also explained that covering subjects can be ‘very fast moving’ and the focus is on ‘completing the course’ (Learner focus group, participant 15) where there is ‘*a lot* [voice emphasis] of information’ (Learner focus group, participant 16). Parent 1 explained that there are huge expectations on teachers, as under neoliberalism, teachers have been forced to become ‘performance-bots’ and it may not matter how creative something is, there is still a curriculum to cover where teachers are being ‘held to a very high standard’ (Interview 2, parent 1). Incorporating voices is difficult with the demands of the curriculum and the high expectations of interested parties (Fleming 2013). Teacher 10 reinforced this view focusing on the setting’s context: ‘our school is academic- [students] are looking for high grades so the focus is getting them ready

for the exam' (Interview 1, teacher 10). Teacher 6 felt that while the methods they used during the research project were valuable, 'sometimes you just have to get through a chapter and get something finished' (Round table discussion, teacher 6).

There have been many changes in the Irish educational system in recent years and one teacher stated that the length of courses presents a time challenge:

'Sometimes you don't want to shut down a conversation, but you've got to keep moving or they are not going to get through the course (Interview 1, teacher 8).

Teacher 7 concurred with these ideas saying that teachers can be constrained by the curriculum explaining that in their own subject:

'There is a very large area to cover and there is no real option for choice or variety and certainly no option for the learner to have freedom to cover some of the areas themselves (Interview 1, teacher 7).

Parent 1 understood that 'voice is vitally important for everything- wellbeing, learning and pedagogy' but 'it is difficult to fit it into' every class (Interview, parent 1). Teacher 8 mentioned that learners were 'more passive' in recent years and 'wondered if that was [due to a] pressure they felt particularly towards exam years' posing the question 'have they been disempowered?'. Teacher 8 further explained that students may present a 'polished', 'formulaic' answer which 'doesn't represent their own voice because they think that [answer] may do better, even if it doesn't represent their own views, because they don't want to take a chance' (Interview 1, teacher 8). The literature exposed that the findings in this section, focusing on the challenges presented in this study, are not unique. Excluding those who are preparing for examinations was a common trait in some studies (Chapple 2019; Fitzpatrick 2016; Fleming 2020; Smyth *et al.* 2011). Ireland places a high value on state examinations and with national media coverage, their high-status infiltrates into society, placing real pressure on teachers and diminishing the likelihood of voicework (Ball *et al.* 2012; Banks and Smyth 2015; Chapple 2019; Fitzpatrick 2016; Flynn 2013; McKeon 2020; Mitra 2004; Moynihan and Donovan 2021; Smyth 2016; Whetton 2009). Curriculum overload and lack of time were very real pressures experienced in this study as exposed in the literature review (Atweh and Burton 1995; Bovill *et al.*; Chapple and Raftery 2023; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007).

Despite these pressures, learners and teachers found that eliciting the voices of learners was time well spent (Learner focus group, participants 1, 3, 5, 9 and 16). One learner noted that ‘more time is needed in the classroom for questions to be asked’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). When asked directly about the time it took to elicit voices and how that time might infringe on the curriculum being covered, learners noted that some methods of eliciting voices could be time effective; learners offered ideas that were time savvy such as having a show of hands to facilitate negotiation or they could write a short reflection in class which only takes a few minutes (Learner focus group, participants 8 and 9). Teachers adapted tasks that were part of the curriculum to include an element of voice, ‘like when debating let the student decide the topic and, in that way, there is input from both sides’ (Interview 2, senior leader 1). Learners also noted that in their experiences voice elicitation methods like self-reflection on work, learner contract and reflections on voicework took place at home (Learner focus group, participants 3, 4 and 16; Interview 2, teacher 8). Learner 8 suggested that using the method of Learner Generated Questions ‘saved time in the long run’ because there was time to discuss the issue and this allayed many questions or queries learners had (Learner focus group, participant 8), similarly experienced by learner 12. Some teachers did not find that the methods ate into their class time: ‘it wasn’t extra work, it was just having a chat’ which was a ‘very natural, normal part of the classes’ (Interview 2, teacher 11). Learner 12 summed up many of the opinions reflected by learners: ‘I think that the positives [of using methods to elicit voices] overrule the negatives as overall [these methods] have been more helpful (Learner focus group, participant 12).

#### **5.2.4.4 The challenge of working after Covid-19 lockdowns.**

*‘Even though our curriculum hasn’t changed we are under pressure after the lockdowns. We might have fresh ideas that this might work or that might work, but after a few weeks we are under such pressure to catch up and get them ready for exams, it kinda goes out the window’*

*(Interview 1, teacher 10).*

Data collection for this study began in August 2021, almost 18 months after the first national lockdown in March 2020. While there were no further lockdowns during the project, challenges presented themselves that were related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers found that Covid-19 had ‘had an impact on the learners as they are more passive and less engaged, particularly in the junior years (Interview 1, teacher 8). Wearing face masks was protocol during the data collection period, and this posed a particular challenge: ‘it’s really an impediment- it’s stopping [students] from talking’ (Interview 1, teacher 8). Learners who:

‘take the chance, who may be a bit shy, and they take the step to try out a question or an opinion for the first time and [the teacher] can’t actually hear them, [...] it’s awful as it took a lot for them to get to that stage’ (Interview 1, teacher 8).

In questionnaire 1, teachers noted seeing ‘a huge difference since returning to school in September’ as students had missed face to face time in school from March 2020 to September 2020 and January 2021 to April 2021 (Questionnaire 1, anonymous teacher response). Teachers noted that students were ‘much quieter’, ‘less forthcoming with questions and opinions’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous teacher response) and had ‘lost confidence’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous senior leader response). Groupwork was restricted to comply with the one metre separation rule which left learners working at their own desks with teachers restricted too, as ‘even moving around the room is a hazard’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous teacher response). Another teacher explained: ‘the mask [was] hiding my face and the learners [could] not see that I [was] inviting them to speak with a smile’ (Round table discussion, teacher 12). Teachers were concerned that learners had lost time: ‘they are so far behind and they have missed so much’ (Round table discussion, teacher 9). Covid-19 brought significant challenges around eliciting of voicework and although it is a unique situation it deserves to be included to note the challenges that teachers faced during this time; a finding that is reflected in other studies (Clarke and Done 2021; Fotheringham *et al.* 2022; Sakiz 2021).

### 5.2.5 ‘What we think learners will do, and what they actually did’ (Interview 1, teacher 1).

*‘Using our voice has given an opportunity to give insight into the student’s view to show how they are with their learning’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

An anonymous learner in questionnaire 1 shows an understanding of the potential power of voice elicitation. It also shows the sharp focus that learners in this study had on improving learning experiences. At the beginning of this research, teachers were concerned about managing the expectations of the learners’ suggestions as learners may ask for things that are difficult to achieve, unrealistic or they may simply ask to play games instead of focusing on teaching and learning (Questionnaire 1, anonymous teacher responses). The literature review exposed the concerns of adults in various studies, who, like the teacher participants in this current research declared that the voices of young people can be unrealistic, inaccurate or have little educational merit (Amis 1971; Forde *et al.* 2018; Pedder and McIntyre 2006;

Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Teachers were concerned with managing the expectations of the learners in their classes saying that ‘they might have expectations that aren’t realistic’ (Interview 1, teacher 1) or ‘the learners might say something and there’s an expectation that you have to do it’ (Interview 1, teacher 5). Teacher 1 explained:

‘If [learners] suggested something that I didn’t feel that I could follow through with, like something I am not confident about or something I don’t believe in [...] I would hate them to think that we are not listening when we are just being realistic’ (Interview 1, teacher 1).

These views were mirrored in Questionnaire 1 with teachers saying that:

‘There is a concern that the suggestions/desires of the learners might not be possible to meet’ and that ‘learners may not be happy with the final decision if it doesn’t go their way and they might feel that their voice is not being listened to- it is, it’s just not possible’ (Questionnaire 1 anonymous teacher response).

One learner revealed high expectations from this study when they said: ‘I think we can just push further and change things in our class and in the school and eventually we will change the leaving cert.’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). Teachers perceived that some learners may have unrealistic expectations: ‘like they may request to go to the Globe theatre to see Othello and that just wouldn’t be feasible’ (Interview 1, teacher 1). This was echoed in teacher 12’s interview saying: ‘they may think that we are not hearing them but really we are just being realistic’ (Interview 1, teacher 12).

Learners too had the same opinion regarding themselves and their peers saying that some learners may not ‘take [elicitation of voices] seriously’ (Learner focus group, participant 1) and will only want to play things like Kahoot!<sup>29</sup> (Learner focus group, participant 4) and may ask for ‘less homework’ (Learner focus group, participants 11 and 16) or just ask for fun stuff (Learner focus group, participants 4 and 16) and ‘that’s actually not helpful to the teacher or for the class if all they want is fun stuff’ (Learner focus group, participant 4). Learner 11 raised a similar view: ‘if we are given the choice to do more or less work, we will go for a smaller amount [...] there might be a bit of conflict between what we need to learn and what we want to learn’ (Learner focus group, participant 11). Learner 16 agreed saying: ‘it might sound bad but we always ask to do Kahoot! [when learners are asked] we are not necessarily going to be like “put the foot down and do a bit more [work]”, we are going to take the chance to do less’ (Learner focus group, participant 16). These views that young people will

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<sup>29</sup> A digital game-based learning platform.

not take voice elicitation seriously or that they will have little of value to contribute were uncovered in the literature review (Burr 2015; Rudduck and Fielding; Skerritt *et al.* 2022).

While the perceptions of teachers and learners were that young people would not be constructive and would favour fun instead of work, the reality was that learners were focused on improvement and did not have unrealistic expectations. This PhD research found that learners asked for smaller, viable and worthwhile activities that were easily incorporated into classes and proved to be highly useful, as exemplified in the following quotations. In interview 2, teacher 1 was asked to reflect on the comments raised earlier in the project regarding learners having unrealistic expectations and responded saying ‘I totally disagree [about asking for games] they are keen as mustard. [My learners] are ambitious and want to do well’ (Interview 2, teacher 1). When speaking about the same issue, teacher 3 noted: ‘they never mentioned games, they have their heads screwed on’ (Round table discussion, teacher 3). Likewise, teacher 7’s class did not suggest games and noticed that they are ‘learners who want to achieve’ (Interview 1, teacher 7). This current research demonstrated that learners were attuned to improvement. Teacher 3 found that learners had a wide range of experiences of different learning methods and their knowledge was helpful in improving classes (Round table discussion, teacher 3). Participant teachers in the round table discussion revealed that learners gave constructive and valuable insights to their lessons showing great respect for their teachers and their peers. Teacher 1 expressed that they ‘found that learners asked for small things that were very easy to facilitate’ (Interview 2, teacher 1) and teacher 12’s experience was that learners offered constructive criticism in smaller ways explaining that learners:

‘found that writing long essays was really difficult and that if they had made an error in paragraph one, it continued throughout the essay. They asked if they would write a paragraph and get feedback on that before going forward. This is actually a much better way to work. The student has a far richer learning experience and I never thought to do it that way’ (Round table discussion, teacher 12).

In teacher 13’s experience, learners asked for tests to be moved to days where they weren’t just back from a match and for the format of tests to change ‘which was simply done’ (Round table discussion, teacher 13). In teacher 1’s experience, learners asked for group tasks, continuous assessment, and more analysis of sample answers: ‘all of these are achievable’ (Reflective journal entry November 15<sup>th</sup> 2021, teacher 1). Teacher 4 noted that they wanted more creativity in their learning; ‘they wanted to have more of a go writing creatively

themselves and I love that idea' (Round table discussion, teacher 4). In interview 1, teacher 1 expressed concern over a 'barrage of negativity' that she may be hit with, but later in the study, found that the feedback from learners was 'quite constructive', explaining that 'they know exactly what they need and they know what is already working' (Interviews 1 and 2, teacher 1). Learners in Questionnaire 1 noted that they are capable of 'respectful discussion' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response); an attribute that was identified in this research. Finally, teacher 1 noted that it takes 'bravery' but it seemed easier now 'having gone through it' (Interview 2, teacher 1).

### 5.2.6 Conclusion: Theme two: Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions.

*'I think that on the ground we find ourselves strained by the curriculum, it's very difficult to [engage in voicework] when we are bound by time and curriculum.'*

*(Interview 1, teacher 7).*

The opening quotation from teacher 7 sums up some of the tensions uncovered while engaging with voicework in this study. This section explored the many tensions and challenges that were exposed over the course of the study. These tensions were grounded in the threat of teachers receiving criticism from learners. Tensions were also found in relating to how students were listened to in the setting, including a latent theme of teachers feeling unheard in staff meetings and not being considered when students had an issue. The processes involved in eliciting voices were complicated. Teachers found that learners were over-reliant on teachers and were challenged by thinking for themselves. High-stakes summative state examinations pose a threat to creative initiatives and the challenges associated with the aftermath of the Covid-19 virus were discussed. Finally, this over-arching theme ended with a discussion of what teachers and learners perceived voicework to be, ranging from unrealistic and unfocused, to what it was, informative and constructive.

### 5.3 Theme 3: Making Space for Voices: Key Learnings from Lundy's (2007) model of child participation.

*'I liked taking part in this because it gives students a chance to talk in a safe environment without being afraid that you will be thought less of for saying out your thoughts.'*

*(Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

Lundy's (2012) checklist for participation identifies that spaces must be safe for young people to express themselves freely, in a variety of ways, to a listening audience who will take their views seriously and feedback to them on how their voices were used. The opening quotation from an anonymous learner in questionnaire 2, notes the importance of the safe environment and its link to voice elicitation. Theme three of this chapter uses Lundy's (2007) model of child participation to conceptualise the many learnings which took place in this research for teachers and learners from their perspectives. The section is sub-divided into four categories, representing the pillars of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation: space, voice, audience, and influence.

Firstly, the pillar space is discussed in terms of the findings on physical space and the reflections on the mechanisms that promoted embedding a culture of eliciting voices in the setting. Learners reflected on which subjects worked well in voice elicitation in their experiences in this research. This sub-section ends with an acknowledgement of the importance of positive relationships when creating safe spaces for young people to participate.

The next section, voice focuses on the elicitation of authentic voices. Participants in this study found that variety, choice, and anonymity are three key avenues to promote the amplification of authentic voices and have the greatest chance of including all voices. The sub-section ends with a discussion on the responsibility that learners have when invited to participate.

Following this, an analysis of findings as they relate to role of the audience is presented. Teachers provided the listening audience and the learnings in this section relate to the role this audience has in supporting voicework. This involves engaging openly and honestly with feedback, by engaging in respectful dialogue. This study found that there remains a gap between listening to voices and responding to voices.

The final section focuses on the influence that learners' voices had in this PhD study. Eliciting the voices of learners empowered change to practices in this setting which ranged from smaller, once off changes to large long-term transformations. Participants focused on mechanisms that would help voicework thrive in the future and deemed habit and collaboration to be two factors to encourage success in the future.

### 5.3.1 Space: Making space to elicit voices in the classroom.

*'I can use my voice to communicate with the teacher what works and what doesn't work for me'*  
(Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).

Learning can happen in different environments and this study was concerned with the physical learning environment and the mechanisms that were put in place to embed a culture of eliciting learner voices in the classroom (Boys 2011; Brown and Lippincott 2003; Kokko and Hirsto 2021; Massey 2005). In this section, data is presented relating to physical space for voice work. This is followed findings on the mechanisms that worked well in voice elicitation methods and the subjects they worked well in. This section details the importance of creating a safe space to empower learners to contribute (Haug 2017; Lundy 2012; Nind *et al.* 2022; MacBeath 1999). The section concludes with an analysis of the relationships which empowered learners to contribute and facilitated voicework to thrive.

#### 5.3.1.1 Physical Space.

*'We don't have any space in the school to showcase what initiatives took place. [Physical space] would give [work being done in school] more of a platform.'*

*(Interview 1, teacher 8)*

The lack of physical space in the setting was a challenging factor to eliciting the voices of learners, as identified by participating teachers (Interview 1, teachers 8 and 15). Teacher 8 explained that having a space to showcase work in a physical way would be appreciated: 'it would be lovely, at the end of a period of work, to bring in another group of students to listen to that work' (Interview 1, teacher 8). It was acknowledged that there are many activities that promote learners' voices, such as debating or class presentations but 'there is very little opportunity for inter-class activity' as there are no spaces to accommodate such numbers (Interview 1, teacher 8). Teacher 15 recognised that space can give value saying:

‘staff have a staffroom, there is a year head office, should there be a student council space or a student voice space? Because when you start giving it that kind of space it gives it value and it becomes a cultural thing’ (Interview 1, teacher 15).

Using the walls of the school as a display was identified as an important medium to convey student voices: ‘we have a [new] anti-bullying wall- that's really important because it is a visual representation of the student voice in the school’ (Interview 1, teacher 8). Voicework is not fixed to one physical space and can be acted on in any place (Cleveland 2009; D’Alessio 2012; Lupton 2009; Mulcahy *et al.* 2015). However, teachers noted<sup>30</sup> in the research that they felt confined by what they could achieve with limited physical space.

### **5.3.1.2 Mechanisms in place to enhance the voices of learners.**

*‘In our class we had a discussion on how we would like to approach the chapter before we started it’  
(Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

Various mechanisms were identified as present in the school that elicit the voices of learners in classrooms and these included debates, discussions, brainstorming, feedback and questionnaires (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learners’ responses), walking debates (Interview 1, teacher 1), 1 minute oral summaries, learners saying what they liked or didn’t like about the class, student-led class activities (Interview 1, teacher 2), digital methods such as QR polls and Mentimeter (Interview 1, teacher 16), and the green pen project<sup>31</sup> (Interview 1, teacher 8). However, a member from the Board of Management stated that they were ‘not aware of any’ method in place to listen to young people at the beginning of the study (Questionnaire 1, anonymous Board of Management response). One parent also had this view saying, ‘I am not aware of anything that is currently being done in the school in this regard’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous parent response). However, another parent noted that ‘there are student representatives that attend education meetings within the school and have meetings with the principal’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous parent response). One learner noted that ‘activities like debates increase confidence which encourages students to speak up and partake in class which helps with learning’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). Finally, the student council was noted as an effective mechanism for eliciting voices (Interview 1, teachers 5, 6, 11 and 16) where learners ‘can interact [with teachers] in an open way’ (Questionnaire 1 anonymous learner response). In Questionnaire 2, one learner noted:

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<sup>30</sup> This theme of physical space was not identified in the learner focus groups or learner questionnaires.

<sup>31</sup> A student reflection initiative where learners reflected on their work to enhance self-improvement using a green pen.

‘We have a fully functioning [student council] with everyone knowing who their class [representative] is and [there is a] meeting fortnightly. Maybe we should dedicate time to hear [peers’] voices in the class time’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).

This positive experience of the student council does not coincide with findings in existing research by Davey *et al.* (2010) and Lygo-Baker *et al.* (2019) which indicate that student councils fail to fully represent the lived experiences of youth participation. Teacher 1 raised a different view regarding the student council saying:

‘I know we have a student council and we ask students to be part of things in the school, but I don’t know that it is fed back to the whole staff. I wonder if [the student council] is a two-way dialogue because I feel that it is a very closed dialogue as no one knows what’s happening. It should be fed back to us (staff)’ (Interview 1, teacher 1).

Teacher 8 had a similar view saying, ‘while we have a very active student council, I don’t think we know enough about what they are doing’ (Interview 1, teacher 8). Teacher 1 and teacher 8’s views here raise questions regarding the openness of student councils and the practices of communication and collaboration, or lack thereof, between student council and staff members.

The observation cycle used in this study gathered quantitative and qualitative data on voices in the classroom. Table 5.2 shows the observation tally sheet with the number of ticks marking when each activity was noted in each of the five observations. A narrative summary was provided data on the context of the observations along with quotations from learners which are incorporated into this chapter.

**Table 5.2: Tally of Observation Activity.**

Name of activity	Observation Number					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Learner answering a question prompted by the teacher	12	4	21	20	12	69
Learner asking a question /commenting unprompted by the teacher	15	4	10	8	5	42
Praise/ Encouragement/Reward from teacher	10	3	18	17	10	58
Evident communication between teacher-learners or among learners	9	3	10	5	4	31
Learners engaging with task	12	10	10	5	4	41
Opportunity for learner involvement in decision making	8	8	6	2	2	26

The observation tally in table 5.4 shows that while there are mechanisms in place for voices to be heard, the teacher’s voice is dominant in the process. The highest number of voice interactions came from learners who were prompted to speak by the teacher. The lowest number of ticks were placed in the columns that were marked when learners had an opportunity to be involved in decision-making in the class. While the mechanisms are in place for learners to have a say in these observed lessons, their influence, as conceptualised in Lundy’s (2007) participation framework, were lowest. Certainly, when learners were asked questions directly, they responded well and there is evidence of learners contributing unprompted by teachers. Decision-making is a high-level voice activity which takes training and support to thrive (Blood and Thorsborne 2005; Bovill *et al.* 2010; Skerritt *et al.* 2021b). The literature also highlighted the chasm that can exist between hearing voices and advocating for those voices to have influence to improve outcomes for all (Davey *et al.* 2010; Markham and Aveyard 2003; Sinclair 2004; Treseder 1997; Vukovic 2020). It may indeed be that young people have voice, but only on the periphery rather than having genuine influence for decision-making (Forde *et al.* 2018; McIntyre 2000).

### 5.3.1.3 Subjects that worked well when eliciting voices.

*‘As students, we know the sorts of things that challenge us in different subjects and by being allowed to contribute to methods of learning we can alter things to our advantage like doing projects, group work, oral communication tasks and class presentations.’*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Learners reporting on the five methods of eliciting voices<sup>32</sup> utilised in this study reported on their experiences in different subjects. The opening quotation from an anonymous learner in questionnaire 1 exposes how students are experts in learning as they have experiences as learners for many years. In the learner focus groups, participant 2 said: ‘I thought it worked really well in [humanities and science subjects]’ (Learner focus group, participant 2). Participants 5 and 10 remarked that the methods of voice elicitation were beneficial in a science subject as there was time given to ‘[aid understanding]’ (Learner focus group, participant 10) and ‘time to ask questions’ (Learner focus group, participant 5). One learner noted that in one subject they were covering part of the curriculum ‘that made me feel uncomfortable and I was able to inform the teacher about it to feel more safe’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). Participant 15 in the learner focus group commented on the method’s use in [language] and found it beneficial as you ‘get to choose which novels to read’ and helps engagement (Learner focus group, participant 15). Learners 8 and 16 in the learner focus groups identified links with an increased interest in their classes noting that ‘there is room for discussion and giving your opinion on stuff that is happening in class’ (Learner focus group, participant 16) and that it was ‘being able to pick what is on the course’ (Learner focus group, participant 8). One Board of Management member stated that voice elicitation would be ‘essential [in] academic lessons’ but ‘[suspected that] the same does not occur in non-academic subjects’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous Board of Management response). In contrast, learner 4 explained:

‘I think it can work in any subject. If you want to make it work, it can work. Like in science, you could negotiate on experiments’ or in any other subject ‘you can reflect on teaching and learning’ (Learner focus group, participant 4).

Teacher 13 stated that ‘regardless of what your subject is [you are getting learners] to explore and analyse through using the student voice’ (Interview 1, teacher 13). It must be noted that

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<sup>32</sup> As a reminder the five methods used in this study were (i) Learner Generated Questions, (ii) Learner Contract, (iii) Reflection, (iv) Negotiated Curriculum and (v) Learner led Learning.

learners<sup>33</sup> had only one subject experience to comment on as each teacher chose one method to focus on in one class so the opportunity to compare methods was not realised over the life of the project.

#### **5.3.1.4 Positive relationships empower safe spaces.**

*'I feel safe to ask questions in the class' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

As suggested by Lundy's (2012) checklist for participation, a safe environment is the cornerstone of authentic voicework. Participants in this study deemed student-teacher relationships in the setting to be 'good [...] strong' (Interview 1, teacher 1) 'positive' (Interview 1, senior leader 1) and that they enabled 'discussion' (Interview 1, teacher 15). These positive relationships were important in creating safe spaces where learners could 'speak freely' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). One learner noted:

'I want to be given the opportunity to vocalise my opinion in a safe environment by having open conversations about the topics on hand' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).

Learners recognised the importance of 'good communication' and feeling 'safe [in class to ask questions]' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner responses); a key emphasis in Lundy's (2012) work. One learner stated, 'I think the best way [to have your voice heard] is to simply ask questions, and [not to be] afraid to do so' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response) which links the power of questioning with the freedom that occurs when a safe space exists. This view was emulated in another learner response saying 'Ná bíodh eagla ort rud a rá (don't be afraid to say something)' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). Phrases such as 'I can ask for help' or we have 'open communication' or '[I can] easily communicate' were common in the learner questionnaire with 28 similar learner responses in questionnaire 1 and 8 similar responses in learner questionnaire 2. In line with the constructivist paradigm of this study, learners noted that for voicework to thrive, student-teacher relationships needed to be positive as those relationships are beneficial for 'understanding' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). Learners were aware that when strong relationships exist, compromises can be reached by 'taking into account how [we] feel' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).

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<sup>33</sup> In a small number of cases, learners got to experience two methods in different subjects where senior students were mixed according to subject rather than class group.

Learners spoke positively about classes where they felt ‘comfortable’ (Learner focus group, participant 1 and 15; Questionnaire 1 and 2 anonymous learner responses) which can be made it easy when ‘asking questions or negotiating’ (Learner focus group, participant 1). Learners appreciated casual conversations with teachers where learners can be more open (Learner focus group, participants 2 and 5). Learners noted that it is ‘easier [to speak to a teacher in the senior years]’ as ‘you have a closer relationship’ with them (Learner focus group, participant 10 and 16). Learners also recognised that it was a personality trait explaining ‘some teachers are great listeners, especially my [language] teacher and my [humanities teacher]. This view was strengthened in the learner focus group and in questionnaire 1, with learners noting that it ‘depends’ on the teacher (Learner focus group, participant 3) as ‘some teachers like to stick to their own way, which can be frustrating as [it may not work and] the class is not engaged’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). This clash of personalities was also acknowledged with teachers saying that with some classes there were strong positive relationships where teachers ‘love teaching them’ (Interview 1, teacher 2) and it is easier in these classes to have a ‘good culture of open discussion’ (Interview 2, teacher 1). The importance of good trusting co-constructive relationships was summed up by teacher 11 who explained that positive relationships benefit the class and make ‘everyone work well’, a finding which is reported in existing research (Banks and Smith 2015; Cruddas and Haddock 2004; Flynn 2017; Levin 1994; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Simmons *et al.* 2015). Voicework thrives where student-teacher relationships are strong, as the process is dependent on trusting, respectful relationships between adults and young people.

Over the course of the study, participant teachers noted that student-teacher relationships were strengthened. Teachers observed that ‘just simply asking [learners] for their opinion on what works for them instead of [teachers] deciding, has enhanced relationships’ (Interview 1, teacher 3) and ‘[it changed] the atmosphere in the room’ (Round table discussion, teacher 2). These experiences coincided with those of teacher 15 who expressed ‘I respect their voice and they feel more involved’ (Interview 1, teacher 15). This finding indicates the strengthening of student-teacher relationships through voicework and concurs with the literature where respect and a sense of membership were featured (Flynn 2017; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Teacher 11 noted that negotiation which focused on tailoring assessments to suit the needs of learners, had nourished relationships with this once troublesome class; teacher 11 attributed this improvement to the negotiation process itself. Teacher 13 stated that:

‘as teachers we are interested in our learners progressing’ and ‘this [eliciting voices] has been rewarding for both me and the learners and our connections in the class’ (Round table discussion, teacher 13).

Similar sentiments were expressed by senior leader 1: ‘relationships have got stronger, but teachers have to let themselves to be more open to the whole area of student feedback and I think that is great for the school’ (Interview 2, senior leader 1); a testimony to the commitment of key actors involved in the research.

### 5.3.2 Voice: Empowering youth voices by offering variety, choice, and anonymity.

*‘Getting the chance to say what you want means [that you are] getting the most out of every situation’  
(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Learners in this study welcomed the opportunity for their voices to be heard saying that ‘being offered the opportunity to speak about my learning made it more enjoyable’ and ‘more involved’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner responses); an aspect of voicework seen in studies in the literature review (Noyes 2005; Shirley 2015). Learners correlated having an opportunity for voice with ‘solving difficulties’, ‘engaging more’, ‘[improving] learning’ and feeling ‘recognised’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner responses). Being listened to was important as teacher 4 recalled her own experience as a student:

‘I was a head girl in my final year-we had meetings with the then, principal and I’m not sure if change was ever implemented but in fairness, we were listened to and we were given the opportunity, I’m not sure whatever happened beyond that but we were certainly listened to’ (Interview 1, teacher 4).

The opportunity for dialogue is a significant part of voicework but there are aspects that need careful consideration such as providing variety and choice and using alternative strategies to elicit voices rather than public oral forums. The findings in this study align with findings in existing literature which show that some voices are heard more easily than others and offering a variety of mechanisms to hear a diverse range of voices, enables the most favourable conditions for voicework to thrive (Aldridge 2017; Davey *et al.* 2010; Flynn *et al.* 2012; Pearce and Wood 2019; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Silva and Rubin 2003; Weiler 1991).

### 5.3.2.1 Empowering learners by offering variety and choices.

*'When you think about it there are so many things that you could do in terms of approaches: group and pair work, including technology or even just ask the students how they want to be engaged with and they will have all of the ideas.'*

*(Interview 1, teacher 7).*

Teacher 7 in the opening quotation notes that there are many ways to elicit voices. Having a variety of methods to contribute their voices was a powerful enabler for authentic responses (Interview 2, teachers 1 and 16; Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). Teachers and learners recognised that different methods of voice elicitation would be suitable for different learners and different class groups (Interview 1, teachers 1 and 3; Round table discussion, teachers 4 and 6). Teacher 2 explained that one group 'were passive' and liked to 'consume [information] rather than engage' and speculated that learner contract may be the 'best fit' for this group as it allowed them to work on their own (Interview 1, teacher 2). Learners had a similar view to teacher 2, stating that they were aware of some learners were quieter and may prefer methods of voice elicitation that were not so 'public' (Learner focus group, participant 2). Parents too understood this need in learners to have different mechanisms to contribute saying 'it's difficult with younger learners as their confidence [to speak up in class] is low. You could find ways to engage and measure learning in a less public way' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). Learners recognised that offering a variety of methods was key in reaching learners with learner 9 saying it 'gives more people the opportunity to have their say' (Learner focus group, participant 9) which provides 'insight' for teachers (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). Parents noted that variety could only increase participation saying that 'activities could be mixed: online forms, quizzes' could be used to elicit voices' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous parent response). Participant teachers were aware that learners are not a homogenous group and that different methods of eliciting voice are required for different learners in different classes (Interview 2, teachers 15 and 16; Round table discussion, teachers 2 and 5). To address this, teachers adapted their teaching to differentiate and suit all learners.

Novel ways of eliciting voices were utilised in this study. One learner explained that their teacher invited learners to place questions on post-its 'which is not as difficult as asking a question or making a comment in class (Learner focus group, participant 3). Teachers used oral classroom discussion (Round table discussion, teachers 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12, 13), presentation (Round table discussion, teachers 5, 8), walking debate (Interview 1, teacher 12), student sample answers (Round table discussion, teachers 1, 4, 6 and 12), projecting work on a white

board (Round table discussion, teacher 6), peer learning (Round table discussion, teachers 4, 5 and 8), co-constructed answers where the teachers and learners improve upon an answer (Interview 2, teacher 1; Round table discussion, teacher 6), using online methods such as MS Forms (Round table discussion, teachers 4 and 12) or moving physically around the room to engage quieter learners (Observation notes, Observation 2). The variety in methods provides an excellent opportunity to ‘reach all learners’ (Interview 2, senior leader 1) especially quieter more reserved learners. Variety in voicework is inclusive and provides an opportunity to authentically represent the lived experiences of a diversity of learners (Arnot and Reay 2007; Davey *et al.* 2010).

Offering learners a variety of ways in which to participate was essential in achieving an authentic voice acoustic (Cruddas 2007). In speaking with senior leader 1 about how the school was currently engaging with student voices she mused:

‘certain students tend to take on roles – like student council [...] or may captain of a team [...] a particular type of student ends up in those roles [so] are we really hearing the student voice?’ (Interview 1, senior leader 1).

This view that a certain type of student is heard most often was evident in existing literature where it was revealed that some young people are naturally drawn to leadership roles in schools (Flynn *et al.* 2012; Maybin 2012; Silva and Rubin 2003). There are voices that are amplified in elicitation processes and voices that are silenced (Angus *et al.* 2013; Bernstein 1977; Bourdieu 1989; Bragg 2001; Butler *et al.* 2021; Brooker and MacDonald 1999; Clarke *et al.* 2011; Lygo-Baker *et al.* 2019; Taylor and Robinson 2009). Participating teachers discussed the importance of variety and noted that it was a key strength in our study. Teacher 14 explained that ‘we have had loads of different ways to let students have their say’ (Round table discussion, teacher 14) which gives a greater chance for authenticity. Teacher 4 had a similar view saying, ‘we have had a chance now to see that it really works to include [everyone ...] so we need to continue to diversify it’ (Round table discussion, teacher 4). This variety made it possible for the individual learning needs of learners to be tailored to them by their teachers (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007).

Some teachers involved The Negotiated Curriculum, offered learners a choice as a way for them to have their say. Learners noted that having choice in how or what they learned increased ‘productivity’ as learners decided the order of what they learned and ‘that has helped’ (Learner focus group, participant 15). In a learner focus group, participant 16 noted

that ‘when you have a little bit of control in something you are probably going to be a little bit more interested and invested in working on it than if you were just being told what to do’, echoing literature which indicates that choice through negotiation can empower learners (Edwards 2007; Francis 2008). Learner Generated Questions were also used to offer choices and facilitate negotiations as noted by teacher 11 (Interview 2) where the teacher offered choice in relation to when tests were scheduled and with teacher 1 (Interview 2), where choices resulted in the class revising sections that the class saw necessary.

### 5.3.2.2 Inclusion of all voices by eliciting anonymously.

*‘When you give your voice privately you have a chance to vocalise your opinions in a safe environment without being judged by your classmates.’*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

While oral methods of communication were appreciated as the class can ‘hear what others say’ (Learner focus group, participant 2), anonymous versions such as online forms or suggestion boxes were welcomed. Learners, as the anonymous learning in the opening quotation, may not wish to comment aloud (Learner focus group participants 1, 2 10, 11 and 16) saying:

‘I feel like we can orally give feedback but it would be nicer if it was an anonymous thing- people would be able to get more off their chests’ (Learner focus group, participant 16).

Learners highlighted that there may be a certain amount of confidence needed to speak to a teacher and welcomed anonymous methods to capture voice. Learners mentioned feeling ‘embarrassed’, ‘judged’, ‘shy’, ‘nervous’ and ‘afraid’ when it came to having their say (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner responses). One parent stated that they ‘often have to explain things at night [because their child] won’t ask a question in class’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous parent response). Participating teachers found that online anonymous processes of eliciting voices had a distinct advantage compared to an oral context you may ‘hear the same voice all of the time’ and the written version was ‘a winner for the quieter voices’ (Round table discussion, teacher 4). Giving learners ‘time to consider’ and an opportunity to answer privately gives a ‘fair chance’ for everyone to be involved (Interview 2, teacher 1); a finding bolstered by the literature review (Arnot *et al.* 2003). It also provided the benefit of being digitally ‘saved’ so that it ‘could be viewed at a later stage’, rather than oral, spontaneous methods of voice elicitation (Interview 2, teacher 1). As there are learners who are:

‘more vocal than others it was useful to put the form up on [Microsoft] teams and give them time to consider their replies. They can all answer privately which gives them time to chew on it and maybe they wouldn’t be happy saying things to my face’ (Reflective journal entry, December 2021, teacher 1).

While every participating teacher did not engage in anonymous methods of voice elicitation, anonymity was considered in the round table discussion where, working in tandem with variety and choice, and with time to consider responses, teachers acknowledged that anonymous voice elicitation provided a significant opportunity for gaining authentic responses. The anonymous MS Form method was one way in which teachers could give learners the time to carefully consider their answers, they could type, voice record, use scales or tick boxes and these ‘can be used for discussion points’ (Interview 2, teacher 1). The opportunity for individualised responses was regarded as a sound method for the inclusion of voices from a diverse range of respondents as the literature acknowledged (Clarke *et al.* 2011; Cruddas 2007; Felten *et al.* 2013; Flynn *et al.* 2012; Flynn 2017; Weis and Fine 1993).

### 5.3.2.3 The responsibility for learners.

*‘Má tá ceist agat chuir ceist, nó deir do thuairim faoi rudaí’*

*(If you have a question, ask it, or give your opinion on things)*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Participating learners understood that having opportunities to engage in voice elicitation methods was one part the process. Learners, like the anonymous learner in the opening quotation, were astutely aware that the onus was on them to take the opportunities when they are invited to it (Learner focus group, participants 6, 11 and 14) as it was expressed by one student: ‘staying silent doesn't benefit anyone’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). Learners recognised that they do have ‘to speak up and engage in those conversations’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response) because ‘by being allowed to contribute to [teaching methods] we can alter them to our advantage’ and ‘be included’, ‘have a say in how we learn’ and ‘get the most out of [learning] situations (Questionnaire 1 anonymous learner response). Learners acknowledged that they need to ‘speak up when you need a change’ because ‘it’s beneficial for others as well as yourself’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). Another learner noted that ‘we have to speak up about what troubles we have and we need to come up with ideas that could help those situations’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). These responses reflect an important theme

featured in the literature review and in Freire's (1970) work *Pedagogy of the oppressed*; eliciting voices provides a prefigurative democratic experience where each person has a responsibility to act and realise their own role in change (Bovill *et al.* 2011; Shirley 2015; Yonezawa *et al.* 2009).

This responsible action was noted by teachers too who, before the project began may have been sceptical about the value that learners may bring to the learning environment (Interview 1, teachers 1, 6 and 11) but were pleasantly surprised with the maturity of learners when they were involved in consultation. Learners were 'well able to have a say' (Interview 2, teacher 11) and 'contributed thoughtfully' (Interview 2, teacher 12) and 'had great ideas' (Round table discussion, teacher 14); such student agency and competency in participating and contributing to decision making was reported in the literature (Abdalla *et al.* 2020; Bragg 2001; Fielding 2004; Oakley 1994; Rogers 2012).

### 5.3.3 Audience: The role of the audience in authentic voicework.

*'I like being able to vocalise what I need to help me achieve my goals. I can vocalise questions so that I am heard by those in charge' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Being 'heard by those in charge' as the anonymous learner notes in the opening quotation is a key part of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). The third pillar of Lundy's (2007) model is the listening audience, who in this study were teachers. Participants' responses indicated that for voicework to thrive it was essential to have an attentive audience; mirroring Lundy's (2007) model of child participation. Participants in this study, recognised that listening to young people is important, but authentic voicework that enables young people to have influence over matters that are of concern to them, is not achieved with that one act in isolation. Lundy (2007) emphasises that voice is not enough; it is the response to the voices, the acknowledgement of the expertise of those voices, the consequent actions taken and the influence exerted. The findings in this study and those in existing literature highlight the gap between listening to what learners are saying and acting on the decisions made (Angus *et al.* 2013; Cook-Sather 2006b; Flynn 2014; Holdsworth 2000; Lodge 2005; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007).

Participating teachers in this research were given information on the importance of feedback and models of how to give feedback effectively in hard copy and on the MS Teams site (Appendix XLIX). Best practice indicates that when engaging in effective feedback, it is important for adults to demonstrate to young people whose voices have been elicited, how

their voices have made an impact and what changes will or will not take place (DCEDIY 2021; Lundy 2007). In this sub-theme, the findings in this study regarding the role of the teacher in supporting voicework, how learners understand feedback, dealing with negative feedback, the importance of dialogue, acting on feedback and the gap that exists between listening and being heard are discussed.

### **5.3.3.1 The role of the teacher in supporting voicework.**

*'I want to have a say in how I learn. For example, when a teacher is discussing when an exam should be, they should allow the students to also be included in that discussion.'*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Participants reported that the role of the teacher in initiating discussion and scaffolding voicework was integral to the success of the research project; this aligns with Vygotsky's (1934) socio-cultural theory of cognitive development. Teachers volunteered to engage with one method of eliciting voices at least three times. Many teachers in this study utilised voice elicitation in their classes more than the obligatory three times saying, 'I found myself coming back to it more [...] it was an evolving conversation (Interview 2, teacher 1); 'It just seemed to be part of the class life after a while' (Interview 2, teacher 11) showing a clear dedication to the support needed to embed the process. Similarly, teacher 3 stated that dialogue should be part of every classroom: 'if we are working with these learners, shouldn't we be having these conversations with them?' (Interview 1, teacher 3), a sentiment supported by the literature (Neilson and Arber 2018) and in Freire's work (1973) which promotes the importance of dialogue in education for critical consciousness. A supportive mechanism which was found to be effective was when teachers 2, 3 and 10 moved physically in the classroom as it gave learners the opportunity to have their say as the teacher was next to them and they did not outwardly seek attention (Observation notes from a science class, a language class, and a creative arts class). Teachers showed their knowledge of individual classes by choosing methods of voice elicitation that suited, such as teacher 1 focusing on learner contract as the group were quieter and 'it suited their personalities' and would still 'allow them to have their say' (Interview 2, teacher 1). Learners, like the anonymous learner in the opening comment of this sub-section, identified that as the recipients of education they have a right to be included in 'decisions' in the class (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). The commitment of teachers during this study, and after the life of the research has made a deep impact in embedding the culture of voice elicitation in the setting. Without this continued and sustained support, opportunities would not be created for learners to have their

voices heard or have the confidence and safety to participate in a supportive environment, a finding evident in the literature review (Angus 2006; Bath 2013; Fielding 2004; Lodge 2005; Lundy 2012; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Sonn *et al.* 2011). The finding here contributes to the literature which indicates that the role of the teacher in creating environments that are inclusive and are characterised by trust, cannot be understated as it has a large impact on embedding the culture of the school (Ainscow and Sandill 2010; Fielding and Bragg 2004; Fullan 2002; Kehoe 2015; Kruse and Lewis 2009; Pearce and Wood 2019; MacBeath *et al.* 2003; Minow and Garland 1991).

### **5.3.3.2 Feedback from a learner's perspective.**

*'Every teacher must give the class time to give feedback and they must let us say what we want and they should just listen' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

Participating learners had a clear idea of what feedback meant to them explaining that it is 'telling the teacher what you think and them taking it on board', 'making a change', 'being listened to instead of just being forgotten about', 'taking suggestions into account and not being dismissed' and being 'updated on what has happened to our suggestions' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). One learner recognised that some teaching methods and styles may not always work and suggested that 'teachers might need to step out of their comfort zone and try new things to see if they are effective' (Questionnaire 1 anonymous learner response). Learners recognised that they have a unique perspective of 'the school problems that we have come across' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response) and this perspective had the ability to improve and influence teaching (Interview 1, teacher 10). Learners expressed the importance of feedback with participant 1 in the learner focus group saying that if a teacher 'doesn't go through with something, they might have a good reason' but if this reason is not communicated then the 'learners might feel like they are not being listened to' (Learner focus group, participant 1). Learners 5 and 6 noted the importance of dialogue, even if it was to 'explain why something [did or did not] happen (Learner focus group, participants 5 and 16). It was clear from these reflections from learners that they were very aware that it wasn't a case of *what we say goes* and understood that there may be valid reasons as to why something is or is not changed. These sentiments are clear in Freire's (1970) work where the processes of democratic and dialogic actions are integral to meaningful education.

### 5.3.3.3 The difficulties in conveying negative feedback.

*‘Teachers should be open to all feedback. It’s not all unnecessary or harsh comments, we could even just talk about aspects of their teaching that we really enjoy to keep it positive’*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Participant learners in this study noted that it would be difficult to give feedback directly to teachers in a live, oral class discussion. Learners spoke about not wanting to get ‘on the teacher’s bad side’ (Learner focus group, participant 6) and they were aware that some feedback may be perceived to ‘be hurtful’ to teachers (Learner focus group, participant 1). The learner’s voice used in the opening quotation suggests that it does not have to be a negative experience if teachers only focus on the positives in class and promote them (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). One learner conveyed a system where, in the past they nominated a class representative to speak to the teacher and ‘if we ever have a problem, we go to her and ask her to tell the teacher’; a system which has worked well for the class group as there is an element of anonymity about it (Learner focus group, participant 2). A similar response was noted by a learner in questionnaire 2 saying that there should be ‘a designated student from each class to represent the students and voice their opinions in order to listen to the students’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). From the same questionnaire, a learner suggested that there should be ‘a student voice meeting where the classes speak up about their experiences and opinions and the teachers listen’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner responses). Other learners felt that anonymity was key, as discussed earlier in this chapter in sub-section 5.3.2.2 as they would ‘feel comfortable’ if it ‘was anonymous’ (Learner focus group, participants 1 and 4). In interview 1 with a member of the school leadership team, supports were discussed that would help and guide teachers as they were ‘opening themselves up’ to ‘feedback from learners’ (Interview 1, senior leader 1). This support was provided through informal professional learning conversations which were established after interview 1, opportunities to member check, as well as information given to teacher participants and posted on the MS Teams site (Appendix XLIX). Participants in this study noted that if voice elicitation questions are framed in a way that learners can comment on ‘what works for them’ (Interview 1, senior leader 1) or what ‘[teaching methods] they like’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response) and not on individual practices, there is ‘less chance of feelings getting hurt’ (Interview 2, teacher 1) and more chance of constructive feedback. It was acknowledged that teachers give feedback to learners on everything from ‘their spelling to their maths ability or science or whatever, [students] are always getting feedback from [teachers]’ and this process of elicitation of voices would allow students to

have their say (Interview 1, teacher 12). Senior leader 1 mused about accessing CPD and said that ‘lately there is an opportunity to give feedback to [course coordinators], to say this worked well or this didn’t work well’ (Interview 1, senior leader 1). Senior leader 1 went on to explain that this is ‘not a personal affront’ to the person who is delivering the course, ‘it is constructive’ and helps others in the future (Interview 1, senior leader 1). The literature exposed that providing young people with the time to respond and a variety in the methods they can respond in, will increase the insights received (Checkoway 2011; Fielding 2011; Kirby and Bryson 2002 cited in Holdsworth *et al* 2007; Minton 2008; Nind 2022; Zilli *et al.* 2020). When inviting young people to respond, no pressure should be placed on young people as they have a right to participate or not to participate (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Children’s Rights International Network 2010).

#### **5.3.3.4 The importance of dialogue in empowering voices.**

*‘I like being able to give my opinion and having it listened to definitely.’*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

Once learners had participated in discussion, there was an onus on the teacher participants in this study to open a dialogue and explain why something was changed or was not changed. If a new style has been adapted due to the influence of voices it should be highlighted so young people know that their voices have had influence (Arnot and Reay 2007; Checkoway 2011; Daniels *et al.* 2001; Fielding 2011; Fitzpatrick 2016; Kristmanson *et al.* 2013; Lodge 2005; MacBeath 2000; Mitra 2018, Riley 1998; Rudduck *et al.* 2006; Skolverket 2011). In the round table discussion and semi-structured interviews with teachers and in the learner focus groups, participants noted that dialogue was essential in the elicitation process (DCEDIY 2021; Lundy 2018). Senior leader 1 confirmed that learners are often asked in school questionnaires, to give the opinions on matters that affect them but, in the past, there was no thought given to ‘re-connect with students to inform them of what decisions took place’ and ‘why those decisions’ took place (Interview 2, senior leader 1). For dialogue to be initiated and developed solid relationships and ‘confidence’ in one’s teaching are important (Interview 1, teacher 3). In effective dialogue, teachers need to be aware that they do not have to change everything (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007) but they do need to let their learners know that they have genuinely been listened to (Holdsworth 2014; Simmons *et al.* 2015). Dialogue can offer opportunities too to have a better connection with the curriculum (Freire 1973; Hoy and Hoy 2006) and it helps to provide knowledge on what type of education best suits the learners (Fullan 1992) even if small changes and tweaks are made to accommodate this.

This study found that teachers wanted to authentically act on the feedback given by learners. Senior leader 1's view that the purpose of eliciting the voices of learners in schools was much more than to transfer 'a list for adults to fix', but it is an opportunity to discuss pathways forward to improve together (Interview 1, senior leader 1). This was explained further:

'As adults we can see the rationale for the decision even if it is not what we wanted or whatever, but we buy in as part of the decision making and reflection process' (Member checking stage 1, senior leader 1).

One teacher's response from questionnaire 1, highlighted that while teachers are good at listening to learners, 'we may not be the best at acting on discoveries' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous teacher response). The response propelled conversation topics later in the study because if teachers are willing to listen, but not willing to change, the loop of dialogue has been broken and no action can take place. Freire (1973) teaches us that education is not simply about understanding, it must lead to action that can change for improvement. This sentiment was found from learners' perspectives with one learner saying: 'a lot of people listen to what we say but I feel nothing becomes of it' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). Another learner said 'we need to be able to communicate with teachers so that they can understand what can be done to help learners' (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). One learner articulated that when feedback from learners is given, it is because it is 'genuine' as 'certain ways of teaching [are] stressful and may not work' and if the teacher and class worked together constructively, they could help everyone 'adapt' (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).

Teachers noted that they 'don't always have to act on everything [learners] say; 'it's about trial and error' (Round table discussion, teacher 12) and 'tweaking things to suit everyone' (Round table discussion, teacher 6). Senior leader 1 concurred with the ideas saying that dialogue is:

'about having talks with learners when they are bringing something forward that we may not agree with or that we are not able to invest in [...] and to be open and honest with learners if something can't happen for whatever reason' (Interview 2, senior leader 1).

This sentiment was raised again with teacher 15 when they engaged with the member checking stage and mused:

‘what is the student voice? - it’s more than listing off issues and expecting that by listing them, the students get what they want - this should be a key learning experience going forward- let’s express our voice/opinion/ideas and know that by just expressing them, that isn’t the end goal, we should know that that is the first step in a discussion process’ (Member checking stage, teacher 15).

The findings presented here contribute to the literature which identifies the themes of dialogue and discussion as significant in offering an alternative and valid perspective to adapt and improve practices (Arnot and Reay 2007; DES 2022; Freire 1973; Lodge 2005; MacBeath 2000; Riley 1998; Rudduck *et al.* 2006).

### **5.3.3.5 The gap between being listened to and being heard.**

*‘I like being able to suggest things to the teacher when you know it will be taken into consideration’  
(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

This research found that listening to young people and responding to them are two different things; knowing things will be ‘taken into consideration’ is an equally important part of voicework (Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response). Voicework implies that there is a listener, that someone in power can potentially respond and facilitate change (Lundy 2007; Noyes 2005). The gap between being listened to and being heard was a topic discussed at various data collection stages. A key consideration in this study was that the elicitation of voices was not tokenistic; that the voices of learners led to actions being put into place (Freire 1973). To find evidence of action, discussions took place at the round table discussion with teachers, at the learner focus groups with learners, in the second round of semi-structured interviews and questions were asked in Questionnaire 2. Teacher 1 acknowledged that sometimes in the school, elicitation of voices was merely a ‘box-ticking exercise’ and that they rarely saw things acted upon and feared that voices in the past just went ‘into another bubble’ (Interview 1, teacher 1). Teacher 4 expressed that teachers are ‘great for listening [they are] not always focused’ on changes that may need to occur or that they are the vital link that can make change happen (Interview 1, teacher 4). The gap between listening and hearing could be filled by ‘providing the rationale behind decisions’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous teacher response) or making the time to discuss and ‘keep up [teacher’s] end of the bargain’ by ‘trying out new things’ (Learner focus group, participant 3) and ‘saying if it isn’t working’ (Interview 2, teacher 11). The need for action as outlined in existing literature (DCEDIY 2021; Lundy 2018) was summed up by a learner in the learner focus group explaining that:

‘it’s a matter of action or words... [Are teachers] going to implement what we ask’ or are they going to ‘keep doing the same thing?’ (Learner focus group, participant 9).

However, ‘it is difficult to recognise and validate how learners are feeling about something’ and ‘respond in a way that suits all learners’ (Interview 1, senior leader 1). Teacher 4 acknowledged that while many teachers may be very open to listening to what their learners have to say, they may not be connecting that with the ‘change that may need to happen’ (Interview 1, teacher 4). Teacher 4 put forward the idea that the actions of listening and responding could be linked to confidence in teaching saying: ‘if you are secure in your subject, you are open to listening to learners and learners are open to listening to you’ (Interview 1, teacher 4). Teacher 4 continued by saying that teachers need to be ‘open minded to take on feedback’; accepting this feedback may depend on the ‘relationship with the learners’ that is already in place (Interview 1, teacher 3). However, these actions are ‘not the norm in the Irish system for students to give feedback to teachers’ (Interview 1, senior leader 1). This finding indicates the ambition of this current study in bridging the gap between listening and responding to show that voices had influence. While it may not be the norm, key actors moved to make changes collaboratively in incremental ways as was evident in existing literature (Balakrishnan and Clairbone 2017; Fielding 2004; Fitzgerald *et al.* 2021; Gray *et al.* 1999; MacBeath 2007; Mitra 2003). It is not a quick fix, but a gradual, evolving process that takes commitment and time to embed (Bovill *et al.* 2010; Hart 1992).

#### 5.3.4 Influence: How voices showed influence in this study.

*‘I liked being allowed to have a more prominent opinion on the amount of work I was set and [its effects] on the student’s mental health and then have changes made based on my views’*

*(Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

Having ‘changes made based’ on the views of learners as the opening quotation suggests, was a key factor in this study (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). Over the life of this study, real change occurred. These changes ranged widely from small adjustments to practice to monumental changes in how teaching and learning occur. The rationale for this research was to improve teaching and learning and an abundance of changes were witnessed and experienced by teachers and learners as the next section exposes. One of the key learnings from this study was that voice elicitation must be habitual with dedicated actors committed to

the practice. In addition to it being habitual, collaboration was identified as a core aspect in embedding a culture of eliciting voices.

#### **5.3.4.1 Eliciting voices empowered change.**

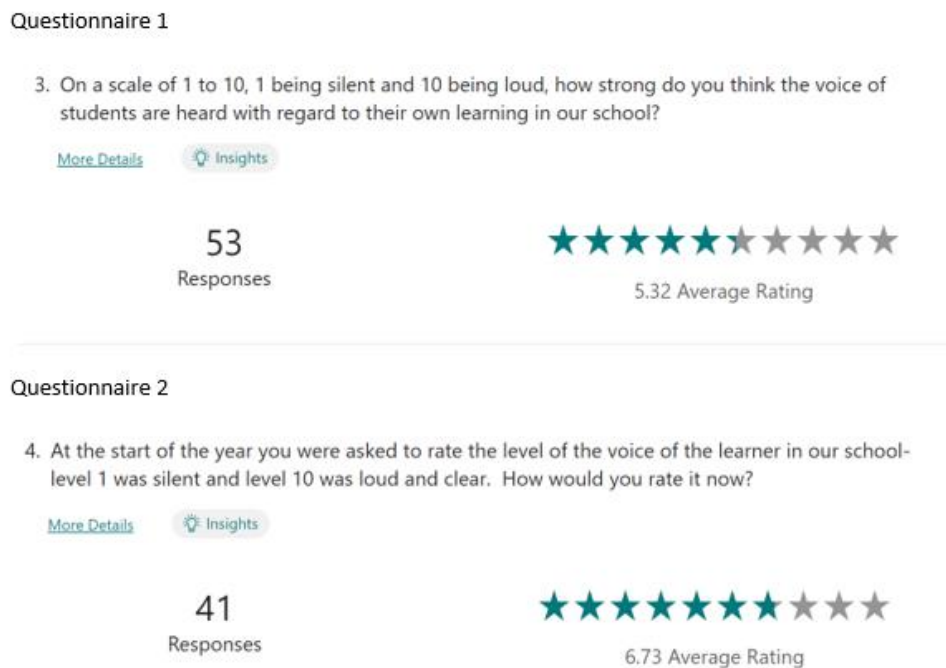
*‘Our school is now taking more time to let students give their opinions on how the school curriculum is going and how the school is functioning’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

While some teachers had been apprehensive before the project began, at the end of the project, when reflecting on their experiences, they found it ‘constructive’ and helpful once you take the brave step and ask: ‘can you tell me how I can help you?’ (Interview 2, teacher 1). Changes took different forms and ranged from small tweaks to larger changes. Before data collection began, teachers were questioned about what they thought eliciting the voices of learners would bring to their practice and teachers perceived that taking part in the study would improve their practice (Interview 1, teachers 1, 3, 6 and 12). There were four references to improving teaching practice in Questionnaire 1 with teachers expanding by writing: ‘I feel this project will help me to reflect on my own teaching practice and the role learners have in their own learning in my classes’ and ‘it will be nice to refresh my approach to delivering lessons’ and ‘it will be good if there are little adjustments we can make that will have positive impact on teaching’ (Questionnaire 1, anonymous teacher responses). The ‘main thrust’ for teacher 12 was to be ‘the most effective teacher as I can’ (Interview 1, teacher 12) while teacher 5 noted: ‘I am always interested in anything that is going to develop education or increase student engagement and this project will do both’ (Interview 1, teacher 5).

Later, as the project was underway, teacher 10 noted that taking part in the study allowed ‘time for reflection on [their] practice’ (Round table discussion, teacher 10) and ‘time for professional conversations which may not necessarily happen in the normal course of teaching life’ (Interview 2, teacher 1). In the round table discussion, when reflecting on the benefits of participation in the study, teachers said that they would continue to use these methods in the future (Round table discussion, teachers 3, 5, 6, and 11) because ‘when it works well, it works really well’ (Round table discussion, teacher 5). While the focus of this study was the elicitation of the voices of learners, a welcome by-product was the opportunity it offered to teachers to investigate and improve practice (Friend and Caruthers 2015).

In questionnaires 1 and 2 participant learners were tasked with rating the level of learners’ voices in the setting. Figure 5.3 presents a screenshot from the two questionnaires,

demonstrates the increase in the perceptions of learners of their voices within the school at the beginning (September 2021) and at the end (May 2022) of the research.



**Figure 5.3 Comparison of learners' responses in questionnaires 1 and 2.**

The first rating of 5.32 taken in September 2021 and the second taken at the end of the study, in May 2022 learners rated their level of voice influence as 6.73. A t-test was undertaken to determine if the difference between the mean scores of two groups was significant. Placing the two paired data sets (PRE = 53 responses {P24}, average 5.73 {Q24}) and (POST = 42 responses {P25}, average 6.73 {Q25}), a T-test was carried out using MS Excel. The formula used was two tailed (2) and paired (1):

$$=T.Test (P24:Q24, P25, 2,1)$$

This test gave a result: 0.574461398 suggesting that the change is insignificant. This result does not concur with the qualitative findings which the descriptive findings demonstrate. In this research, the qualitative findings, which reported more of an impact, provide rich description of the experiences and changes that occurred, more than what the quantitative data presents here.

Many of the changes, captured by the qualitative data, that occurred over the life of the study were small. Teacher 12 used Learner Led Learning to change class seating plans based on

feedback. Teachers 3 focused on Learner Generated Questions by adding questions to their class structure and found that this enhanced their lessons. Teacher 3 expanded on this saying:

‘I was just asking them their opinion on what works best for them and [...] it has enhanced the relationship with the students because they are using [learner generated questions] and they are giving their opinions and as you respect their voice, they respect you for respecting them’ (Interview 1, teacher 3).

Teacher 6 used Learner Generated Questions by pairing learners and challenging them to answer or research one another’s questions. In teacher 14’s classes, learners self-reflected on tests and made judgements on their progress by marking from a teacher led marking scheme. Teacher 14 found that this connected the learners with the work they had done in a far more meaningful way that if teacher 14 had corrected it and returned it to the learners. Teachers 11 and 15 used The Negotiated Curriculum to decide with the class on topics that would be covered in a term in school. Teacher 8 used learner self-reflection to create a success criteria for their next assignment. Teacher 8 noted that this was ‘new to me but it helped make the lesson valuable’ (Round table discussion, teacher 8). Teacher 1 decided to use a group-based voice activity where:

‘I [opened] a word document and [projected] it on the board. I [wrote] the first sentence and they [contributed] and we [wrote] the answer together; someone [needed] to be hitting me with what sentence [came] next. Sometimes I [said], I don’t like that word and another student [would] build on it. It’s very enjoyable and it’s good for learning’ (Interview 2, teacher 1).

This activity used by teacher 1 stemmed from a Learner Led Learning session where learners suggested working together to complete an assignment, mirroring evidence in existing literature promoting active, collaborative learning (Rudduck and Flutter 2000, 2004; Fletcher 2005; Fielding 2001; Vygotsky 1934; 1963).

Teachers noted that variety was linked to differentiation with teacher 12 stating that they, ‘found through communicating with [learners] that they learn in varied ways’ (Interview 2, teacher 12). Engaging in methods of voice elicitation identified some issues that were ‘unclear’ to learners (Interview 2, teacher 1). Teachers 5, 17 and 12 used Learner Led Learning in oral class discussion and found it useful to understand the needs of the class regarding revision. Teacher 2 and teacher 9 used learner contract and diversified it so that it introduced discussion about revision and study. Teacher 2 placed the class in pairs so that the

learners could work together on contracts to help each other revise. Teacher 3 found that using Learner generated questions at the beginning of the class, helped to focus the lesson and cover any areas that had been missed; a new method of instruction for teacher 3. Teacher 1 found that after taking on board feedback from learners, she used different assessments and found them ‘worthy’ and ‘easier to correct’ (Interview 2, teacher 1). Teacher 6 had a similar experience and by breaking down questions, as her class had requested, it ‘enhanced the teaching and the learning experience’ (Round table discussion, teacher 6).

Eliciting voices encouraged classroom discussion (Interview 1, teachers 3, 5, 6 and 8). In this study, classroom discussions which spurred from the elicitation of voices ranged from the way tests may be completed (Interview 2, teacher 11) to the format of the test or the day a test might be on to suit their schedule (Round table discussion, teacher 13). Teacher 13 explained that the learners had alerted her to the fact that the last two tests were on a Thursday which was not a good day for them; it was a fact that Teacher 13 had not realised until entering into a dialogue with them (Round table discussion, teacher 13). This experience was also mentioned by a learner saying that they could use their voice to:

‘let teachers know if we are really busy in other subjects for example if we have tests in other subjects on the same day that they (teachers) want to give us a test’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).

Another learner explained that through dialogue ‘we were allowed to manage our learning and choose what nights to learn heavier material’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). Discussions with learners altered the order in which items were covered to suit learners wishes before their exams; ‘they are not dictating everything that is happening, it’s a negotiation’ and it will be covered anyway (Interview 2 teacher 2). In the literature review studies suggested that schools had to find creative ways in which to elicit and incorporate the voices of learners (Lundy 2007; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007) and in this study a plethora of mechanisms were found to include and empower learners.

While these changes were valuable, there were several larger changes that transformed teaching and learning in the setting which have the potential to carry on beyond the life of the project. Teacher 12 created a display space in their classroom which had three columns labelled (i) what is working well? (ii) what could we do more of or do differently to help you learn and (iii) what changes have we made? Teacher 12 explained that originally the first two columns were the only ones on display, but it was important to show that the learners’ voices

had influence and changes took place. Teacher 12 has incorporated these questions into every class and regularly updates the display to demonstrate what changes were made. Teacher 6 found that learner generated questions were a valid part of the lesson and has since included it in their everyday practice. After participating in this study and reflecting on how learners' voices were elicited in the past and how they were not fed back to, senior leader 1 has committed to making a conscious effort in the future to inform learners how their voices were used and what changes were made (Interview 2, senior leader 1). Teacher 15 changed their practices after understanding the importance of variety because there is 'a certain percentage who like notes, a certain percent who like group-work and a certain percent like other types of methodologies, so if I mix it up over the course of a couple of months, I'm going to hit everybody' (Interview 1, teacher 15). Like teacher 15, teacher 12's lessons now include different ways in which learners could contribute rather than focus solely on written work (Interview 2, teacher 12). Methods including audio recording, comic strip, sketch notes and presentation have all been introduced to the class and this has been transformational for 'students as well as for corrections' (Interview 2, teacher 12). Inspired by other teachers from the professional learning conversations, teacher 2 used voice elicitation as the focus of creative arts lessons, where the ideas were fully learner led to create a unique piece of work; a technique they have continued to use after the completion of the study. As the academic year progressed, teacher 4 tweaked the self-reflection sessions to model upgrading answers in the classroom where learners reflected on what had merit in their work and added it digitally to create a collaboratively produce a model answer. Likewise, teacher 3 adapted Learner Generated Questions and introduced a Padlet and online notebook where questions posed could be answered by learners collaboratively, a cornerstone of Vygotsky's (1934) socio-cultural cognitive theory. Inspired by the testimony of other teachers in the informal learning conversations, teacher 4 decided to try 'The Negotiated Curriculum' and facilitated the class in exploring a topic of interest to them. The class decided to focus on the environment and a Green Schools Committee which had become dormant during Covid-19, was revitalised, and is running once more.

Taking part in the project was a positive force in developing teaching practice:

'I think it is easy to become stagnant in this job and being involved in this project has kept my teaching fresh [...] I have already begun to modify my lesson plans according to [the learners' suggestions]' (Reflective journal entry November 13<sup>th</sup> 2021, teacher 1).

Elicitation of voices also encouraged a ‘culture of listening’ (Interview 2, teacher 15) which was reflected on in the round table discussion and teacher 8 noted ‘if you want to hear someone, you have to listen as well’ and this listening has ‘changed how I teach’ (Round table discussion, teacher 8). Teacher 1 found that using the Learner Led Learning method through an anonymous MS Form was the most effective way to receive authentic feedback from the learners. Teacher 1 will continue to use this method ‘at the end of a term or after completing a scheme of work’ (Interview 2, teacher 1). These responses concur with the information in the literature review highlighting that consulting with learners and listening to their voices can have a transformative effect on teaching and learning (Cook-Sather 2007; Lodge 2005; Mitra 2008). The findings also show that teachers had the opportunity to transform their practices by taking action to amend and add new ideas (Baroutsis *et al.* 2016; Fielding and McGregor 2005; Freire 1973; Parr and Hawe 2020).

#### **5.3.4.2 It must be habitual to survive.**

*‘Teachers just have to keep their word on this and not just let it be a once off thing.’*

*(Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response).*

‘For this to survive, it has to become common practice’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous teacher response). These words summed up a common view that this culture of taking the learners’ perspectives into account must be habitual to continue to thrive and increase. In relation to voicework being habitual, MacBeath (1999, p.105) argues that changes in practices must come from within the organisation yet be ‘supported from the outside’. Changes in this study came from the voices of learners within the organisation and were supported by both teachers and senior leaders, somewhat on the outside of the learners’ experiences. Supports also came from the informal learning conversations where teachers’ experiences were shared and on the MS Teams page where supports and resources populated the online forum. As outlined in the literature review, supporting staff is not a quick fix, it is an ongoing, evolving entity which must last beyond the life of the study (Blood and Thorsborne 2005; Bovill *et al.* 2010; DCEDIY 2021; Hart 1992; Kirby and Bryson 2002 cited in Holdsworth *et al.* 2007; McIntyre *et al.* 2005; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Teachers raised the point that voicework should not be a separate entity and should be incorporated as part of everyday teaching (Interview 1, teachers 2 and 5) to ensure it is kept alive. One way for this to become a habit for the teachers is to ‘start with the first years’ and then it will be introduced with them as it is ‘difficult to

jump into it with Leaving Certs<sup>34</sup> (Interview 1, teacher 13). Making time for these methods was a key concern and even ‘checking in’ as part of the normal conversation of the class will keep learners’ voices alive in classroom practice (Interview 1, teacher 2). Learners suggested that if time was left for questions every day it would become a habit and people would be able to interact more and it would normalise the same making it more comfortable to have a say (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learners responses, 4 similar references; Learner focus group, participants 1, 7 and 9), concurring with the literature that habitual practice develops an inclusive culture (Ainscow and Sandhill 2010). Teacher 2 was of the same view as the participant learners believing that eliciting voices should be ‘part of the lesson and not an add-on at the end of a class’ (Interview 1, teacher 2). Reflecting Lundy’s (2007) framework, learners deemed making space in the lessons for the elicitation of voices as very important explaining that it would be ‘a time where there is not something else to be done and the teacher just listens’ [...] ‘it would not have to be very long, but it would help a lot’ (Questionnaire 2, anonymous learner response). This learner’s idea was mirrored by teacher 13’s remarks saying that ‘making space and time for voice gives it status, gives it a label and gives it importance’ (Interview 1, teacher 13) as ‘they may not realise that they are having their say or using their voice’ (Interview 2, teacher 11). Giving voicework a formality can increase its importance:

‘If you brainstorm an answer and [learners’ ideas] on the board, that’s student voice, but it’s not highlighted as [voicework]. I think if you do a quick questionnaire, it’s more formal and the students will realise that they are getting the opportunity to make a difference’ (Interview 2, teacher 11).

By labelling clearly to young people that their voices are being taken seriously, it can elevate the status of elicitation (MacBeath *et al.* 2003; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). These findings mirrored the findings in the literature review that eliciting the voices of young people is not a commonplace experience (Davey *et al.* 2010; Yonezawa 2010) and needs a conscious effort to survive (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007).

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<sup>34</sup> Leaving Certificate class; the final year of post-primary education.

#### 5.3.4.3 Eliciting voices for influence: Collaboration is key.

*‘Using my voice to help me learn means that I can communicate freely within groups and with my teachers and it helps me be able to feel more involved and very relaxed in school’.*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

This study identified that eliciting voices is not a straightforward process. It involves changes to practices which may be difficult to overcome as they are a large ‘cultural shift’ (Interview 2, senior leader 1). Participants in this study expressed how time and curriculum pressures, result in teachers being:

‘required to do an enormous amount of box ticking, form filling and bureaucratic stuff [...] it can be difficult to be creative and change’ (Interview, parent 1).

This study found that to facilitate the cultural shift among staff is to ‘share what works’ and not to do this ‘individually as teachers, [...] do it more as a unit- for the school’ (Interview 1, teacher 13). Sharing experiences was highlighted by teacher 8, particularly in terms of sharing with the whole staff as opposed to smaller groups where ‘only a small group of people will benefit from it, and [others will benefit] if they have exposure to it’ (Interview 2, teacher 8) as listening to each other is empowering (Interview 1, teacher 4). This could be done by incorporating the eliciting of voices into the ‘subject planning at the beginning of the year’ (Round table discussion, teacher 13). These ideas replicate studies which identified that social bonds were an integral part of research (Baker-Doyle 2017; Oddone *et al.* 2019; Reinius *et al.* 2022) and highlight why the learning conversation support groups were integral to the success of this action research project.

Feeding back the results and experiences that came from this study was promoted as a priority in the round table discussion (Teachers 6, 12 and 13). A small group of participating learners and teachers made a presentation about the story of the project, highlighting its benefits and challenges and shared this with their classes and at the final staff meeting of the academic year to show that the voices of learners have ‘gone somewhere and the information has been acted on’ (Interview 2, senior leader 1). This process was important to inspire other teachers who did not take part in the study, to share in the benefits and adapt methods of eliciting learners voices for themselves. The MS Teams teachers’ page with resources and information was made available to the whole staff and five participating teachers decided to become leaders and made themselves available should any teacher wish to ask them about their first-hand experiences. This method of coaching or mentoring was recognised in the

literature as a significant factor where more experienced colleagues support others (Clutterbuck 1991; Rhodes and Beneicke 2002). In addition to sharing the learnings of the project to members of the school, a presentation was made to the Board of Management and at the school open day to inform the wider school community of what the study entailed. This action was completed to include stakeholders to honour the multitude of perspectives that enhanced this study and to share ownership of the research with all school members (Collins *et al.* 2018; Chapman and Sammons 2013; Gordon and Seashore Louis 2009; Faddar *et al.* 2021; Kadel and Follman 1993; Mitra 2018; Sliwka and Istance 2006; Smith and Benavot 2019). This action commended the constructivist paradigm, where all participants had equal value and worked towards the improvement of education (Brydon-Miller and Maguire 2009; Savin-Baden and Wimpenny 2007; Stelmach 2016).

Participating teachers in this study suggested that learners could showcase their experiences to younger learners ‘and they could empower the learner more’ by showing what can be done to influence change (Interview 1, teacher 8) and make productive citizens for the future (Flynn 2014). This suggestion was brought to fruition and a student-to-student showcase of experiences was presented to demonstrate the benefits of speaking up and having a say in learning. One suggestion from a parent was to issue ‘end of term evaluations’ to learners for submission to the subject teacher to measure how well a segment of the curriculum went or if there were areas that need more attention from the views of the learner (Questionnaire 2, anonymous parent response). This parent’s idea was mooted in a staff meeting and Teacher 12 provided a blank template which was shared with all staff. These examples show how participating teachers and learners were the change agents, collaborating with the goal of embedding a culture of voice elicitation and their agency and action offers the greatest chance for easing voicework into place (Bubb and Earley 2010; Cibulka and Nakayama 2000; Given *et al.* 2010; Guskey 2002; Hopkins 2001). The examples of modelling also demonstrate how participating teachers aimed to build confidence in other adults so that they became an effective audience for voice elicitation (Bauch and Goldring 1998 cited in Mitra 2003; Cook-Sather 2006a) working in harmony with other practices already in the setting (Boreham 2000; Fielding and Bragg 2004; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Kools and Stoll 2016; McGregor 2007; Oddone *et al.* 2019; Stoll *et al.* 2006; Trust *et al.* 2016; Wenger 1998).

Finally, on a leadership level, identifying voice ‘as a priority in the posts<sup>35</sup> structure [would give] it kudos and wealth’ (Interview 1, senior leader 1). Support from leaders is recognised in the literature as a key component in the success of initiatives that aim to change, enhance, or modify culture (Reinius *et al.* 2022; Tarnanen 2021). After the study, the school recognised the need for a post of responsibility as ‘Student Voice facilitator’ which includes working with the student council and student voice groups, promoting the elicitation of student voices within the school and ensuring that there is a platform for voices to have influence in the future. This APII<sup>36</sup> role, which this study was a catalyst for, assesses the pathways that enable young people to participate and monitor those systems periodically to ensure that changes are taking place (DYCA 2015).

### 5.3.5 Theme 3: Key Learnings on Lundy’s (2007) model – Conclusion.

*‘We have to think about how we feed the learnings from this project to the whole student body. How will we show that the student voice has gone somewhere and that what they have said has been acted upon. I think it’s really important that the whole school gets feedback.’*

*(Interview 1, teacher 1).*

Reflecting on the key learnings in this study through the lens of Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation demonstrated the gains this research has made in one setting. The learnings that were prominent under the pillar of Space were that physical space is important to showcase voice elicitation in action. Ensuring that safe, respectful spaces are in existence is another important factor. One way to ensure that an initiative like voicework takes hold, is to integrate it into practices already in existence. Participant teachers in this study incorporated methods of eliciting voices into their everyday classrooms through mechanisms such as debates, student led activities, and digital methods. Participants noted the importance of positive supportive student-teacher relationships to ensure a safe space in which to contribute. Looking at the study through the lens of Voice, participants in this research found that variety, choice, and anonymity were three key characteristics that contribute to the inclusion of many voices. Participant teachers included many creative ways to include voice, offered learners choices in how they contribute and found that if authenticity is to be found, anonymous methods are key. Participant teachers held key roles in supporting this initiative and were an integral part to its survival as they were the audience who listened and responded to learners. The role of feedback from both the learners’ and teachers’ perspectives were

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<sup>35</sup> Posts of responsibility in schools named Assistant Principals Grade I and Grade II.

<sup>36</sup> Assistant Principal Grade II.

discussed considering the findings in this study, which impressed the need for open dialogue in classrooms; a key factor in Freire's teachings (1970; 1973). Teachers in this research acknowledged that they may be open to listening, but difficulties arise when changes need to be implemented, or when changes suggested may not suit, in the adult's opinion. Open, honest dialogue that respects all voices is key here. This section ended by viewing the final pillar of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation, influence, by demonstrating the many changes, big and small, that occurred through interactions with this research. The changes made varied from teachers who made once off changes like rescheduling an exam, to definitive changes in teaching practices that show commitment to voicework such as a dedicated space in the classroom to exemplify the ongoing conversations that take place regarding teaching and learning. This last example is a clear illustration of the DCEDIY (2021) Youth Participation Framework in action, as it shows that dialogue is an ongoing process that shares information respectfully with all parties (Freire 1970). The quotation that opened this section from teacher 1 demonstrates the understanding participants had in this study about the importance of sharing with non-participants what happened. This shows that voices were 'acted upon' building a base of dialogue which is ongoing (Interview 1, teacher 1).

## 5.4 Conclusion.

*'Using our voice helps us guide humanity [so that it is] fair and honest.'*

*(Questionnaire 1, anonymous learner response).*

The opening response from an anonymous learner in questionnaire 1 exemplifies their understanding of the underlying values of this study: fairness and honesty. It is appropriate to end with this quotation as it reminds us of the principles and rationale behind the study. This chapter focused on the findings of the research which were organised into three over-arching themes: Theme 1 – voicework empowered teachers and learners, Theme 2 – Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions and, Theme 3 – Making Space for Voices: Key Learnings on Lundy's (2007) model of child participation.

Theme one exhibited how participant teachers were eager to improve practice and empower learners' voices. Learners' perspectives on participating in the research demonstrated that it was a positive experience for those involved. Teachers and learners found that participating in the study made pathways for participants to have a clear understanding of needs that exist

in the classroom space. Participating in the research also enabled deep, meaningful engagement with enhanced collaboration among peers. Overall, the study showed that the education experience was perceived to be enjoyable due to voice elicitation.

Theme two exposed the many complex tensions that arise when eliciting voices. The section began with a discussion of the reasons why teachers were anxious about participating in this study with the primary causes being the threat of negative feedback from learners, as well as not being able to deliver on what learners wanted. Participants disclosed a tension that exists in the term ‘student voice’ with a preference for the term ‘student-teacher dialogue’.

Participant teachers in this study also struggled with relinquishing power in their classrooms and searched to identify how their role would change in engaging with voicework. Other challenges this study were that learners were over-reliant on teachers, both teachers and learners found it hard to adapt, there was pressure to cover the curriculum in a high-pressure exam focused culture, and participants were working in the aftermath of Covid-19 lockdowns. Finally, there was a conflict in the expectations teachers had of learners, and learners had of themselves, chiefly that learners would not take the process of voice elicitation seriously or would have little of value to offer. The reality was that the opposite was true and learners contributed thoughtfully with great consideration, respect, and responsibility for their own and their peers’ learning.

The third over-arching theme reflected on the key learnings from this research through the lens of Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation, the theoretical framework on which this research is underpinned. The findings revealed that as physical space in the setting was confined, leaving the potential to showcase learnings and collaborate with others within the school curtailed. Teachers incorporated voice elicitation methods into their classroom practices to embed the process in incremental ways. Participants acknowledged that the setting was a place where positive relationships existed, giving the study an advantage in terms of a safe place to participate. Teachers found that providing a variety of methods of learners to participate, providing choices, and collecting responses anonymously had the greatest chance of hearing authentic voices in action. Teachers were creative in how they listened to learners and noted that feedback should be open, honest, and accountable. Teachers confessed that they may be eager to hear what learners have to say, but this eagerness wanes when changes are suggested. Dialogue was recognised as a key factor to appreciate that voices had been heard and change may need to happen. Change, empowered by the voices of learners, happened in simple and elaborate ways. Participants noted that

voicework must be habitual if it is to survive and thrive. Finally, the process of collaboration was crucial to the success of schoolwide consolidation for the embedding of voicework.

Participants took a daring step into the unknown with the certainty of success and led the way for transformation to take place (Stetsenko 2017). Learners communicated openly and insightfully providing alternative understandings and perspectives which enriched the data; a feature seen plentifully in existing literature (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Clarke *et al.* 2011; Cook-Sather 2006b; Fielding and Bragg 2004; James *et al.* 1998; Kushman 1997; Leitch *et al.* 2005; Ireland *et al.* 2006; McIntyre 2000; Mitra 2003; Pedder and McIntyre 2006; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Thiessen and Cook-Sather 2007). It was clear that eliciting the voices of learners about their experiences allowed time for their unique perspectives to be uncovered; unique perspectives that offered transformative knowledge about classroom experiences (Butler *et al.* 2021; Friend and Caruthers 2005; McIntyre and Rudduck 2007; Mitra 2003, 2006; Mitra and Gross 2009; Pedder and McIntyre 2006; Quinn and Owen 2016; Yonezawa *et al.* 2015). Providing variety was a key concept in the success of elicitation of voices as variety gives more opportunity for inclusion for a diversity of voices and the potential to engage many learners. Such variety had a significant and influential impact on strengthening the relationships that are needed to make voicework flourish, and on the resulting research findings which emerged. Including all stakeholders' perspectives and facilitating an easy route to collecting those views led to real change in this study, as in studies in the literature review (Boyden and Ennew 1997; Davey *et al.* 2010; Treseder 1997; Vukovic 2020).

Embedding a culture of participation in this setting, required a whole systems approach by firstly; increasing the opportunities for participation through variety, choice, and anonymity, secondly; supporting the key adult actors from within through bolstering activities such as the informal learning conversations, and finally; raising status and awareness of voicework through the recognition of senior leadership sharing information. In this respectful space, participants worked co-constructively, resulting in learners bring supported to influence decisions in matters that affected them.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations.

### 6.0 Introduction.

This study began with one overarching research question and five embedded questions. This chapter will directly address these questions which were the impetus behind the themes exposed in the findings. The responses to the research questions are brief as they foreshadow the conclusions drawn in the main body of the chapter. These nuanced answers from the embedded and research questions are not definitive of the study as they acted as the catalysts to investigate the inner workings of the school's attitude and comfort with voice elicitation practices.

The next sections of this chapter draw conclusions from the three main themes discussed in the findings chapter. The first theme, voicework empowered teachers and learners, showed that participants were motivated to transform learning and improve classroom practice. A model is presented so that knowledge from this study is transferable to other settings.

The second theme emerging from the findings was that the elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions. Challenges with the term 'student voice' and with the balance of power in the classroom are discussed. The section investigates if voicework is feasible in practice and muses on the reasons that teachers may be reluctant to get involved and how this issue can be addressed.

The final section in this chapter reflects on using Lundy's (2007) model of child participation in one context. This section is divided into four pillars: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence and discusses the learnings that were drawn from underpinning this research with Lundy's (2007) model. The section ends with a discussion regarding the conscious and unconscious biases that exist and impinge on authentic voices.

### 6.1 Revisiting the research questions.

This study set out to find the answer to 'how can a culture of eliciting the voices of learners be enhanced in our school?'. Perspectives from school stakeholders found that eliciting voices was empowering, but the process is filled with complex tensions. The study investigated the practices present and aimed to build on them to ensure that eliciting voices continued beyond the life of the study. The next section answers the embedded questions directly.

### 6.1.1 What is our school doing to capture the voices of learners?

In the initial stages of the study, participants were asked what measures were in place in the school to capture the voices of learners. The findings revealed that there were oral, physical, digital, and written mechanisms in place to capture voices identified by learners and teachers. Having formal methods of eliciting voices such as online forms and the student council, school wide questionnaires, committees and group were exposed as important factors in the findings of this study. Methods for capturing voices changed over the course of the study. It was found that providing a variety of ways in which learners could respond increased the chances of reaching everyone. Furthermore, if learners have an opportunity to contribute anonymously, the chances for participation and confidence in participation are increased.

### 6.1.2 How effective are different teaching methods in eliciting the voices of learners in our school?

No single method of eliciting voices was prominent in the eliciting of voices. Each of the five methods of eliciting voices had strengths and weaknesses. Methods that were designed to interfere little with the class, such as learner contract and reflection needed more support from teachers to help learners engage effectively. Using the methods of eliciting voices within class time had a greater impact than doing it as a homework exercise. A wide variety of subjects were represented in this study and no single subject emerged as one that was tailor made for voicework.

### 6.1.3 Does eliciting the voices of learners have a positive impact on teaching, learning, assessment, and engagement in our school?

Voicework empowered both teachers and learners over the life of the study. However, voicework was complicated. Teachers were anxious in taking part, not knowing what would be revealed through voice elicitation. Teachers also struggled with the perceived changes in the balance of power and even with the term 'student voice'. While learner and teacher participants also believed that learners would not take the process seriously, it was found that learners engaged thoughtfully and respectfully, giving expertise on matters that affected them. This bias exposed at the beginning of the study has implications for the classroom as it may be used as a reason not to invite young people to participate.

The study found that teachers were empowered to reflect and enhance their own teaching practice, in some cases diversifying it to include learners' voices. Teachers and learners

reported that understanding, of both needs and content, was strengthened by engaging in voicework. Collaborative learning that promoted empathy and understanding of others' needs was also a noted factor. However, the high value on summative state exams remains and important factor and was seen to be at odds with voicework, placing them in competition for the time needed in class. Finally, confidence and enjoyment were both highlighted as aspects that were reinforced by engaging in voicework.

#### 6.1.4 What impact does amplifying voices have on teacher and learner interactions?

Eliciting the voices of learners had a profound impact on the power dynamics in the classroom. Initially teachers were concerned with what may be uncovered in the elicitation process, but these concerns were not realised as learners contributed insightfully to the research. Addressing an altering of the balance of power was a difficulty, explored further in section 5.3.2 of this chapter. Eliciting voices has most chance of success when spaces are respectful and relationships are strong; voicework will strengthen these further. Supporting learners to be authentic contributors took a sustained effort from teachers who had a belief in the research. Amplifying voices had an impact on practices being amended or altered and the elicitation process provided spaces for teachers to reflect collaboratively and share good practice; a feature which was welcomed in the study.

#### 6.1.5 What are our stakeholders' perspectives on the value of the voices of learners?

Value is defined as the regard, importance, and usefulness that something deserves (Oxford English Dictionary 2024). Voicework was deemed important and useful by participants in this study but it is not without faults. Learners and teachers showed interest in improvement, identifying that the power of relationships in respectful, safe spaces is key for change to happen. Each stakeholder group had representation, with learners and teachers occupying most of the participant space. Influence and this was achieved in different ways such as changing seating plans, using collaborative learning methods, providing variety, negotiating the sequence of the curriculum and how and when assessment would be given, taking advice from learners about revision, assignments, and encouraging learners to honestly evaluate classroom practices. The voices of learners were listened to and valued as they influenced change over the life of the study.

### 6.1.6 How can a culture of eliciting the voices of learners be enhanced in our school?

The overarching question in this study was poised to recognise that learners had experience of using their voices through various mechanisms within the school. This study aimed to build on what was already established, focusing on eliciting voices. The answer to this question lies in three areas: relationships, collaboration, and habit. The importance of relationships as identified in the findings, is the foundation on which voicework can be built. Safe spaces must exist for voices to thrive and these are developed and nurtured through the building of relationships. The second tenet is collaboration. The learning conversations, developed out of a request from participant teachers, were vital to the success of the study. They provided a space to share practice and knowledge and to listen to other teachers' experiences. Without these collaborations, successes may not have spread and difficulties may not have been resolved. Finally, the importance of the practice being habitual were uncovered as a dominant factor for voicework to thrive. Lundy's (2007) model of child participation on which this study is underpinned, provided the secure foundation to listen and respond to voices. The process of eliciting voices was not without its tensions, as revealed in the findings. The answer to this overarching question is nuanced and tackled in the remainder of this chapter. In each theme, part of this overarching question is tackled, to honour the improvements that were made, the challenges that were uncovered and the learnings that were had.

## 6.2 Conclusions from theme 1: Voicework empowers teachers and learners.

Teacher participants were interested in making improvements to their own practices for the benefit of teaching and learning and to generate new theory (McNiff and Whitehead 2009; VanEekelen *et al.* 2006). A total of 67% of the teaching staff in the setting engaged with the study, including newly qualified teachers and more experienced teachers, demonstrating that improvement is an ever-evolving process (McDonagh *et al.* 2001). Reflection spaces in this study were welcomed by teachers to focus on adapting and differentiating practices and learn from one another; identified as a rarity in school (Blumberg 2015; Boyd 2014; Koshy 2009; Mitra 2018; Stenhouse 1975). Including teachers as co-researchers who co-constructed knowledge was a success in this study as they were invested in the personal improvements made for their learners and classroom practices (Avalos 2011; Hargreaves 1996; Lopes and

Cunha 2017). Teachers are ‘deeply committed to making schools better places’ and this was certainly borne out in this research (Apple 1996, p.107). Learners too were interested in improvement. A total of 22% of the student body<sup>37</sup> volunteered willingly to share their insights and perspectives on their experiences and ideas of having their voices elicited (Butler *et al.* 2021; Cook-Sather 2006b; Fielding and Bragg 2004; Friend and Caruthers 2015; Ireland *et al.* 2006; James *et al.* 1998; Kushman 1997; Mitra and Gross 2009; Quinn and Owen 2016). Like teachers, learners were co-constructors of creating and transforming knowledge and improving practices, in a respectful way, for themselves and others (Chapman and Sammons 2013; Fielding 2004; Morrow 1999). Using Rudduck and McIntyre’s (2007, p.145) categorisation of the benefits of voicework are concluded in Table 6.1.

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<sup>37</sup> 77 learners out of the total 352 students took part (Academic Year 2020-2021)

**Table 6.1 Conclusion of benefits categorised using Rudduck and McIntyre’s Dimensions (2007, p.145).**

Organisational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people had a sense of membership and positivity about the school.</li> <li>• Relationships between learners and teachers strengthened.</li> <li>• A distributed leadership model spread the knowledge of the study through the school.</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer learning helped build empathy.</li> <li>• Wellbeing was positively reinforced through voicework.</li> <li>• Confidence of learners was bolstered through voicework.</li> <li>• Understanding of learner’s own abilities.</li> </ul>
Pedagogic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voicework and reflection increased motivation, achievement, and engagement.</li> <li>• Increased awareness and management of learner’s own learning.</li> <li>• Increased understanding of curricula.</li> <li>• Meaningful learning.</li> <li>• Effective teaching practices enhanced.</li> <li>• Challenges in learning communicated to teachers.</li> <li>• Individualised learning was scaffolded.</li> </ul>
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved confidence in speaking out.</li> <li>• Increased sense of agency to contribute to wider school life.</li> <li>• Opinions were used in a lived democracy style.</li> <li>• Skills developed in this study will be useful beyond school.</li> <li>• A rights-based approach to education was achieved.</li> <li>• Learners influenced change.</li> </ul>

### 6.3 Conclusions from theme 2: Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions.

This section focuses on the many tensions exposed in the elicitation of voices. The failure of the term ‘student voice’ to represent the complex processes of dialogic interactions in voice elicitation is discussed. Next the challenges that were presented for teachers and learners regarding the balance of power are considered. This is followed by discussing if voicework is feasible in practice; the time available to engage in voicework is limited and there is a societal interest in state summative examinations. This section ends by looking deeper at the reluctance and anxiety of teachers in wanting to participate and whether it is grounded in a

real-life worry. The section ends by recommending that policy, culture, and practice need to identify voice as a key area for it to have value in education systems.

### 6.3.1 Is it time to consider a new term to replace the term ‘student voice’?

Through analysis of data, it was revealed that some teachers participating in this study were not in favour of the term ‘student voice’ as it did not honour the dialogic process that takes place. Using Lundy’s (2007) model, the voices of learners must have an audience and the power to influence (Atweh and Burton 1995; Cook-Sather 2006b); this is complicated when adults do not feel that change is suitable. If their right to express their views has been given, where do their rights lay if the changes they seek are not seen as feasible? Are students empowered when change cannot happen? Will they feel disenfranchised? The term ‘student-teacher dialogue’ was selected as a more appropriate term as it made gave both partners in the dialogue an equal footing.

A path forward, based on the findings from this single case study, would be to ensure teachers are aware that ‘student-teacher dialogue’ incorporates an open and honest explanation as to why something can or cannot be done. Acting on elicitation of voices does not necessarily mean that young people are granted everything they have asked for (Boyden and Ennew 1997). Acknowledging opinions, tweaking or adjusting practices, or making spaces for further debate and negotiation where both sides need to compromise are hugely important in student-teacher dialogue. There are times that the expert in the room must be given credit for being just that and if, in their expert opinion, something cannot be changed, this too should be respected.

### 6.3.2 The balance between being a leader and a facilitator.

Eliciting voices calls for the adult to consider a power shift and listen to directions from the perspectives of young people. This research found that respectful relationships are important for the success of authentic listening, and there is a balance required between input from learner and teacher. The findings from this single case study suggest that support, for both teachers and learners, is key as the balance redistribution requires alterations from both learners and teachers (Hart 1997; Lewis 1993). Learners need practice and experience in participating in voicework to give them confidence in engaging and understanding that using their voice is a safe and respectful exercise (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). Part of this is to clearly highlight the opportunities for voice elicitation that are available so that young people are aware of the possibilities for being heard (MacBeath *et al.* 2003; Rudduck and McIntyre

2007). This can be layered with an approach where learners can determine how they would like to be consulted (Fielding and Bragg 2004; Thomson and Gunter 2005). It is certainly difficult to navigate adults being over present or taking too much control as it can lead to voicework being tokenistic and futile (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Cruddas 2007). However, no adult presence, can lead to a lack of clear leadership and a dissolving of the actions or that the measures are unfocused (Chapple and Raftery 2023; Fleming 2013).

From my own experiences in voicework, and from the finding in this single case study, voicework can never be considered as complete; it is about the 'journey' rather than the 'destination' (Blanchard and Hodges 2006, p.205) as stakeholders are continually evolving (Graham *et al.* 2019). Both the adult and the young person have meaningful but not equal roles; the adult must be responsible for supporting and coaching young people to help them assume leadership roles (Mitra 2005, 2009; Richards-Schuster and Timmermans 2017). Realistic goal setting is a useful practice to ensure that all parties know their roles in driving the project forward (Blood and Thorsborne 2006; Keddle 2015; NCCA 2018, 2019). Voicework can be considered as pushing against the normal forces that usually define the roles of teachers and learners, so it does take dedicated players to continue the journey (Mitra 2018; Skerritt *et al.* 2022). While engaging in voice elicitation methods can shift the power dynamic (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Hart 1997; Morrow 1999), learners still need the support of their teachers to have an authentic role; a power-balance act that may be difficult to achieve. Finding the balance is not an easy feat but fostering good relationships and making the practice open to as many participants as possible are ways to promote it so that young people have a meaningful role and are not passive recipients but active changemakers (Bragg 2010).

Using Lundy's (2007) model of child participation, this study aimed to elicit voices for influence. There are certain gaps that exist that are severe barriers to the amplification of voices in post-primary schools. The findings from this single case study and the learnings from empirical literature suggest that bias is one factor that inhibits the voices of young people having real power in educational settings. Biases in this current study exposed regarding the worth of voice elicitations before the process and were surprised with learners contributed insightfully to the study. This result had to be experienced to be fully realised. Follow up and feedback was another area that caused a challenge as it was unclear in the results, how many engaged with feedback conversations to further the influence from learners' voices. It is true that positive changes, big and small occurred. As teachers were

invited to only share the experiences that they wanted, it was not clear if there were any suggestions from learners that were not followed up on and if this was discussed openly.

### 6.3.3 Are voice-based initiatives feasible in practice?

Time was a limiting factor which restricted the elicitation of voices in this research. Once established, these methods can be incorporated into everyday classroom practice, however, it does take time to install. Learners do not automatically know how to respond or how to think critically about their learning, therefore, it is imperative to support and train them to reflect on the ways they learn or what they have found effective; expecting that to happen during a once off on the spot elicitation is not realistic. Learners who were given tasks to reflect on in their own time, found that they made little effort if it was not going to be viewed by their teacher.

Curriculum overload, initiative fatigue, the pressure of points in a high stakes summative examinations were inhibiting factors to voicework. State examinations hold a great appetite for society that national media report daily on the examinations and much airtime is given to analysis of papers with reactions from young people, parents, teachers, and senior leaders. The cultural shift to move away from the focus on summative examination to concentrating on the learning process seems too great. In a neoliberal era, which is centred on examination, performance, league tables, curriculum, and surveillance, where voice is constrained by the dominant power, we need to ask if it is possible to thrive? (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Fielding, 2007, 2011; Lodge, 2005, 2008). With enormous pressure on teachers in a results obsessed culture it is difficult to realise the aims of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that every child has the right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. If this is not embedded into education policy, culture, and practice, it will remain rhetoric and it will be a struggle to sustain (Lyle 2014).

### 6.3.4 Questioning the reluctance and anxiety teachers had regarding voicework.

Voicework can push against the normative boundaries of student-teacher relationships and teachers may feel that their authority will be undermined in that elicitation space. The finding from this single case study suggest that teachers who are anxious about participating in voice elicitation may simply be protecting themselves from criticism or changes they do not wish to make. Investigations into the ways in which the voices of young people are being used at present need to take place. If youth voices are being used as surveillance, perhaps there is

little hope that those who are sceptical will feel differently. If we examine the current use of student voice in the Department of the Inspectorate in Irish post-primary schools, we can see that the voices of young people, selected by the school, are elicited through questionnaires, and focus groups. In this process, we must ask the questions: How are the young people in these instances given feedback on how their voices were used? How were the young people supported before, during, afterwards? Are the voices being used to help the young people assume leadership roles or have an equal standing in decision-making? How will these voices have influence? Are the voices are collected in an information-gathering exercise, in a system that is not aimed to empower or treat as equal, but to gain a perspective of the school from the consumer's view? It is understandable why teachers would have a reluctance to take part in voicework as there is a tradition present for voicework to equate to surveillance. When stakeholder groups are surveyed to get their perspectives and one key stakeholder group, the teachers are excluded, it may give the impression of surveillance, even if this is not the intention. However, in this current study, teachers who expressed anxiety about negative criticism before the study began, felt differently about it on reflection. Even though the thought of relinquishing power was a difficulty for some teachers in this study, participants' experiences and contributions enhanced classroom practices.

## 6.4 Conclusions from theme 3: Key learning using Lundy's (2007) model.

Lundy's (2007) model of child participation which underpinned this study was a useful foundation to build the research on. It was easily understood by adult and youth participants and provided a reference point to ensure that the chief goal for young people to be empowered to have influence over the matters that affected them in the classroom was realised. In this next section the four pillars of Lundy's (2007) model, Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence are considered in light of the current study to uncover what can be done to build further to transform classroom practice.

### 6.4.1 Space: The importance of good relationships cannot be understated.

The findings from this single case study suggest that respectful relationships between learners and teachers are vital for the success of voice elicitation. If a partnership exists between staff and young people, the potential for transformation increases dramatically (Fielding 2004). Traditionally, teacher and student spaces do not cross; there are assigned spaces such as

student council meetings or staff meetings where participants can discuss their own needs. Equality or ‘radical collegiality’ (Fielding 2004, p.147) in the classroom space, may alter the power dynamic between the traditional role of the teacher as the sage and can leave teachers feeling vulnerable as seen in this current study. However, once the step was taken to include learners in decision making, relationships were significantly improved which aligned with the literature (Banks and Smyth 2015; Bourke 2017; Bovill *et al.*2010; Carnell and Lodge 2002; Davey *et al.* 2010). Listening and responding to learners and including them in important decisions about their learning will strengthen student-teacher ties and relationships in the school community in general (Fielding 2004; Laurence-Lightfoot 2000; Sonn *et al.* 2011; Wachtel 2016). Learners in this study highlighted the link between safety and security in the relationships they had with teachers and their enjoyment of the classroom experience; a sentiment that concurred with studies in the literature review (Halliday *et al.* 2019; Kincheloe 1991; Mitra 2006; Postlethwaite and Haggerty 2002; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Tangen 2009).

#### 6.4.2 Voice: Having the opportunity to speak is important.

Through the data and in the learning conversations, it was clear that learners recognised and appreciated the importance of having the opportunity to speak and be heard. This current study aimed to go beyond ascertaining perspectives from young people, to achieve a democratic agentic process of co-constructed classroom knowledge and solutions (Bovill *et al.* 2011; Cook-Sather 2007; Fielding 2015; Fielding and Moss 2010; Finneran *et al.* 2021; Flynn 2014; Markham and Aveyard 2003; Sinclair 2004; Sonn *et al.* 2011; Shirley 2015). Listening to audible voice is just one of many varied ways in which to be an audience for learners. The term ‘voice’ can be interpreted as the physical expression of words and certainly that is the most common way of eliciting ‘voice’. Physical movement, teamwork, written voice, digital voice, and non-verbal voice are all important factors that should not be overlooked.

#### 6.4.3 Audience: It must be habitual to survive.

Participants in this study recognised that if elicitation of voices is irregular or sporadic, it is ineffective and will struggle to survive. This study advised teachers against once off voice elicitations or treating elicitation of voices as a box ticking exercise; it is a process that must be introduced slowly, and all parties must be supported over time. Sole interactions will not embed a culture or foster empowerment. This current research utilised a change from within approach (MacBeath 1999); teachers implemented changes which were supported on the

outside by management, literature, and policy. Further supports such as the learning conversations for teachers and the MS Teams pages were invaluable when keeping the energy in the initiative going. At the end of the research,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the participant teachers were determined that they would continue to elicit the voices of young people in their classrooms; this may have been due to the focused support over one academic year to participants in the study.

#### 6.4.4 Influence: How can voice be truly authentic?

This study came from an emancipatory stance, following Lundy's (2007) model of child participation and using it as a framework to empower young people in the classroom. Eliciting voices is a complicated and difficult process that needs to be planned and scaffolded with great care. In this single case study, some voices were elicited and some were not, due to conscious and unconscious biases of participants.

The setting had its own hierarchies which determined who was allowed to speak and who listened to them (Angus *et al.* 2013; Henderson 2011; Noyes 2005). On a smaller scale, in each classroom there is a culture of who controls the conversation, how opinions were elicited in the past, how decisions are made and what level of influence has been shown and these factors all influence how each teacher elicits voices (Dyson 1995; Rondinella *et al.* 2017; Walsh and Black 2009). The teachers who volunteered for this study, brought with them their ideological and political position and their preconceived notions of voicework (Morrow 1999; Smyth 20015). Participating teachers were autonomous in how they chose who to speak to, how the young people were supported and trained before voices were elicited and in what way they were elicited will all have ramifications on voice authenticity (Christensen and Prout 2002; Graham *et al.* 2019; Jones and Hall 2022; Mannion 2010; Subramanian *et al.* 2013). While this autonomy was intended to give control to teachers, it had an impact on the power dynamics of the facilitation processes, whether variety and anonymity were used and how feedback was delivered (Arnot and Reay 2007; Jones and Hall 2022; Mihans *et al.* 2008). Participating teachers made conscious decisions that affected the authenticity of voices by eliminating exam groups, choosing class groups that they perceived would respond well to the methods of voice elicitation and choosing older year groups as they may take the process more seriously (Carr and Williams 2009; Gunter and Thomson 2007; Lodge 2005; McCafferty 2017; Mabovula 2009). Participating teachers were encouraged to only share data that they were comfortable in sharing to ensure that no teacher

was unduly burdened with the idea that voices could be used as surveillance. In doing so, negative or critical voices may have been eliminated from the data collection process (Bragg 2001; Cruddas 2007; Rudduck 2005). Learner participants in this study volunteered to take part which will influence the authenticity of voices; by choosing those who wish to be chosen, there is a chance of further eliminating the voices of marginalised people who may not put themselves forward or engage.

There were unconscious biases too; some participating teachers did not fully consider the implications of informing learners of what would be discussed and how it would be discussed in elicitation processes. By not forewarning learners about what they might be asked regarding their learning gave learners little time to formulate answers. Some participant teachers did not realise the consequences of eliciting voices once only or in a sporadic way which limited the practice learners had in responding authentically. Some teachers did not offer a variety in which to respond or offer training which limited learners' ability to participate. Many teachers expected learners to co-operate and articulate once they are given the space and opportunity to do so. We do not know how young people may have been disempowered in the past, or how much they think about curriculum to be ready for a robust discussion on same (Heath 2004). We do not know how much training or practice a young person has had in oral literacy, how confident they are in expressing their needs or how well they can negotiate dialogue with adults who hold control (Bovill *et al.* 2011; Checkoway 2011; Clarke 1991; Driscoll *et al.* 2021; Mercer *et al.* 2017; Rudduck and Fielding 2006). These unconscious biases that existed in this study will have influenced the authenticity of the voices in this research.

The dilemma of eliciting the voices of those who do not want to engage is certainly difficult. But, simply focusing on the voices that are elicited easily, cannot be considered authentic. The silent voices which do not permeate this research must be contemplated; were they given a method to engage that suited them? Was it at a time that suited them? Were they forewarned? Trained? Supported? Did they feel safe in the space provided? Did they feel confident in being able to contribute orally? Was their voice dominated by others? Did they feel like there was no point in contributing? While these questions cannot be answered outright, they need to be posed in a reflective space to question the authenticity of voices in this and other studies. To illustrate this point, I invite the reader to visualise a class of young people who are a diverse group, a mix of age, gender, life experiences and abilities. They are

all capable of contributing their opinions, so they are named the ‘capable group’ and are represented using the following image Figure 6.1:



The adult decides what group, what age, what subject in which to elicit voices. This eliminates some young people as they are not the age selected or in the subject selected. The number in the capable group diminishes slightly:



Next, the adult does not pre-train the young people in how to negotiate discussions. The adult does not support them by giving opportunities to practice using their voice. These actions will reduce the members in the capable group as some will need more help to respond than others:



Let’s assume that some members of the capable group do not feel safe contributing in an open, public forum due to confidence, dominance of others, or previous experience and the capable group diminishes further:



The adult decides to only consult the capable group once but some members are not ready or are absent, so they are not included:



The adult decides only to capture voice audibly in a public forum; some members of the capable group choose not to respond in this public, audible way:



The capable group were not told in advance they would be speaking about this topic, so some of the capable group need more reflection time to formulate answers and thoughts so they did not contribute during the allotted time and the number of responses is reduced:



The questions given to the capable group are closed by asking yes/no questions and not leaving space for grey areas. The adult directs the discussion leaving little space to share perspectives. This excludes some of the capable group:



Some members of the capable group share negative views which are deemed unsavoury to the adult that is filtering them, so they are excluded.



The adult does not feedback to the group to ensure what was said was correct. Adult assumptions are placed on what members of the capable group may have meant. There is no member checking stage so this reduces the power of the capable group to respond and clarify, so the power of the group is reduced further.



**Figure 6.1: The Capable Group**

This capable group, through conscious and unconscious bias, is a niche group which cannot be considered as authentic. At first appearances, it seems that all members of the capable group were given the opportunity to have their voices heard. However, those who were permitted and supported to respond were a small selection of the capable group at the beginning of this graphic. This is what we are led to believe is being reported on when we use the term ‘student voice’. The capable group of young people in the last line of the visual aid are articulate, confident, engaged, able to negotiate discussions, aware of the hierarches in schools and how to navigate them, and do not represent genuinely or authentically speak for all. If we continue to elicit voices in this slanted way, we are fooling ourselves that this is genuine, authentic ‘voice’.

## 6.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations spur from the knowledge uncovered from the literature review and the knowledge gained in the completion of this PhD study. The recommendations based on the conclusions in the three themes are presented in the following section.

### 6.5.1 Recommendations for theme 1: Voicework empowers teachers and learners.

- Voicework is a powerful positive action that benefits teaching and learning; it enhances relationships, wellbeing, empathy, meaningful learning and democratic education. The methods used in this study can be replicated in any classroom, by providing opportunities for voice contribution in different forms and respecting the right of young people to respond or not to respond (Kirby and Bryson 2002 cited in Holdsworth *et al.* 2007).

- Teacher and learner participants indicated that the space for reflection was much needed as it was helpful in sharing knowledge and experiences. Learners noted that time was needed to effectively process and share information about their learning. Figure 6.2 shows an alternative research design, which includes the learnings from research.

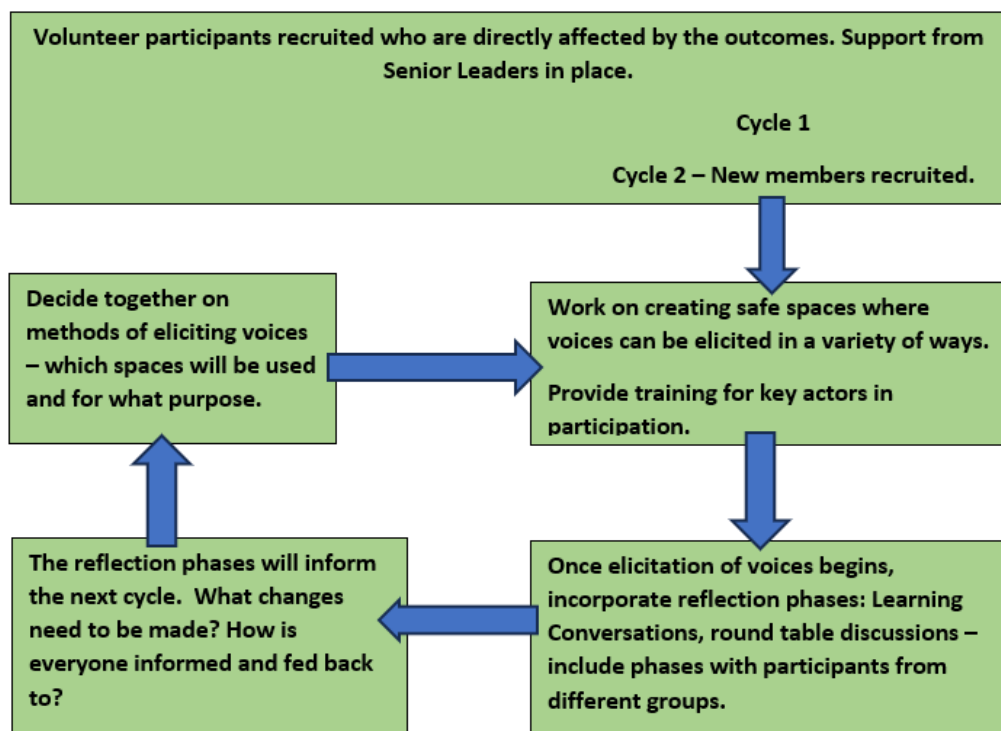


Figure 6.2 Suggested Research Design for eliciting voices in post-primary settings.

- Support from volunteer participants who have an interest in transforming learning and their practice, as well as support from school leaders is important. It is important for groups from different stakeholder groups meet as equals.

## 6.5.2 Recommendations for theme 2.

The recommendations that follow include: the need for support and training, the need for a move away from the focus of teaching on summative state examinations and the importance of communities of practice.

### 6.5.2.1 A need for support and training.

- The shift, or perceived shift in power presents a challenge for teachers and students. All participants will need training on how to contribute and participate in voicework as it may be difficult for young people to challenge existing authority, just as it would be difficult for an adult to receive criticisms from young people (Bragg 2007b). Training should be provided by teachers so they can adequately support their learners in their classrooms.

- As policies have a focus on youth voices, the training in elicitation needs to be provided to teachers by a state body to help voicework be successful and authentic. Practices around elicitations of voices also need support as effective listening and responding will not emerge after a once off voice elicitation session, it will need to be practiced and supported, for both adults and young people (Angus *et al.* 2013; Bergmark and Kostenius 2009; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018).

- Through a community of practice, initial teacher education and in continued professional development, support for teachers could be provided. Using Lundy's (2012) checklist for participation (Appendix II) also raises the awareness of how and why voices are being elicited to reduce the biases that can exist in adult led initiatives (Cruddas 2007).

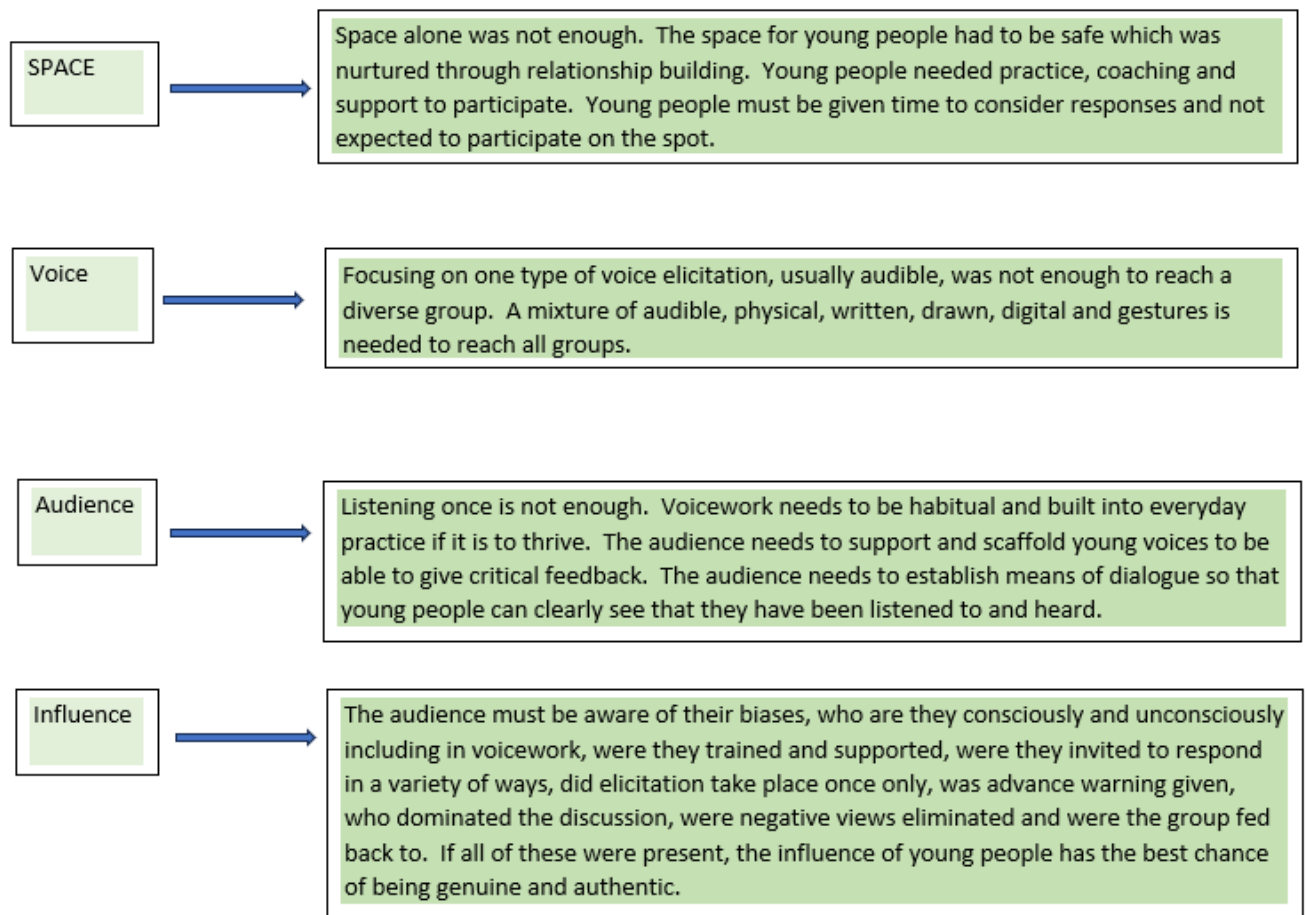
### 6.5.2.2 Move focus away from summative state examinations.

- The pressure of summative state examinations limits the time to seek out the voices of young people. Educators must question the type of educational system are we involved in? What sort of educational system doesn't allow teachers the time to 'draw breath' and reflect on one's own teaching (Interview 1, teacher 1). The high value placed on state examinations contributes to the culture of teaching to the test. As long as voicework has low value in terms of university points, its worth will remain low in classrooms.

- Avenues for voices to have influence must appear in subject curricula in democratic teaching methodologies and continued professional development offered by educational bodies. While the National Participation Framework (DCEDIY 2021) is available, if schools were advised to create policies to encourage and facilitate student voices, the practices in this current study could be replicated.

### 6.5.3 Recommendations for theme 3: Key learnings from Lundy’s (2007) model.

Figure 6.3 was created to highlight the learnings from using Lundy’s (2007) model to make it easily transferable to other settings.



**Figure 6.3 Reflections on Lundy’s (2007) model from this case study.**

- A variety of methods must be employed to include a greater number of voices.
- A move away from audible public forums and nurturing alternative ways in which young people can participate is warranted (General comment 12- Committee on the rights of the child 2009).

- Incorporating creativity in the elicitation of voices of those who are articulate or less verbally proficient, can be realised in the classroom by any teacher interested in the power of voices.
- Anonymous elicitation, as was noted in this current study, provides a mechanism for young people to respond without fear and has a powerful potential for authenticity. While there are merits in anonymous response mechanisms, they may be combined with oral discussion to publicly discuss and offer a public space for dialogue. Providing a mix of anonymous and public elicitation of voices gives the opportunity for privacy and listening to the views of others.
- A variety of formal and informal settings where voicework is clearly labelled as such, is important in supporting young people by engaging in a variety of methods to include as many voices as possible. Presenting voicework in a formal forum will elevate it to a position of importance and help define the space as safe to offer opinions. Including the elicitation of voices within everyday classroom practice has a greater chance of longevity.
- Starting small, in one class or in one year group was sound advice given by teachers in this current study (Balakrishan and Clairbone 2017; Fielding 2004; Gray *et al.* 1999; MacBeath 2007; Mitra 2003). The conscious effort from the adult actors will embed voicework practice in the school (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007).
- Opportunities to practice voicework must be present as once off elicitation are less effective. The onus should be on teachers to scaffold and support voicework to train young people in how to have their say. Sporadic voicework session can never achieve this.
- Reflection time before voice elicitation begins gives time to young people to consider their responses.
- Communications with young people need to be in a child-friendly manner.
- Feedback, whether something was changed, amended or stays the same, is important to ensure that young people are aware of how their voices were used.

To summarise these recommendations and to provide a transferable model that can be used in other settings, a checklist is presented in Table 6.2. This brings the learnings from this study together with existing literature to form a set of questions to provoke reflect on the conscious

and unconscious biases adults have when eliciting the voices of young people. The right-hand column is blank for the user to critically address their own situation.

**Table 6.2: Transferable template to investigate conscious and unconscious biases.**

Questions to consider	Answer
Why are the voices of young people needed? Who has decided that those voices are warranted? Is the project adult-led or youth-led? How will the voices of young people benefit this project? How is it envisaged that young people have influence? How will the involvement of young people make a difference in their lives or the lives of other young people?	
Will young people volunteer freely? Who will select the young people and why is that group/person being selected? Who is being excluded by volunteering or selection? If young people are participating with adults, how is it known that all voices are equal?	
What training or practice have young people had before the elicitation? How much experience do they have of contributing their voices in this space?	
Will elicitations have a variety of ways in which young people can contribute? Are there other ways other than audible methods in which to contribute? Does elicitation take place in a public place or are there opportunities for anonymity? Do young people understand that they do not have to participate?	
Will the elicitation of voices take place once or will there be more than one opportunity to participate? Will young people be aware of when the elicitation is taking place?	
How will young people be informed about the process? Will questions be shared with them before voice elicitation occurs? How will young people know how their voices will be used?	
Will there be opportunities to ask questions during the facilitation process? Who chooses who speaks in the facilitation process? Do the young people have power to change anything in the facilitation process? Can they contribute when they like, or does the adult invite responses? Are the questions asked YES/NO or is there room for discussion? How is space provided for discussion?	
Who is listening to the voices of young people? Does the adult check with the young person that they have interpreted their voices correctly?	
How will the young people receive feedback? How will the young people know how and where their voices have influence?	

This checklist is a summary of many of the themes in the review of the literature and the findings from experiencing this research. It concludes that voicework is a complex and fragile process that is easily contaminated with adult biases. The purpose of the checklist is to highlight and address some of these biases to achieve an authentic response from a diverse range of voices.

## 6.6 Conclusion.

This chapter began by answering directly the five embedded questions and overarching research question that drove this study. The study found that there were mechanisms in place to capture the voices of learners in the school, and that no single subject or method of voice elicitation was superior to another; a mixture of various methods and applications proved effective. Eliciting the voices of learners was a positive experience which brought on changes and transformations, but the process was not without complication. Many challenges existed from teacher's fears in taking part in the study, to their distaste of the phrase 'student voice' and their predictions that learners would not take the study seriously. While stakeholders from each relevant group in the school community took part in the study, the chief stakeholders, teachers and learners, viewed voicework as a positive force where learners' voices influenced changes. The culture of eliciting voices can be enhanced by focusing on relationship building, collaborating, and ensuring that voicework is habitual.

The next section of this chapter focused on the first theme that was generated from analysis of the findings: elicitation of voices empowers teachers and learners. In this study, both teachers and learners were interested in improvement and found voice elicitation beneficial to the whole school organisation. Learners' wellbeing, confidence, self-understanding, empathy, and enjoyment improved and teachers appreciated the time afforded to reflect on their practice for improvement. Through voicework, learners had agency and valued a rights-based approach to learning. It was recommended that key actors work in a distributed leadership style to improve aspects from the inside, while being supported by school leaders. Safe spaces for young people to respond must be carefully created, nurtured, and maintained. Adults need to be supported, in this case study it was achieved through learning conversations and a round table discussion. Finally, reflection time is needed to amend, and recruit new members.

Following this is a section based on the conclusions drawn from theme 2: Elicitation of voices is filled with complex tensions. Some teachers in this study were not in favour of the term 'student voice' as it places emphasis on the student and not on the dialogic process that is fully representative of voicework. There were challenges when learners suggested aspects to change that were deemed unsuitable which highlighted the importance of feedback to discuss and compromise. The balance of power in the classroom was altered as teachers became listeners and learned from students, while at the same time supporting their learners to participate. Participants perceived that learners would not take the process seriously, but this was found to be untrue in this study. Further challenges were exposed in the lack of time in classes and curriculum overload which, if voicework was embedded in policy, culture, and practice, it would help the initiatives thrive. The threats to teachers when youth voices are used as surveillance was discussed as a valid reason why teachers may be anxious about participating in voice-based activities.

The final section in this chapter reflected on using Lundy's (2007) model of child participation in one setting. This section was divided into the four pillars of the model: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. Strong relationships are vital to create a safe space where adults and young people can meet as equals. Creating opportunities to speak that are varied including anonymous methods are helpful for young people. Adults must make voicework a habitual process by introducing it slowly, scaffolding learners and sustaining the practice. Finally, adults must check their biases as some may tend to exclude examination groups or choose class groups that are more likely to respond. The section focused on the learnings gained from each pillar of Lundy's (2007) model to transfer some knowledge gained to other settings who wish to enhance the voices of young people.

# Chapter 7: Reflection.

## 7.0 Overview.

This chapter critically reflects on the research. The implications of this research for practice, stakeholders, the wider world, and the profession of teaching are discussed. Next, is a personal reflection on what the directions are for future research and a discussion on the distinct and original contribution this research makes to the field. The chapter ends with a personal reflection on my teaching practice, research work and the impact this PhD has had on my life.

## 7.1 Personal Reflection on the research.

I began this PhD study in September 2019 and much has changed since then. My children have become young men, a pandemic changed the way we live and work and my life has evolved in big and small ways. Reflection was a key feature throughout this project, and now, at the end of the study, I will reflect on how it has shaped me as a researcher, how my career has changed and how this work has had and will continue to have impact. To structure the reflection, I will use Rolfe *et al.*'s (2001) reflective cycle which has three stages: (i) What? (ii) So What? and (iii) Now what? Incorporated into these three stages are my personal views on the research process, findings, and impact for the future.

### 7.1.1 What?

To reflect on this question, it is necessary to return to the overarching question 'How can a culture of eliciting the voices of learners be enhanced in our school?'. Perspectives from stakeholders answered that question, showing insight to this complex process. It is worth noting here that the thesis presents the findings of a single case study and I am mindful of the limitations it has. The study was a personal and professional journey to address the gap between policy and the lived experiences of eliciting voices in classrooms; the study presents the findings from my own lens. The next sub-sections address this overarching question in segments, beginning with the research design and finishing with reflections on the findings of this study.

### **7.1.1.1 Reflection on the Research Design.**

The constructivist paradigm allowed participants to work together to co-construct knowledge and investigate aspects with the aim of improvement. Vygotsky's (1978) teaching encourages collaboration, conversation, and social interaction (Holzman 2009), key aspects of this study. Freire's (1970) work was influential as the oppressed were supported to surmount their oppression through dialogue and critical consciousness. The constructivist paradigm worked well with the underpinning of Lundy's (2007) framework of child participation as it provided a clear roadmap from which to direct the action. The framework was suitable to use in a mixed methods design where the different methods complimented each other and allowed for a robust, rigorous, and sequential data collection processes in this multi-layered study (McNiff 2013). Using these methods in a case study was efficient as the context was familiar even though there were no opportunities for comparison. As this study was never static, the action research model was suitable for the project. Even at the end of the study, it was not complete (Carr and Kemmis 1986; McNiff 2013); there are still many opportunities to explore and no fixed answers to be fully satisfied with (Winter and Burroughs 1989). Participatory Action Research (PAR) complimented the paradigm as the participants had ownership, revealed when participants transferred their knowledge to others in the school community. The aim for the participant community was improvement – for themselves, for others and for the organisation.

Being an insider however, brought some challenges; the over familiarity made it difficult to ask reaching questions. For example, in some semi-structured interviews when teachers were explaining how they elicited voices, I would ask the question 'who held power in that situation?' but colleagues seldom saw that they had full control over the voices of learners. Reflecting on this, I believe if the learning conversations were a formal part of the study, it may have provided the space to discuss issues like these further.

Reflecting on the sample, which was convenient, voluntary, and purposeful in some instances, leads me to consider if the study engaged with the already engaged. I was disappointed with the level of uptake from the BOM and parents. Just four parents out of a population of over 350 agreed to take part in the study and of those, three completed the first questionnaire and only one parent engaged with the study from the beginning to the end. The BOM was a much smaller group, and just one member engaged with the first questionnaire and no further. Reflecting on this again, my focus was always on the support of teachers and

learners in supporting and training them to engage with voicework. I did not consider that parents and members of the BOM may need this support also. I did not consider if avenues already existed for parents and the BOM to have a say in classroom practices; I expected them to be ready to participate, without practice or precedence, something I have advised against when dealing with young people. Platforms need to be forged for the wider school community to have a say.

Looking back on the volunteer ethic of the study, I suggested that teacher participants engage with the methods of data collection as much or a little as they wished. This resulted in three of the teaching participants not engaging with many aspects of the study. Reflecting on this, it may have been prudent to have a minimum level of participation, higher than simply engaging with the methods of voice elicitation. I have also considered that the support given by me could have been formalised. The main method of support was the learning conversations; very few engaged with the MS Teams page or read the literature in the welcome pack.

#### **7.1.1.2 Reflection on the Data Collection Methods.**

The use of questionnaires in this study was invaluable especially as it represented a large cohort of learner voices (Cohen and Mannion 1994; Davey *et al.* 2010; Rowley 2014). They provided an excellent source of anonymous data and anchored the study before pointing the way towards areas of new discoveries. While the observations were useful also, some teachers did not invite me to a class where the method of eliciting voices was in progress. I feel that I did not make the purpose of the observations clear to the teachers. Two observations contained identifiers that would compromise anonymity, so data was difficult to present in the findings. The semi-structured interviews generated a large amount of data from teachers participating in the study. On reflection, more opportunities for participation were given to adults. Considering this, I noticed my bias towards the importance of adult voices which had the opportunity to outweigh learner voices in this study. Despite this, the voices of learners are dominant in the study and the focus groups provided an invaluable mechanism to record experiences (Abdalla *et al.* 2020; Howard 2004; Simmons *et al.* 2015; Vaughn *et al.* 1996; Wilson 2008; Yin, 2014). I regret that the stakeholder round table discussion did not happen and I feel if I have taken more time to develop relationships with the parents and BOM participants, the outcome may have been different. Since the study has completed, I have reflected on this and wonder if I didn't prioritise these as I am reflecting a cultural blind

spot in the school where families generally don't have influence. I began this study with the aim to include all stakeholders equally, but I focused in on teachers and learners. Looking back on my notes after meetings with my critical friends, they are concerned with the actions taking place in the classroom, with little reference to the wider stakeholder community. This is an area of interest for future research. Finally, I was disappointed with the lack of engagement in the reflective journaling, especially considering that each teacher received a journal and pen, along with monthly prompts on the MS Teams page. Reflecting on this, I think that time is a large consideration here. As an insider research I drew on my social capital to secure the sample of participant teachers. Perhaps the reflective journal was a step too far in the busy school schedule.

#### **7.1.1.3 Reflection on the analysis process.**

Data from this study were analysed in sequences providing natural reflection spaces. Audio recordings were particularly effective and self-transcription enabled familiarity. Leaving the quotations in a pure 'unadulterated' way, honoured the participants and added to the credibility of the study (Mazzei and Jackson 2012, p.746). On reflection, the quantitative data could have played a more significant role, particularly in the observation cycle. I feel that more segments could have been created in advance to cover the many ways in which learners' voices were part of the session. I feel also, that in the questionnaire, I could have delved deeper into the Likert Scale rating to understand why learners rated the school at their chosen level.

#### **7.1.1.4 Reflection on the ethical considerations of the study.**

I worked to achieve an accountable and ethical study which honoured the participants' voices. I employed member checking stages for transparency to give ownership of the data to the participants and to ensure that they could see that their views were taken seriously (Birt et al. 2016; Doyle 2007; Iivari 2018; Mertens 2005; Merriam 1998). I invited adult participants to only share with me what they wanted and to use the methods in whatever way they wanted. In hindsight, this created a bias as the youth voices were filtered through adults' voices (Rudduck 2005).

#### **7.1.1.5 Reflection on the findings of this study.**

The findings presented genuine pride in that learners were empowered to have influence as Lundy's (2007) model of child participation and Article 12 of the UNCRC envisaged. The testimonials from teachers and learners to the BOM and the school community was an indication of the ownership and satisfaction participants felt in the research. When reflecting on the challenges, I acknowledge that the fears teachers have in engaging with voicework are legitimate. I was surprised to uncover the aversion to the term 'student voice' but the alternative term 'student-teacher dialogue' honours both parties in the roles of voice elicitation. This reflects on the co-constructive nature of the research; participants were not simply consulted with, there was a co-production of outcomes and recommendations. I accept that the power balance is another difficulty and this is to be expected when one is challenging the normal power structures of any organisation. I also see the important role of training young people to participate, an area that this study did not deeply focus on; there was an expectation that young people would be ready and willing to participate once adults invited them to. Providing the space to elicit voices was not enough; being creative in ways to include all voices and building strong relationships was integral to voicework.

It was interesting to note that the BOM participant and one parent were not aware of any voice initiatives taking place in the school, which highlights a disconnect between the organisation and its stakeholders. Finally, it was fascinating to see that influence is still a struggle; low level changes were more common than instances of shared decision-making. Fundamentally, learners' voices influenced changes in this study and the research uncovered many ways in which the voices of learners could be enhanced in our school.

#### **7.1.2 So what?**

This section discusses the implications that this single case study may have for teaching practice, for stakeholders and for the profession of teaching.

##### **7.1.2.1 Implications for Practice.**

I began this research believing that eliciting voices was beneficial for teaching, learning, assessment, and engagement; my prior experiences were akin to those exposed in the findings of this study. Reflecting on the impact this study will have, I see the 'capable group' framework as a reflective tool for adults working with young people to use. In this study, as in existing literature, adults often think that young people have had a fair chance at

participation and I feel that this framework will help adults to be reflexive and question the facets used in their work to view how voices were authentic? (Cruddas 2007; Fielding 2004; Mitra 2004).

#### **7.1.2.2 Implications for Stakeholders.**

This study demonstrates the need for effective communication and a development of family leadership in decision making with parents. Schools are doing tremendous work which should be communicated to all stakeholders in various ways. In the setting, because of the study, a post of responsibility, which focused on the facilitation of youth voices and the communication of information was created, showing that the value had increased in the setting. Reflecting on the questions asked in the final questionnaire, there was a missed opportunity to ask learners if they had enjoyed the participation process, if they felt their voices were heard effectively and what they would change about the design. I feel that this would have gained deep insight about their experience as participants and would have provided some insight on impact. However, this study presented findings of increased confidence in young people who, when they had support, influenced classroom practices. I feel that this has enormous potential to train young people to navigate the power structures in a prefigurative democracy. The possibilities for supporting young people in this way to become active citizens in our ever-changing world is an exciting prospect (DES 2016; Fleming 2015). It is a long-sighted vision to provide the tools for agency and action which would be used beyond the life of the study.

#### **7.1.2.3 Implications for the profession.**

In the last number of years, I have been involved in different research studies and although I am not searching for barriers in teaching, the restrictions of the curriculum, the constraints of time and summative exams are reoccurring themes. Teacher 1 said that the system does not allow teachers to ‘draw breath’ and this sentiment has stayed with me. Working under these limitations will certainly curb the opportunities for creativity and time for elicitation in post-primary schools. The research demonstrates the difficulties that exist in voice elicitation, so caution must be taken when connecting policies with classroom practices. Teacher wellbeing, burnout, and the constraints of the curriculum are genuine issues that need to be addressed at a high level.

### 7.1.3 Now What?

I feel that this study revealed that voicework is not a quick fix to difficulties in the education system; it is a conscious and continuous way of conducting teaching practice. It requires training and support to be successful. It also requires dedication from adult participants who will reflect on their own biases to consider their impact on the authenticity of voices. This must be maintained in the culture of the school for continued impact to take hold (Angus 2006; Bath 2013; Simmons *et al.* 2015).

#### **7.1.3.1 Directions for Future Personal Research.**

This study presented findings on the complexities of eliciting learners' voices in classrooms in one school. The following bullet points list the many directions that future research should take, based on my experiences and learnings from this PhD study.

- Providing spaces for youth voices to be heard is not enough. Training to navigate the power structures within spaces is needed to support young people in affecting change.
- How Student councils have influence in education spaces warrants research.
- Some youth voice work does not elicit an authentic voice acoustic (Cruddas 2007). Using the Capable Group Framework, and investigation into authentic voice elicitation showing best practices would be useful and transferable to the field. It would be interesting to investigate the role of parents as co-producers or leaders in decision-making in schools to discover avenues for family leadership in school structures.
- An investigation of how voices are heard in the curriculum frameworks and how this translates to classroom practices would be an interesting comparison.
- An investigation into how support bodies prioritise voicework would provide insight as to the value voicework has for professional learning.
- Finally, how the culture of the school influences the creation of optimal conditions for voicework would be another area of examination.

#### **7.1.3.2 Distinct Contribution & Originality.**

Underpinning this case study using Lundy's (2007) model of child participation in the design, literature review and analysis is a significant strength. It highlighted the challenges this study encountered with each of the four pillars of Lundy's (2007) model of child participation.

Space must be nurtured, voice must not be an expectation, audience must feedback and influence must be authentic. These learnings were unique to our own experiences but have value in transferring knowledge for the future. The thick descriptions (Dawson 2009) in the narrative report utilise unadulterated quotations to show the lived experiences of participants in this research. It is my hope that these will bring the authenticity of the work to life so that our learnings can be built upon.

As our experience was unique, I created models and frameworks to ease transferability. Figure 6.1 shows an alternative research design which includes learnings from the research. The capable group framework, Figure 6.2, should be used as a reflection tool to reflect on and analyse how voices are elicited to see how authentic the voice acoustic is. Finally, Figure 6.3 summarises the theoretical contribution of findings as framed by Lundy's (2007) model of child participation and demonstrates the unique knowledge gained from the study and the learnings that can transfer to other settings and contribute to theory.

#### 7.1.4 Impact Statement.

At some point of my PhD journey, one of my supervisors said that reading someone's PhD thesis is like looking into their soul. I feel that this is true in this case. The PhD highlights the personal values of equality, fairness, and justice that I live by. It tells the story of a young girl in a post-primary setting in the early 1990s and how her voice was listened to, and how that experience influenced her teaching practice and research. Empowering young people is my passion. This study offered the opportunity to share this passion with my colleagues to improve practice, the organisation and, through the Community of Practice, influences positive change.

##### 7.1.4.1 Reflection on my own teaching practice.

While I was eliciting voices for many years in my teaching practice, this study allowed me to reflect on the ways in which I had elicited voices. Using my 'capable group framework' I can see that there were many instances where my biases and practices would have affected the authenticity of the voice responses. I understand the importance of training in participation processes and introduced training sessions to support this (Appendix LV). I also was alerted to the power of youth voices and the importance of participation beyond the school gates and this caused me to view my work as a teacher in a different way. I became a report writer for Hub na nÓg in September 2022 and saw that empowering young people in classrooms has

implications for active citizenship in our world. In August 2023, I resigned my much-loved teaching post and accepted a position of Programme Director of WorldWise Global Schools (WWGS). WWGS is Irish Aid's national Global Citizenship Education programme on the island of Ireland. WWGS works with 500 post-primary schools directly and in-directly through, funding, support, professional development, and training. Through WWGS, students are supported in becoming active citizens in this changeable and interdependent world in which we live. I feel that this aligns with my values and beliefs and I know that the PhD process was integral in navigating that space.

#### **7.1.4.2 Reflection on my research.**

In 2016 when I completed my first action research project as part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership, I was fascinated by research. The experience ignited an excitement within me that remains. I am captivated by the processes in which we teach and interested in ways to improve. In 2019, a colleague and I received a bursary from The Teaching Council under the auspices of the John Coolahan Research Support Framework to investigate raising the acoustic of student voices in the school. Through experience of writing, I culminated the essence of the project into a journal article for the International Journal of Student Voice, published in September 2023. In 2020 I began a Student Voice Community of Practice in the Limerick Education Centre. The group meets twice a year and shares knowledge and best practices in relation to amplifying youth voices. This voluntary position is a distinct contribution to the community and my expertise is bolstered by the PhD completion.

The experiences of researching for the PhD study have enabled me to carry out research for UNICEF investigating their Rights Respecting Schools programme, currently in use in the United Kingdom to see if it was transferable to Ireland. This experience highlighted the need for a rights-based interrogation of our own school policies and led to changes to the Code of Conduct which were respectful of the rights of the young person. I volunteered to do this successfully in two other settings. I have worked as a student voice facilitator for the Department of Education on two occasions and with Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board where I use my expertise and experience to speak to young people to elicit their views on matters that affect them. I have also taken part in many conferences since beginning the PhD in September 2019 (Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1 Conference participation related to this study.**

Date	Venue	Research Details
<b>October 2019</b>	Le Chéile Symposium for Deputy Principals, Mullingar	Student Voice Research.
<b>February 2020</b>	Women in Education Conference- Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ	Student Voice Research.
<b>May 2020</b>	AHSS Online Poster Conference, University of Limerick	PhD Methodology.
<b>April 2021</b>	SRPRC (Shannon Regional Postgraduate Research Conference) Online Poster Conference	PhD Methodology
<b>May 2021</b>	AHSS Online Poster Conference, University of Limerick	PhD Methodology.
<b>Jan 2022</b>	Limerick Education Centre	Developing Student Voice: An Online Workshop.
<b>Feb 2022</b>	Thesis in Three: MIC Postgraduate Research Competition.	PhD Research
<b>Feb 2022</b>	Postgraduate Research Presentations, Research Week, Mary Immaculate College	PhD Research
<b>March 2022</b>	ESAI Conference	PhD Methodology
<b>May 2022</b>	IRMSS Conference, MIC Limerick	PhD Methodology.
<b>May 2022</b>	Postgraduate Research Conference, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin	PhD Research – Methodology and preliminary findings.
<b>February 2023</b>	Student Voice in Inclusive Education Systems: LEC (Community of Practice).	PhD Research – Methodology and preliminary findings.
<b>September 2023</b>	Children’s Rights: Participation and Education Symposium Queens University Belfast	PhD Research
<b>Jan 2024</b>	Opening address at the Model United Nations, Cork City Hall	Voicework and active citizenship
<b>Feb 2024</b>	Plenary Session Keynote Speaker, GCE day, University of Galway	Student Voice Research and GCE in Education settings

Once the thesis is submitted, I aim to publish several journal articles. The first will concentrate on the findings from each theme and will be aimed at practitioners in the field. Another will focus on the learnings from using Lundy's (2007) model and will add the experiences from this study. Another publication will focus on the 'capable group framework' with the intention of creating a tool in which to measure the authenticity of youth voices. I am interested in investigating the mechanisms that are in place in post-primary schools such as the student council and measuring how authentic and influential they can be. Another will focus on the Community of Practice and the development of teacher professional learning in relation to how education support services scaffold voice elicitation for teachers.

#### **7.1.4.3 The impact of the PhD on my life.**

The PhD has enabled a great many changes to come about, most significantly a change in career. I now focus on supporting a greater number of teachers across Ireland to empower young people in the Global Citizenship Education Space. I have uncovered a talent for research and a thirst to delve more into the field. The research on youth voices does not end here; it is merely a milestone in the journey. Completing this PhD was not always positive; financial and personal constraints were challenging. Prioritising the work meant that the thesis has travelled with me and my family to Cork, Antrim, Galway, Kolkata, Spain, and the Orkney Islands. It has been a living presence in our lives for many years. Mostly, I am grateful and feel privileged for the experience that has brought such wealth and knowledge to my life. It is not a starting or end point, but a landmark on a future career in the empowerment of youth voices.

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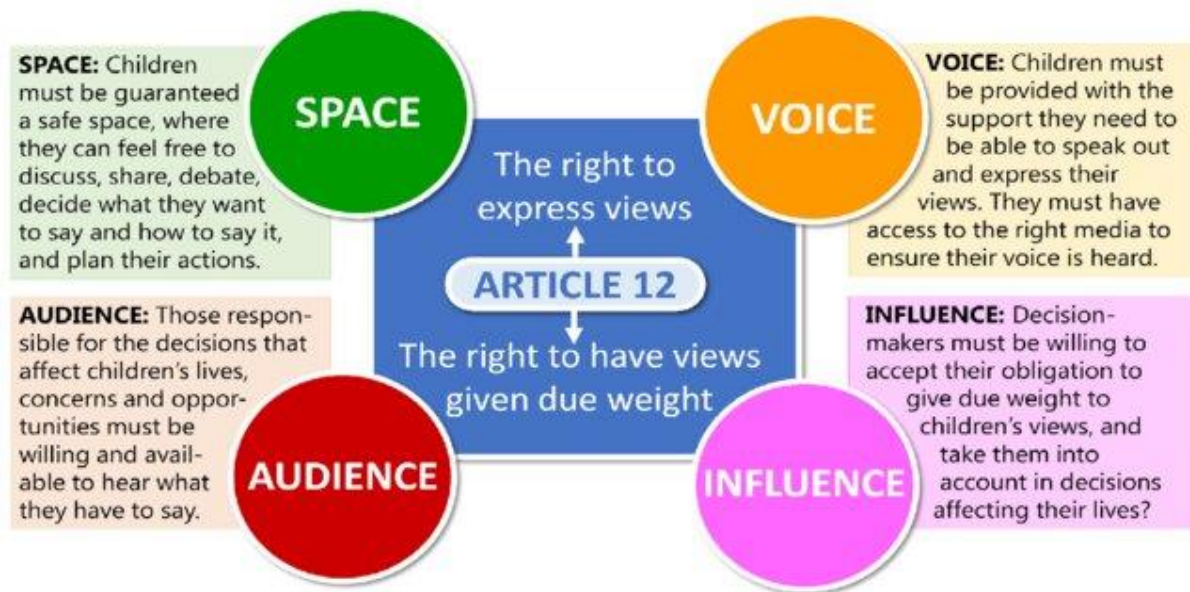
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## Appendices

### Appendix (I) Lundy's Model of Child Participation.

This is Lundy's Model of Child Participation.



How does this apply to us?

In our classes we are going to make space for students to have a say using the method you have chosen to elicit voices. You can use this as much as you like over the next few months. Students then can participate by giving their voice in ways that suit them. You will be their audience and you will listen to what they have to say. Their voices will be used for you to reflect on what they have said and influence changes in your classroom.

Remember, you can use your method in whatever way you feel is appropriate to your class.

# Everyday Spaces Checklist

This checklist is designed as a guide to help you ensure that children and young people have a voice in decision-making. It can be applied in many everyday situations including in classrooms, hospitals, childcare settings, child and youth services, youth and sports clubs, youth projects, arts and creative initiatives and other spaces.

Please do not use this checklist for developing policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation – use the Planning Checklist on page 18.

Please make sure that the ways you involve children and young people in decision-making are age-appropriate and accessible for all, whether in person or online.



### Appendix (III): Methods of eliciting the voice of the learner in the classroom.



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

**Questioning:** Making time for students' questions at some point in every lesson is a way to help students have a say in what is happening in the class. This can be done with the 321 method- (Three things you remember from today's class, two things you found interesting and any one question you have). An alternative version of this is to get the class to write down a question from today's lesson/ this topic/ story/ equation. Focus on two or three questions every time you do this. The idea is to make questioning a part of the lesson; every student can contribute a question. Another way to use questioning is to ask students to contribute one question on a topic and the questions will form a quiz. You could ask one student to compile a Kahoot style quiz or a Microsoft Forms quiz or ask the questions as part of the classroom activity.

**Learner Led Learning:** Survey the class by asking them two questions: 1. What are we (teacher and students in this subject) doing well to support your learning? 2. What could we do more of or do better to support your learning? These two questions will give a clear picture of what students are finding helpful and where they could use support. Once you have completed these questions and have analysed the student responses, focus on enhancing one aspect that students recognised as a support and focus on changing/ enhancing/ introducing one aspect that students identified as an area of need.

**The Negotiated Curriculum and Assessment:** This method involves discussing with students the material that will be covered and in what way it will be covered. The teacher involves students in the selection of course work. Students can negotiate the sequence of work and can enter into dialogue on how they would like to be assessed- orally every day, a test at the end of the section, small tests every week, a large question, peer assessment etc.

**Student Contract:** A student is given an A4 Sheet of paper and on it they record their promises they make to themselves about their learning in your subject. The promises may contain sentences like: By next week I will have revised all of chapter.... Or by next week I will have completed the assignment. This is followed by: What is my plan to do this? This could be taking it in small pieces or assigning a time to complete the work. The final statement each week will contain the phrase... I know I will have learned because... These statements can be shared with the class and can encourage others to revise when they learn what is being completed by their peers. Sometimes contracts don't go to plan and this can be used as an avenue to discussion- do we need to spend time on that in class? Or how do we (students and teacher) help this student to revise?

**Student Reflective Practice:** Students will reflect on their own learning- once they have finished a piece of work and before they submit it to the teacher for correction, they reflect on

the strengths and weaknesses of the work. They predict how well they think they have done and what are their reasons for this. When they receive their work back, they reflect on the feedback that the teacher has provided. They summarise the feedback for themselves and make a statement such as “Next time I will...”. When the next piece of work has to be submitted the student must reflect back on the statement and feedback from the last piece of work. Before they submit again, they will reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the piece, what they have changed for this piece of work (based on the last one) and how they think they will perform in this assignment.

**Appendix (IV): Advice on Leadership – Given on the MS Teams Page, October 2021.**

We are modelling the way in which student voices can be used in our classrooms and in our school. We must:

**Model the way:** Show students that we can listen to their voices in different ways. Encourage them to speak about their experiences in other classes. Tell other teachers about your own experiences.

**Inspire a Shared Vision:** Tell your students about what you want for student voice in our school. If we persuade enough teachers and students, we will embed a culture of listening in our school.

**Challenge the Process:** Try and look for ways in which student voices can be heard in your subject. Little changes will make a big difference.

**Enable others to Act:** Help other teachers to get started and support them to stay going, even if it is difficult, uncomfortable or new.

**Encourage the Heart:** Keep your enthusiasm and passion and share your wins with everyone!

(From Kouzes and Posner 1997)

**Appendix (V): MS Teams Post (adapted)**

Adapted Post from Teacher: *I have been asking the students to predict their grade before they hand me up the question and they are writing the reason why they have given this grade. The reason behind the grade is probably the most important bit because they are thinking it through more.*

**Appendix (VI): Template for a Learner Contract.**

Today's Date	What do I need to do?	What steps do I need to take to get me there?	End Date	How did I do?

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**Appendix (VII): MS Teams Post (November 2021).**

*Voices can be elicited in many ways. Next time you are going to engage your students in an elicitation, think about different ways in which students might like to respond – could they write, draw or record an opinion? Could they say their view in a physical way like hands up or a walking debate? Could they participate privately? Think about how the different ways might engage different responses.*

**Appendix (VIII): The four F’s of effective Feedback.**

Provided as a MS Teams Post (October 2021): Remember that Feedback is a very important part of the elicitation process. Lundy (2018) has a useful guide about feedback to students:

<b>Full</b>	<b>Provide feedback to young people about why their views were or were not accepted. Young people should be told about what is being implemented and who is in charge and what is happening next.</b>
<b>Friendly</b>	<b>Feedback given by adults needs to be in plain English. Findings from consultation should be shared so they can see how their views were given due weight.</b>
<b>Fast</b>	<b>Young people need to be given timely feedback that acknowledges their initial contribution and shows what progress is being made.</b>
<b>Followed-up</b>	<b>Decision-makers need to provide ongoing feedback and information to children and young people throughout the decision-making process.</b>



# MIREC-3

## Research Ethics Committee

### Research Ethics Application Form

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY: APPLICATION REFERENCE NUMBER:

A guide to completing this form can be found [here](#)

1. MIREC-3 is compatible with Windows running Adobe Acrobat. Compatibility with Apple Mac is not guaranteed.
2. Complete all sections. Information provided must be comprehensible to non-experts.
3. Attach a copy of all relevant documentation to the application.
4. For Postgraduate Research Students, the Supervisor must sign Section 1.16 of this form.

#### SECTION ONE: APPLICATION DETAILS

1.1 APPLICANT TYPE:  Faculty / Staff  Student

1.2 APPLICATION TYPE:  New application  Resubmission

1.3 If this application is a resubmission, please quote original application reference number: (e.g. A16-023)

1.4 PROJECT DURATION: Proposed Start Date (Month, Year)

Anticipated Completion (Month, Year)

1.5 PROJECT TITLE:

1.6 FUNDING BODY (if any):

1.7 NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

1.8 OTHER INVESTIGATORS and AFFILIATIONS:

1.9 MIC EMAIL ADDRESS:

1.10 POSITION, DEPARTMENT and FACULTY  
(Students should add Supervisor's Position, Department and Faculty):

1.11 ID NUMBER (Students only):

1.12 PROGRAMME OF STUDY (Students only):

1.13 NAME OF SUPERVISOR (PGR Students only):

## SECTION TWO: DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

### 2.1 Purpose of research (300 words maximum).

This research aims to investigate the perspectives stakeholders have on the impact of an intervention to facilitate learner voice on approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. The voice of the learner has gained momentum in Irish education in recent history. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations [UN] 1989) gave children the right to be heard on matters that concern them. This right has led to a change in policies regarding children; the publication of the ten-year National Children's Strategy (2015), the creation of the office for the Ombudsman for Children (2002) and the appointment of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2011 (Flynn 2018). Ireland, like much of Europe since the mid 1990's has had an explicit focus on the learner at the heart of the education system (Lamb 2011, Ravenhall 2007). The effects of the rights of the child are seen in the White Paper on Education (Department of Education and Science [DES] 1995) and the Education Act (DES 1998). More recently, in 2010, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published 'Innovation and Identity' which put forward a set of proposed changes to the Junior Cycle which embraced a student-centred approach in its vision and values.

The voice of the learner is embedded in policy. This research will engage with a whole school population; students, teachers, management, Board of Management and parents, to investigate in a case study approach by collecting data from multiple sources to answer the following research questions:

- (i) What methods according to stakeholders are effective in eliciting the voice of the learner in the classroom?
- (ii) Does eliciting learner voice have a positive impact on teaching, learning, assessment and engagement from the perspectives of stakeholders?

### 2.2 Research methodology. This must describe in detail all interactions with research participants (focus groups / interviews / online surveys etc.) (300 words maximum).

This constructivist study will accumulate knowledge by vicarious experience to empower learners. Case study is the chosen methodology to conduct an in-depth study of learner voice (Bell 2005). The school in which I am employed will provide the sample for this research which gives me an understanding of the context (Mercer 2007, p6.) This ethnographic insider research study aims to include students ( $n=403$ ), teachers ( $n=19$ ), management ( $n=4$ ), parents ( $n=25$ ) and members of the Board of Management (BOM) ( $n=3$ ) and challenge them to consider how learner voice impacts teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. The study includes a phase of action research where a method of eliciting learner voice will be focused on in each class group. This method will be reflected upon and adapted using Lewin's (1946) method of Plan, Act, Observe and Reflect. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods can dramatically enhance the value of research (Bryman 2006, Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). In this study, participants will complete two anonymous online surveys with quantitative and qualitative questions to establish the perceived level of the voice of the learner within the school. Semi-structured audio recorded interviews will provide qualitative data and will be conducted at the beginning and end of the project. Participating teachers will use a reflective journal to document their journey of focusing on eliciting learner voice. Observations will take place to collect quantitative data on how learner voice is used within the class. Audio recorded student focus groups will take place in addition to a round table discussion with representation from all stakeholders to glean qualitative data. There is no exclusive reliance on one method of data collection (Cohen and Mannion 1994, p.233). These mixed methods will provide triangulation which is suitable for this project as it establishes a holistic view (Cohen and Mannion 1994, p.239).

**Appendix (X): Letter to the Board of Management.**



13<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

Dear Principal,

I am writing to request formal permission to carry out research on the project 'Perspectives on enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Post-primary School'. At present, I have completed the second year of my Doctoral studies in Mary Immaculate College and wish to begin research in our school in September 2021.

The research intends to gain perspectives from all stakeholders in our school on the level of learner voice currently in our school, the merits and drawbacks of using methods of eliciting learner voice in our classrooms and what can be done to enhance the voice of the learner further. The study aims to engage with members of the BOM, school management, teachers, parents and students. Data will be gleaned from online questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observations, reflective journaling and round table discussions. Participating teachers will focus on using a method of eliciting learner voice in their classrooms over four to six months and will reflect on their experiences by journaling, through interviews and round table discussions. Students will be invited to participate in online questionnaires, focus groups and round table discussions. Parents and members of the BOM and school management will have an opportunity to give their views via online survey, interviews and round table discussions. A detailed plan is attached.

I am seeking permission to attend the first BOM meeting to have my request sanctioned by the board and to recruit BOM participants. I also request permission to speak at our first staff meeting in September 2021 to invite colleagues to participate in the research. Further to this, I need permission to contact parents by letter from the school to inform them about the research, request their consent and student assent. Finally, I request permission to use the school building to conduct interviews, focus groups and round table discussions, some of which may be held outside of school hours.

This research is being supervised by Dr J Fitzgerald ([Johanna.Fitzgerald@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Johanna.Fitzgerald@mic.ul.ie)) and Dr F. O Murchu ([Finn.OMurchu@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Finn.OMurchu@mic.ul.ie)). This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (A21-014). If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. 061-204980 [mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie).

Many thanks for your continuing support. If you have any questions before sanctioning this research, please do not hesitate to contact me,

K. Chapple.

**Appendix (XI): Expression of interest form distributed to teachers.**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. Which method(s) of eliciting learner voice are you most interested in using?

Negotiated Curriculum and Assessment

Learner Led Learning

Questioning

Student Contract

Student Reflective Practice

2. Which of your subjects are you most interested in using it in?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which year group are you most comfortable working with? (Tick all that apply)

First Year

Second Year

Third Year

Transition Year

Fifth Year

Sixth Year

4. Any other comments

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Please return to me when you have completed this form.

**Appendix (XII): Questionnaire 1 (Parent/Board of Management adapted).**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of Learner Voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Post-primary School.

These questions will appear on a Microsoft Form which will be emailed to all parents who wish to take part. It will also be posted to the Microsoft Teams Parents Page.

1. What does Learner Voice mean to you?
2. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being silent and 10 being loud, what level do you think the voice of the learner is in our school?
3. What do you think is currently being done in our school to enhance your daughter's voice in her learning in school?
4. What could be done more of or done differently to enhance your daughter's voice in relation to her learning?

**Appendix (XIII): Questionnaire 1 (Student)**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

This questionnaire will be available online and will be completed outside of class time. It will also be available on the Microsoft Teams Student Page.

1. What year group are you:  
First   
Second

- Third
- Transition Year
- Fifth Year
- Sixth Year

2. What does “using your voice to help your learning” mean to you?
3. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being silent and 10 being loud, how strong do you think the voice of students are heard with regard to their own learning in our school?
4. Give examples of ways that your voice can have an impact on your learning.
5. What could be done more of or done differently to allow you to have more say in your learning?

**Appendix (XIV): Questionnaire 1 (Teacher, Senior Leaders and Board of Management).**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

This questionnaire will be available on the Microsoft Teams site and will be completed outside of class time.

1. What does the term “Learner Voice” mean to you?
2. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being silent and 10 being loud, how strong do you think the voice of students are heard with regard to their own learning in our school?
3. In what way do you think students could use their voice to influence their learning?
4. What could we do as a school community to enhance the voice of the learner within our school?
5. What, in your opinion are the benefits and challenges associated with facilitating learner voice in our school?

**Appendix (XV): Observation Checklist.**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

\*The following chart will be given to teachers who have agreed to have their class observed in advance of the observation taking place.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_  
Class Group \_\_\_\_\_ Method being focused on \_\_\_\_\_  
Observer: K Chapple Subject \_\_\_\_\_

\*The table represents sample areas which will inform observation checklist.

Name of Activity	√ when the behaviour is observed	Narrative commentary
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Student answering a question  
(prompted by teacher)

Student asking a  
question/Commenting  
(unprompted by teacher)

Praise/ Rewards

Evident communication  
(between teacher/ students or  
amongst students)

Students engaging with task

Opportunity for pupil  
involvement in decision  
making

Disruption to class

**Appendix (XVI): Questionnaire 2 (Student).**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

This questionnaire will be available online on the Microsoft Teams page and will be completed in the student's own time.

Which method of eliciting learner voice did you focus on?

- Negotiated Curriculum and Assessment
- Learner Led Learning
- Questioning
- Student Contract
- Student Reflective Practice
- I don't know what method I used

Which year group are you in?

- First Year
- Second Year
- Third Year
- Transition Year
- Fifth Year
- Sixth Year

Has the process of eliciting learner voice in your class been:

- Positive
- Negative
- There is no difference

How would you rate the level of learner voice in our school- one being silent and 10 being loud and clear?

What has been the best way that you were able to use your voice to impact your learning?

What could be improved?

**Appendix (XVII): Questionnaire 2 (Teacher).**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

This questionnaire will be available online on the Microsoft Teams Participant Page.

**1. Which method of eliciting learner voice did you focus on?**

- Negotiated Curriculum and Assessment
- Learner Led Learning
- Questioning
- Student Contract
- Student Reflective Practice

**2. With which year group did you use it?**

- First Year
- Second Year
- Third Year
- Transition Year
- Fifth Year
- Sixth Year

**3. Has the process of eliciting learner voice in your class been:**

- Positive

Negative

There is no difference

4. How would you rate the level of learner voice in our school- one being silent and 10 being loud and clear?
5. What has been the best way that students were able to use their voice to impact their learning?
6. What could be improved?

**Appendix (XVIII) Questionnaire 2 (Parent).**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

1. Which method of eliciting learner voice did your daughter focus on?

Negotiated Curriculum and Assessment

Learner Led Learning

Questioning

Student Contract

Student Reflective Practice

I don't know

2. With which year group is your daughter in?

First Year

Second Year

Third Year

Transition Year

Fifth Year

Sixth Year

3. In your opinion, has the process of eliciting learner voice in her class been:

Positive

Negative

There is no difference

4. How would you rate the level of learner voice in our school- one being silent and 10 being loud and clear?
5. What has been the best way that students were able to use their voice to impact their learning?
6. What could be improved?

**Appendix (XIX): Blank Contact Sheet.**

## Contact Sheet

What people, events or situations were involved?	
What were the main themes or issues in the contact?	
Which research questions did the contact bear most centrally on?	
What new hypothesis, speculations or guesses about the field situations were suggested by the contact?	
Where should the fieldworker place more energy during the next contact, and what sorts of information should be sought?	

Appendix (XX): Contact Sheet Example 1.

Oct 2021

Contact Sheet

<p>What people, events or situations were involved?</p>	<p>Interview <del>_____</del></p>
<p>What were the main themes or issues in the contact?</p>	<p>Feedback to students - Why does this not happen in the school at present?</p>
<p>Which research questions did the contact bear most centrally on?</p>	<p>Enhancing L.V. in the setting.</p>
<p>What new hypothesis, speculations or guesses about the field situations were suggested by the contact?</p>	<p>Nervous of L.L.L. Huge importance of feedback</p>
<p>Where should the fieldworker place more energy during the next contact, and what sorts of information should be sought?</p>	<p>Review fb. methods. Share with all teachers Check that fb is highlighted Look for a notice board for the Student Council.</p>

Appendix (XXI) Contact Sheet Example 2.

Interview Oct 2021

Contact Sheet

<p>What people, events or situations were involved?</p>	<p><del>SV</del> Interview.</p>
<p>What were the main themes or issues in the contact?</p>	<p>SV in the main school - The fb doesn't loop - No idea where SV is going.</p>
<p>Which research questions did the contact bear most centrally on?</p>	<p>Embedding the culture</p>
<p>What new hypothesis, speculations or guesses about the field situations were suggested by the contact?</p>	<p>Need the top down &amp; bottom up approach.</p>
<p>Where should the fieldworker place more energy during the next contact, and what sorts of information should be sought?</p>	<p>Share Leadership examples with participating teachers. Update the HS Teams page ↑</p>

## Appendix (XXII): Teacher Information Sheet.



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

**Who is conducting the study?** This research is being conducted by Katie Chapple, a student in the Structured PhD in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is the research project about?** This research aims to gain perspectives from all stakeholders: students, teachers, management, members of the Board of Management in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ and challenge them to consider how a learner's voice can influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. A case study approach will be adopted and all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the research.

**What are the benefits of this research?** It is hoped that your participation in this research will support continued development of our approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement for our school community. It will inform the school improvement planning process and collect information from all stakeholders invested in our school community.

**What is involved for the teacher participants?** As a teacher participant you will be asked to:

- take part in a seminar where we will discuss different methods of eliciting learner voice (45 minutes- September 2021). This will be recorded and available online.
- choose one method of eliciting learner voice that you will focus on with one class group for a up to a four-month period between September 2021 and March 2022.
- complete two anonymous teacher surveys (10 minutes October and April) on your views on learner voice.
- keep a reflective journal (online or hard copy) from September 2021 to May 2022.

In addition to this you **may** choose to:

-watch or attend a short seminar on effective reflective journaling; available online (15 minutes September 2021).

-complete one, two or three audio recorded interviews in person or remotely (September 2021 /January 2022 /May 2022- 40 Minutes for each interview)

-allow me to observe classes to enable me to observe the methodologies you are using to facilitate learner voice in the classroom and observe the voice of the learner in the classroom (December -February- for one or more classes).

-take part in a teacher round table discussion about the how the different methods of learner voice are working in the classroom (January 2022- 1 hour)

-take part in a round table discussion with all stakeholders (a member of the BOM, school management, parents, teachers and students for 1 hour April 2022)

**Reflective Journals:** Reflective journals are used to help teachers analyse experiences they have had working with students. You will be invited to record your reflections about the process of eliciting learner voice in your classes over the course of the academic year (September 2021- May 2022). There are many different ways you can write in your journal. You may write as much or as little as you wish. I encourage you to use this journal and write for yourself and share with me only what you feel comfortable with sharing. Quotations from your journal will be anonymised and may form part of the results section of my doctoral thesis. A session on reflective journaling will be conducted on (date/time in September) for participating teachers to ensure you are comfortable engaging with this effectively.

**Observations:** If you are open to inviting me into your classroom, I would welcome the opportunity to observe how learner voice is facilitated in your lessons. These observations would be carried out in the course of your normal teaching and are optional.

**Interviews:** At the beginning (September 2021), at a mid-point (January 2022) and at the end (May 2022) of this research project I will interview teachers about their journey with learner voice. Each interview will take about 40 minutes and are audio recorded. You may choose to do one, two, three or zero interviews.

**Round table discussions:** There are two round table discussions planned for this research. The first, scheduled for January 2022, will be a discussion with the teacher participants only, where they will discuss their experiences of eliciting learner voice in the classroom. The second-round table discussion will comprise of representatives from the Board of Management (1), Staff Management (2), Parents (2), Teacher participants (2) and students (2-4). Each round table discussion will take approximately one hour and is optional.

**Can I withdraw from the study?** Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. It will not be possible to withdraw your data afterwards. This is because all data is anonymised and it is not possible to link anonymised data with individual participants. Your anonymity is assured. Your name or the name of our school will not be identified in any part of the study. A code will be applied to all individuals (e.g. "Teacher A") and this code will be used in transcripts and published data. Your name will be known only to me and I will have custody of the data. My supervisors in this study will have access to the data but will have no access to identifiers; name, subject or role in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ. The interviews and round table discussion will be audio recorded and your contributions may be transcribed and used in the written thesis.

**How the information will be used?** The data from the study will be combined with that of the other participants and will be used to form the results section of my doctoral thesis. Summary data will appear in the thesis along with anonymous quotations from questions in the interviews. Quotations that are used will never identify any participant by name, subject or role in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ.

**How will confidentiality be kept?** All interviews will be in private. Audio recordings will be kept on a separate device and will be transcribed to my personal computer which is password protected. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I will have custody of all data and my supervisors will have access to it as necessary. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and



7. In signing this document, I am aware that I will complete an online anonymous survey, focus on one method of eliciting learner voice in my classes and keep a reflective journal.
8. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

**Please tick this box to agree to the interview being audio recorded:**

**Signatures:**

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Please tick the following boxes if you wish to take part in one or all:

Interview (Audio Recorded)

Observations

Round table discussion (Teachers) (Audio Recorded)

Round table discussion (All Stakeholders) (Audio Recorded)

## Appendix (XXIV): Interview 1 Information Sheet (Teachers and Senior Leaders).



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

**Who is conducting the study?** This research is being conducted by Katie Chapple, a student in the Structured PhD in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is the research project about?** This research aims to gain perspectives from all stakeholders: students, teachers, management, members of the Board of Management in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ and challenge them to consider how a learner’s voice can influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. A case study approach will be adopted and all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the research.

**What are the benefits of this research?** It is hoped that your participation in this research will support continued development of our approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement for our school community. It will inform the school improvement planning process and collect information from all stakeholders invested in our school community.

**What is a semi-structured interview?** A semi-structured interview is an interview between the researcher (me) and you where there are pre-determined but open-ended questions (below). This interview will be audio recorded and should take about 40 minutes to complete. Your answers will be transcribed and your words may be used as quotations in the results section of the written PhD thesis. You will not be named and will be given a code such as “Teacher A”. If you speak about certain subjects, roles of responsibility or give identifiers that could reveal your own, or any other person’s identity, those identifiers will be removed or blanked.

Once the interviews have been analysed, a draft copy will be sent to each participant. The participant will be given their pseudonym or code and asked if the interpretations of their data is accurate. At this stage you can engage with me to ensure that I have interpreted your words correctly and amend any misunderstandings. After this process has been completed you cannot withdraw your data.

**What will I be asked in the interview?** The interview will focus on four questions:

1. What do you understand by the term “learner voice”?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being silent and 10 being loud and clear, how would you rate the level of learner voice in our school at present? How is it evident?
3. As a teacher/ manager/ member of the Board of Management, what could we do to enhance the voice of the learner within our school?

4. What, in your opinion are the benefits and challenges associated with facilitating learner voice in our school?

The tone of the interview will be conversational. I may pick up on something you have said and ask you to further define it.

**Can I withdraw from the study?** Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. It will not be possible to withdraw your data afterwards. This is because all data is anonymised and it is not possible to link anonymised data with individual participants. Your anonymity is assured. Your name or the name of our school will not be identified in any part of the study. A code will be applied to all individuals (e.g. “Teacher A”) and this code will be used in transcripts and published data. Your name will be known only to me and I will have custody of the data. My supervisors in this study will have access to the data but will have no access to identifiers; name, subject or role in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ. The interviews and round table discussion will be audio recorded and your contributions may be transcribed and used in the written thesis.

**How the information will be used?** The data from the study will be combined with that of the other participants and will be used to form the results section of my doctoral thesis. Summary data will appear in the thesis along with anonymous quotations from questions in the interviews. Quotations that are used will never identify any participant by name, subject or role in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ.

**How will confidentiality be kept?** All interviews will be in private. Audio recordings will be kept on a separate device and will be transcribed to my personal computer which is password protected. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I will have custody of all data and my supervisors will have access to it as necessary. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. The anonymised research data and findings will be retained in a secure location for five years after the submission of the research project in line with the Mary Immaculate College Research Management Retention Schedule.

#### **Contact Details:**

If at any time you have any queries with regard to this study my contact details are as follows: Katie Chapple ([Katie.Chapple@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Katie.Chapple@mic.ul.ie)). The Supervisors on this research are:

Dr J Fitzgerald, Head of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education      Dr. F O Murchu, Head of the School of Education (Post Primary).

Phone      061      204517      Email: [Johanna.Fitzgerald@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Johanna.Fitzgerald@mic.ul.ie)      Phone:      0504      20534      Email: [Finn.OMurchu@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Finn.OMurchu@mic.ul.ie)

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC Reference Number A21-014). If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Tel: 061-204980  
[mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)



**Appendix (XXV): Interview 1 Consent (Teachers and Senior Leaders).**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

Please fill out and return to me at Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ.

**INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT**

1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.
2. I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.
3. I understand that I am agreeing to take part in an audio recorded interview and I will be asked four key questions. The interview is conversational, and it may lead to other topics being covered.
4. I understand that I can volunteer to be part of a round table discussion in April 2022.
5. I am fully aware of the procedures involving myself in this study.
6. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason.
7. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

**Please tick this box to agree to the interview being audio recorded:**

**Signatures:**

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix (XXVI): Draft analysis of Interview 1, Member checking stage for teachers and Senior Leaders.**

**Analysis of interviews 1**

There were varied reasons why teachers decided to be part of this project. Newer teachers claimed that it was important to develop their 'skill set' (teacher 11) whereas more experienced teachers welcomed the chance for reflection (teacher 1, teacher 10) as there is 'a danger of slipping into a comfort zone' (teacher1). Other factors included the opportunity focus on the teaching and learning in an 'intensive way' (teacher 8) to improve practice

(teacher 1, teacher 6) and to develop education (teacher 5). The empowerment of the student was a factor (teacher 3, teacher 4, teacher 11) as was student engagement (teacher 4, teacher 5, teacher 8) because 'if you feel that your voice is heard more, you are going to feel like participating more' (teacher 4). Teacher 13 felt that these methods would increase learning and described the situation when students receive a test result; if it's satisfactory, they do not review it. If they are disappointed with the result, they tend not to review it either, they just look at the mark and not the feedback. Teacher 13 felt that these methods would promote self-reliance and critical awareness in students.

The phrase 'learner voice' was generally taken to mean the voice of the students with regard to learning. Teachers 3, 7 and 13 identified that teachers are indeed learners in the classroom space also. Teacher 3 noted the focus in college on teaching and learning from the perspective of the teacher and the lack of focus on what the students think; 'if we are working with these students, shouldn't we be having these conversations with them?'. Differentiation was another component as 'what works well for the majority might not be great for certain clusters' (teacher 1, teacher 15). There was an interest in finding authentic student voice as 'students tend to take on roles- like student council [...] maybe captain of a team [...] and a particular type of student ends up in those roles [so] are we really hearing the student voice?' (teacher 15). Participant teachers recalled their personal student experience and how they felt when their 'voice was heard and when it wasn't'; 'I think it makes a difference when every voice is [...] taken into account' (teacher 2). Teacher 13 noted the importance of labelling the activity with students to make them aware that they are using their voices and it gives the process a status.

There were individual reasons why teachers participated as one teacher stated that they were 'not comfortable with [their] "teacher" [or "in charge"] role (teacher 2). Another stated that there have been many changes both in the education system and in their personal teaching career and noticed that students 'were not as vocal as they had been' (teacher 8). This participant teacher was curious to see if something had changed due to a subject change, a teaching style or 'had students become quieter due to other factors?' (teacher 8).

Participant teachers were aware of the relationship between teachers and students in the school stating they were 'good and strong' (teacher 1) and 'positive' (teacher 15) which 'allows for discussion' (teacher 15). However, it was acknowledged that as class teachers, students do not often discuss matters with the subject teachers and perhaps speak to those in managerial positions such as year heads (teacher 3). It was also noted that students have no problem in going 'right to the top' if they had an issue as they know they will be listened to (teacher 10). The culture of communication 'at staff meetings where [student voice, engagement, assessment for learning and differentiation]' are spoken about actively (teacher 8). It was noted that students are 'involved in [decision making] with particular projects' (teacher 1). The student council was mentioned as an effective mechanism for eliciting voice (teacher 5, teacher 6, teacher 8, teacher 11). Staff meetings were said to be student centred (teacher 4, teacher 8, teacher 10) even to a point where the teacher's voice can be muffled or the balance is tipped in the other way (teacher 10).

In classrooms, various techniques were in place to give the learners a voice, including debates and discussion, brainstorming, feedback and surveys (teacher 11) 1 minute summaries, what they liked or didn't like, 2 things learned and one question they had, asking them if *they* were teaching the class, what would they have done differently (teacher 2) the green pen project (teacher 8) and 'hearing students on the intercom this week as it's anti-bullying week it's good because the students are listening to each other' (teacher 5). The importance of students listening to each other was acknowledged again with teacher 8 saying: 'I feel that the greatest learning can take place when a student has learned something from another person in the class rather than from me'. It was acknowledged that if these methods are not highlighted to students as voice work, the learners may not recognise that they are using their voice to influence the classroom (teacher 11) which was further appreciated by teacher 8 in saying: 'I think that students don't realise that they can learn as much from each other as they can from the teacher in the classroom'. There was a recognition of the wealth of methods that are already being used and need for teachers to share their knowledge in staff meetings (teacher 6).

In terms of benefits, participating teachers cited 'understanding what works well for pupils' (teacher 1) so that lessons will be more related to them, beneficial for them and in turn be more engaged and take more responsibility for their learning (teacher 1, teacher 6, teacher 11, teacher 13). Improved relationships between students and teachers (teacher 3, teacher 15) were cited as an important benefit; 'just simply asking them for their opinion on what works for them instead of [teachers] deciding will enhance [teachers] relationships with [students] as we will respect their voice and they respect [us] for respecting them (teacher 3). Improved teaching practice was also mentioned as a perceived benefit (teacher 3, teacher 6). Teacher 3 had replicated the method of asking students for their input on lessons with a younger year group and found that 'they are very aware [of how they learn] probably more than we give them credit for. In participating in this project teachers will have to be more open minded about student feedback (teacher 3, teacher 15). While student voice work encourages the student to speak about matters which are important to them, it is only half of the equation; the student voice also encourages a 'culture of listening' (teacher 15) as 'if you want to hear someone, you have to listen as well (teacher 8). It was acknowledged that what students require may be small and 'easy to facilitate' (teacher 1). One teacher spoke about her hope for students becoming more confident in 'speaking aloud, and hearing their own voices, in giving presentations and become orally more proficient' (teacher 8). 'All of us will benefit' as we as teachers reflect on our own practice and students receive customised lessons (teacher 3).

There were fears and challenges with regard to participating in this research. Most fears were in relation to criticisms of 'practice that might make [teachers] uncomfortable' (teacher 1, teacher 3). However, it was also acknowledged that for authentic dialogue 'you do need a certain level of honesty about what works and what doesn't' [and even though] 'I am a little anxious about what might be thrown up [...] that is why I want to do it' (teacher 1). Teacher 15 expressed the need to support teachers as some feedback from students is bound to feel like criticism but added that in their experience 'I don't think the students mean it in a criticising manner' and often 'it is not a personal attack on teachers, this is not

an attack on students or on the school, it's about students saying "this is how I feel right now" [and] how they are feeling about something is very valid' (teacher 15). The challenge is 'being able to recognise and validate how they are feeling' and then act on it (teacher 15). Teachers who are open to listening may not always be thinking about the change that may need to happen (teacher 4). The challenge of the two-way dialogue was also voiced as we as teachers give feedback to students every day, 'it's not the norm in the Irish system for students to give feedback to teachers' (teacher 15). Teacher 11 expressed a concerns about pleasing everyone saying, 'when you put topics to students, they are all not going to agree- no matter what happens, you are not going to please everyone'. In addition to this, teacher 11 voiced concerns about the majority ruling when negotiating with students saying: 'what if the negotiation goes against one student the whole time? Yes, they are giving their opinion but if the majority rules against them every time- will they give up?'. There were also concerns about using some methods with certain class groups that were passive rather than naturally engaged (teacher 1, teacher 2). Teacher 2 explained: 'I have a class that doesn't really engage in conversation. They are finding [student contract] difficult; they are passive and consume rather than engage'. Teacher 8 was concerned about the flow and progression with the Transition Year group as 'they can be doing other things and the continuity [may be affected]'.

Another challenge raised by participating teachers was the unbalance of the power dynamic in the classroom. Teacher 1 explained that 'in a sense you are relinquishing some of the teacher power that you think you have. You're leaving yourself a bit more vulnerable'. Teacher 15 noted that there is an outside view or a traditional view of 'how teachers *should be*, how teachers should communicate, how teachers are never off duty' [and that there is a traditional perception of the classroom where] 'the teacher is the main leader in the room'. This type of teacher-student participation; moving from leader to facilitator (teacher 15) has its challenges. There are times that you must acknowledge that the teacher is the expert in the room; students 'might think that an assessment might be better done one way but I, from experience know that it wouldn't' (teacher 5). This idea was concurred by teacher 11 explaining that 'any decision [made, is to improve learning] not to make this easier on me'. However, some teachers explained that this was the way they taught normally: 'this kind of teaching is normal for me [the students] are very relaxed in the class; they feel that if they don't know something it's ok to communicate with me' (teacher 4).

Teachers were also concerned with managing the expectations of the students in their classes; they might have expectations that aren't realistic' (teacher 1) or 'the students might say something and there's an expectation that you have to do it' (teacher 5). Teacher 1 explained 'if [students] suggested something that I didn't feel that I could follow through with, like something I am not confident about or something I don't believe in [...] I would hate them to think that we are not listening when we are just being realistic' (teacher 1).

Exams and curriculum overload were on teacher's minds and there were expressions of concern regarding meeting students' needs (teacher 1, teacher 7, teacher 8, teacher 13, teacher 15) as sometimes strategies and the constraints of the curriculum can get in the way of what teachers are trying to cover (teacher 6, teacher 7) and while there is often a desire to try new things in a fresh way, once you are teaching for a few weeks, there is a pressure

to get thing covered that innovative methods can go out the window (teacher 10). 'Our school is academic- the girls are looking for high grades so the focus is getting them ready for the exam' (teacher 10). There have been many changes in the Irish educational system of late and one teacher wondered if the length of the course is 'presenting serious challenges in terms of student voice [as] there is so much to get through and sometimes you don't want to shut down a conversation, but you've got to keep moving or they are not going to get through the course (teacher 8). Teacher 8 also noted that students were 'more passive' and 'wondered if that was [due to a] pressure they felt particularly towards exam years. Have they been disempowered?'. There were concerns that the grind school culture where there 'seems to be a lot if input from the instructor as regards notes being given, [where there would not be a focus on the voice of the learner] and I think that has had a knock on effect in schools especially in exam years [as] students are expecting notes more than discussion' (teacher 8) and have less value in strategies such as assessment for learning and learner voice (teacher 8). Teacher 8 further explained that even if the voice of the learner, students themselves can make a decision to present a "polished answer which is formulaic and doesn't represent their own voice because they think that may do better even if it doesn't represent their own views because they don't want to take a chance'. There was also an acknowledgement that 'when we hear student voice and listen to [students] they still achieve' (teacher 15) and that there will be 'trials and error and tweaking' (teacher 6).

The lack of space was a challenging factor identified by two participating teachers (teacher 8, teacher 15). Teacher 8 explained that having a space to showcase work in a physical way would be appreciated: 'it would be lovely, at the end of a period of work, to bring in another group of students to listen to that work'. A space to show the 'initiatives they took on in a particular year and what they are focusing on now' would be welcomed (teacher 8). It was acknowledged that there are many activities that promote the voice of the students such as debating or class presentations but 'there is very little opportunity for inter-class activity' which could 'empower the learner more' (teacher 8). Teacher 15 recognised that space can give value; 'staff have a staffroom, there is a year head office, should there be a student council space or a student space? Because when you start giving it that kind of space it gives it value and it becomes a cultural thing. Using the walls of the school as a display was identified as an important medium to convey the student voice; 'we have a [new] anti-bullying wall- that's really important because it is a visual representation of the student voice in the school' (teacher 8).

While it was accepted that there were many student based activities in the school, there is a danger that the dialogue from those activities is closed or if we are paying lip service in our school; 'I know that we have a student council ... but I don't know whether that is fed back to the whole staff. It's a very closed dialogue as no-one knows what's happening' (teacher 1). Teacher 8 had the same opinion: 'I don't think we know enough as a whole school about what [the student council] are doing' (teacher 8). Teacher 4 recognised the danger of closed dialogue and promoted the need of hearing what students have to say and 'getting it back to management- there are priorities and sometimes the student voice isn't a priority'. Teacher 15 focused on building on what we have at present with different ways of hearing the voices of our students but looking to the future by asking 'what are we doing with the student voice? Where is it going? [And how do we ensure] that those who are on the periphery or on the margins are also heard?'. Teacher 13 noted that feedback could be

incorporated into subject planning at the beginning of the year and promoted the idea of sharing the experiences of teachers not just in individual subject departments but as a whole school unit.

The role of negotiation between students and teachers was highlighted as an area of importance. Teacher 15 identified that teacher will be open to hearing voice and while there is a necessity to act on some of it, it is more important to have dialogue with students especially when they bring 'something forward that we may not agree with or that we are not able to invest in or do whatever is required, but to be open and honest with the students as to why something can't happen'. Teacher 2 explained that in her view the students' perspective of voice is different to the teacher's view: 'sometimes I think that students think that student voice is "whatever we make verbal here, we should get and if you don't get it, then you are not listening to us" but it should be more constructive rather than just getting what you want. It's dialogue rather than just voice'. In a specific example, when students wanted to re-arrange a test date the teacher gave her rationale for having it earlier- she didn't want them studying over mid-term- and after discussion the students agreed that the test would be better to be out of the way before mid-term (teacher 11). Teacher 2 had encountered a similar scenario where 'looked for a sample answer and I wouldn't be comfortable in that because they would just give that back to me in an answer- but I would give them a sample structure'. There are ways in which voice can be extracted without mentioning personal aspects- like saying what they like- for example Kahoot! or group work or class notes and we 'mix it up over the course of a couple of months, we will hit everybody' (teacher 15). Finding authentic voice is difficult and maybe 'it should be student dialogue rather than student voice because we are meeting each other half-way' (teacher 5). What also must be kept in mind, is when we find that authentic voice- what do we do with it? Are we coming to this with preconceived ideas which could be worked out with dialogue (teacher 15)

One of the concerns about this project was that teachers wanted to authentically act on the feedback given and how the information from this project will be fed back to the whole student body and not just the students who participated in the project because 'how will it be if the students feel that their voice hasn't gone somewhere or if the information isn't acted upon' (teacher 1). Teacher 8 expressed a wish to spread the knowledge gained by saying 'it would be really great to share the experiences of the other teachers. Otherwise, you only get a small group of people who benefit.

The issue of time was a feature in many of the interviews. Teacher participants welcomed the time to reflect as it's 'something we don't do it enough, I'd say, because we are so busy [...] the system doesn't allow you to actually draw breath' (teacher 1). Participants were concerned that eliciting the voice of the learners in their classes may take up 'too much time and I don't veer away from the work I am supposed to be doing' (teacher 5). The constraints of the curriculum were a concern for teacher 7 and teacher 13. Teacher 13 acknowledged the merits of eliciting the voice of the student but was aware that it took time and as teachers we can't fall behind or be a poem or a chapter behind the others. The disconnect

between the policy of promoting the autonomous learner and the reality of being ‘strained by the curriculum’ was one difficulty experienced by teacher 7.

Covid 19 has brought many challenges in the last 18 months and it has had an impact on the students as they are more passive and less engaged, particularly in the junior years (teacher 7, teacher 8). The mask poses a particular challenge: it’s really an impediment- it’s stopping [students] from talking. There is a swathe of students who find it a real obstacle and let’s say you have a student who is trying out a question or an opinion for the first time, a student who is a bit shy and they have taken that step to put up their hand and participate and you can’t actually hear them and you have to ask them to say it again and it’s awful because it’s been a leap to get to that stage’ (teacher 8).

Student voice work can often be with a flush of enthusiasm which wanes over the life of the research and keeping the energy of it in the school beyond the life of the project was also a concern raised by teacher 15. It has been identified as a priority in the posts structure which gives it kudos and wealth (teacher 15). There was a strong sense from the participants that practice of eliciting the voice of the learner must be habitual in order to survive beyond the life of the project. One way to do this is to make sure it is part of the conversation and not a separate entity to the teaching of the class (teacher 2, teacher 5). Teacher 13 suggested incorporating the student teacher dialogue in subject planning and promoted the idea of beginning this with first year students as it then becomes routine and habitual ‘if you start with a group, they know no different- it’s hard to jump into it with a group of seniors’. Teacher 4 suggested that it may be something to do with how comfortable you are in the classroom as a teacher: ‘if I am uncomfortable then I tend to be didactic and have a lecture style so I think that if you have confidence and security if you are secure in your teaching, if you are secure in your subject, you are open to listening to students and students are open to listening to you, then it has a chance’.

**Appendix (XXVII): Observation Checklist**

Observation.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Junior/ Senior Subject Group \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Activity	√ when the behaviour is observed	Total Number	Narrative commentary
Student answering a question (prompted by teacher)			
Student asking a question/Commenting (unprompted by teacher)			
Praise/ Rewards			

Evident communication (between teacher/ students or amongst students			
Students engaging with task			
Opportunity for pupil involvement in decision making			
Disruption to class			

Appendix (XXVIII): Samples of Completed Observation Checklists with identifiers removed.

*Give opportunities for voice*

①

Observation. [redacted]  
 Date 31<sup>st</sup> JAN 2002 Junior/Senior Subject Group JUNIOR [redacted]

Name of Activity	✓ when the behaviour is observed	Total Number	Narrative commentary
Student answering a question (prompted by teacher)	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	12	Answer An bhfuil sé sin ce Do you want to do it?
Student asking a question/Commenting (unprompted by teacher)	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓ <i>Can I try the box?</i>	15	Are we supposed to [redacted] I was in the bathroom [redacted]
Praise/ Rewards	✓ lovely ✓ I liked [redacted] coming ✓ Good woman! ✓ For the Carlini. ✓ Excellent!	10	Good girl [redacted] playing in [redacted] Tabulous [redacted] Excellent.
Evident communication (between teacher/ students or amongst students)	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	9	Even while [redacted] - [redacted] watching each other
Students engaging with task	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓ - Throughout	12	Evidence of listening to each other listening to the teacher
Opportunity for pupil involvement in decision making	✓✓✓✓✓✓ Several	8	What do you think [redacted]
Disruption to class	✓ - no real disruption with the [redacted] R. ✓ Swimmig class ✓ Basketball [redacted] - 6 weeks.		C.R. students left

*Timed Intervals - Class 40 mins.*

*In students asked for opinions - Will we start.*

*'Or maybe [redacted]*

*What will [redacted]*

*[redacted] - what*

*Maybe [redacted]?*

*I think [redacted]*

*- Students helping each other. - How does this go?*

*An bhfuil aon rud eile uainn?*

*What about to bring [redacted]*

*Everyone [redacted] or what will we do.*

*Should [redacted]*

Who are we picking? [Teacher asks]

clear evidence of listening to each other.

I feel it's missing something? What do you think?

Teacher's guidance [redacted] - Teacher does it first!

We [redacted] - Will we go through it (over again) - [redacted] (Teacher)

This time I [redacted] (Teacher)

That's [redacted] so now can you

Oh! bhud nios fur! I know you can do it! really try & project

Will we do it again to see [redacted]

[redacted] (Whole class lists)

[redacted] (Whole class lists)

Can we all join? [redacted]

Can I [redacted] I don't think [redacted]

Would any one else like to [redacted]?

Opportunities for everyone to ask - then evidence of prompted responses.

Teacher moved about to room - Moving towards [redacted] students to help

Will we try it - [redacted] engage them.

Is there any red eye as fast as - Is there anything else?

Will we try [redacted] - Do you think? Are we [redacted]

[redacted] an bhifur sibhe sasta le

[redacted]

[redacted]

Lets keep that [redacted]

Will we keep [redacted]?

How [redacted] when

[redacted] "May" [redacted]

[redacted] How are we finding the [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

Will we try it without [redacted]? Can [redacted]

Lets see how the energy levels [redacted]

2

Observation.

Date February 1st 2022 Junior/ Senior Subject Group

Name of Activity	✓ when the behaviour is observed	Total Number	Narrative commentary
Student answering a question (prompted by teacher)	- Asks individuals ✓ ✓ groups ✓ ✓ at all stages ✓	4	
Student asking a question/Commenting (unprompted by teacher)	The teacher is circulating students approach her She asks groups what they need.	4	
Praise/ Rewards	✓ lovely ✓ heart gleeor? - Well done.	3	
Evident communication (between teacher/ students or amongst students)	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	3	
Students engaging with task	- Throughout ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	10	
Opportunity for pupil involvement in decision making	- Throughout ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	8	
Disruption to class	✓ 1 person late ✓	-	

Can we do a tail  
How would you do that?

All students engaged in getting

Every student is busy -

Carlisle - so what is a tail do like?

Students have already decided

We need a task

1159 - Every student has got their own equipment. They have

she is passing ~~the~~ ~~method~~. students use ~~the~~ ~~method~~  
the student approaches a group - what are you doing? The  
students explain the experiment.  
If any of this spills - let me know about it. You need to be an - ~~circumstances~~  
'let it out' You do it - you're better.

Students are working on experiments - ~~most~~ all are active, carry out  
experiments in groups of 3 or pairs. Students ask each  
other for equipment - "Can I have this weighing scales" - "That's a hotplate."  
~~\_\_\_\_\_~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

What do you expect is going to happen?  
What will happen when the chips get smaller.  
~~What~~  
Did Siméil - What do you think - It's definitely ~~bandwidth~~.  
① ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~? - then what do you think?

② What do you think - Maybe try one more at 10 and go  
drop by drop.  
Students were not able to break down a tablet - ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_~~



a student is reading their work - the other students - green pen - and they are filling in what they have missed.

Q - What could you add? S - I could have added a quotation

Students are busy highlighting - where they have highlighted the drama.

Again - Student answers - but T adds an additional aspect to improve the answer, and expand the vocabulary.

Clearly enjoyment of the students - They enjoy the ideas from one student.

Student prompted to expand on their ideas - and enjoyed giving responses.

T take a minute - How could I have improved?

Remember, (Structure) - Am I being clear?

Am I happy with this?

Students invited to share what

What did I do well here?

They would change / what they are happy with.



protests because they thought ... work it out and the student sees that it is a primary activity.

do you think that? - Students are asked to give the rationale for their answers.

All happy? All sãshã? - Teacher asks students if they have questions.

Teacher goes through notes - looking at vocabulary.

Teacher came back to 'what ~~we~~ did we do today?' - Students give the key words from the class.

## Appendix (XXIX): Round Table Discussion (Teacher) Information Sheet.



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

**Who is conducting the study?** This research is being conducted by Katie Chapple, a student in the Structured PhD in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is the research project about?** This research aims to gain perspectives from all stakeholders: students, teachers, management, members of the Board of Management in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ and challenge them to consider how a learner's voice can influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. A case study approach will be adopted and all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the research.

**What are the benefits of this research?** It is hoped that your participation in this research will support continued development of our approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement for our school community. It will inform the school improvement planning process and collect information from all stakeholders invested in our school community.

**What are round table discussions?** Round table discussions are discussions where every participant has an equal part. The researcher (me) leads the discussion without influencing it. The aim of this discussion is to discuss the use of learner voice methods being used in your classes. Taking part in the round table discussion is optional.

**The schedule for the discussion is as follows:** A reminder of the etiquette of an audio recorded round table discussion is not to mention student or teacher's names or subjects as these could identify participants. If this happens by accident, these will be removed or banked out.

Firstly, teachers will in turn explain which method of eliciting learner voice they have been engaging with over the past few months. The next part of the round table discussion is to discuss the following questions:

What has worked well? What still needs work/ didn't go well/ what disadvantages? What does this school still have to do to encourage learner voice?

Any other comments.

**Can I withdraw from the study?** Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. Once the round table discussion is completed, I will transcribe the data. Each participant in the round table discussion will be given a draft version to read. You will be given your code or pseudonym (Round Table Discussion Teacher Participant 1"). At this stage you can engage with me and

alert me if I have misinterpreted your words. After this process is complete, it will not be possible to withdraw your data.

**How the information will be used?** The data from the round table discussion will be combined with that of the other participants and will be used to form the results section of my doctoral thesis. Summary data will appear in the thesis along with anonymous quotations from the round table discussion. Quotations that are used will never identify any participant by name, subject or role in our school.

**How will confidentiality be kept?** All interviews will be in private. Audio recordings will be kept on a separate device and will be transcribed to my personal computer which is password protected. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I will have custody of all data and my supervisors will have access to it as necessary. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. The anonymised research data and findings will be retained in a secure location for five years after the submission of the research project in line with the Mary Immaculate College Research Management Retention Schedule.

**Contact Details:**

If at any time you have any queries with regard to this study my contact details are as follows: Katie Chapple ([Katie.Chapple@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Katie.Chapple@mic.ul.ie)). The Supervisors on this research are:

Dr J Fitzgerald, Head of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education      Dr. F O Murchu, Head of the School of Education (Post Primary).

Phone      061      204517      Email:      Phone:      0504      20534      Email:  
**Johanna.Fitzgerald@mic.ul.ie**      **Finn.OMurchu@mic.ul.ie**

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC Reference Number A21-014). If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Tel: 061-204980  
[mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)

**Appendix (XXX): Round Table Discussion (Teacher) Consent form.**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

Dear Teacher,

Many thanks for agreeing to take part in this teacher's round table discussion on learner voice. The discussion is due to take place on (date) at (time) in (room) and should last approximately one hour.

### ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION PARTICIPANT

1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.
2. I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.
3. I understand that I am agreeing to take part in an audio recorded round table discussion. The round table discussion is conversational.
4. I am fully aware of the procedures involving myself in this study.
5. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason.
6. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Please tick this box to agree to the round table discussion being audio recorded:

#### Signatures:

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Appendix (XXXI): Interview Two (Teacher) Information Sheet.



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

**Who is conducting the study?** This research is being conducted by Katie Chapple, a student in the Structured PhD in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is the research project about?** This research aims to gain perspectives from all stakeholders: students, teachers, management, members of the Board of Management in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ and challenge them to consider how a learner's voice can influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. A case study approach will be adopted and all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the research.

**What are the benefits of this research?** It is hoped that your participation in this research will support continued development of our approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement for our school community. It will inform the school improvement planning process and collect information from all stakeholders invested in our school community.

**The schedule for the interview is as follows:**

I will remind you of the etiquette of an audio recorded interview; there can be no mention of student or teacher’s names or subjects as these could identify yourself or other participants.

The following questions will be asked:

What method of eliciting learner voice have you been using?

What has worked well with this method?

What still needs work/ didn’t go well/ what disadvantages? What does this school still have to do to encourage learner voice?

Any other comments.

Sometimes in the course of an interview I will pick up on something you have said and ask you a further question that may not be on this list.

**Can I withdraw from the study?** Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. It will not be possible to withdraw your data afterwards. This is because all data is anonymised and it is not possible to link anonymised data with individual participants. Your anonymity is assured. Your name or the name of our school will not be identified in any part of the study. A code will be applied to all individuals (e.g. “Teacher A”) and this code will be used in transcripts and published data. Your name will be known only to me and I will have custody of the data. My supervisors in this study will have access to the data but will have no access to identifiers; name, subject or role in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ. The interviews and round table discussion will be audio recorded and your contributions may be transcribed and used in the written thesis.

**How the information will be used?** The data from the study will be combined with that of the other participants and will be used to form the results section of my doctoral thesis. Summary data will appear in the thesis along with anonymous quotations from questions in the interviews. Quotations that are used will never identify any participant by name, subject or role in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ.

**How will confidentiality be kept?** All interviews will be in private. Audio recordings will be kept on a separate device and will be transcribed to my personal computer which is password protected. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I will have custody of all data and my supervisors will have access to it as necessary. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. The anonymised research data and findings will be retained in a secure location for five years after the submission of the research project in line with the Mary Immaculate College Research Management Retention Schedule.

**Contact Details:**

If at any time you have any queries with regard to this study my contact details are as follows: Katie Chapple (**Katie.Chapple@mic.ul.ie**). The Supervisors on this research are:

Dr J Fitzgerald, Head of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education      Dr. F O Murchu, Head of the School of Education (Post Primary).

Phone            061            204517            Email:      Phone:            0504            20534            Email:

**Johanna.Fitzgerald@mic.ul.ie**

**Finn.OMurchu@mic.ul.ie**

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC Reference Number A21-014). If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Tel: 061-204980  
[mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)

**Appendix (XXXII): Interview two (Teacher) Consent form.**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

Dear Teacher,

Many thanks for agreeing to take part in this semi-structured, audio recorded interview. In this interview we will discuss your experience to date of using learner voice within your classroom. Your interview will take place on (date) at (time) in (room) and should last approximately 40 minutes. This interview is optional and you are free to cancel at any time without consequence.

**INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT**

1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.
2. I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.
3. I understand that I am agreeing to take part in an audio recorded interview and I will be asked four key questions. The interview is conversational, and it may lead to other topics being covered.
4. I am fully aware of the procedures involving myself in this study.
5. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason.
6. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

**Please tick this box to agree to the interview being audio recorded:**

**Signatures:**

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix (XXXIII): Round Table Discussion Information Sheet (Adult Participants).



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

**Who is conducting the study?** This research is being conducted by Katie Chapple, a student in the Structured PhD in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is the research project about?** This research aims to gain perspectives from all stakeholders: students, teachers, management, members of the Board of Management in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ and challenge them to consider how a learner's voice can influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. A case study approach will be adopted and all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the research.

**What are the benefits of this research?** It is hoped that your participation in this research will support continued development of our approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement for our school community. It will inform the school improvement planning process and collect information from all stakeholders invested in our school community.

**What are round table discussions?** Round table discussions are discussions where every participant has an equal part and the researcher leads the discussion without influencing it. The aim of this discussion is to gain the perspectives from representatives of the Board of Management, school management, teachers, parents and students and to discuss how the use of learner voice methods brought advantages and disadvantages to the learner, the classroom and the school. Taking part in the round table discussion is optional.

**The schedule for the discussion is as follows:** The researcher will briefly explain who each person is and what is their role within the school community. This will not be audio recorded as it will identify people. Recording will begin. The researcher will remind participants of the etiquette of an audio recorded discussion- no mention of student or teacher's names or subjects as these could identify participants.

Firstly, students and teachers will explain which method of eliciting learner voice was used in their class. Members of school management, parents and a member of the BOM will speak about their experience of observing the progress of the project. Next, the following questions will be asked and the table will be open to anyone who wishes to join in the discussion:

What has worked well over the last few months?

What still needs work/ what didn't go well/ what are the advantages and disadvantages?

What does this school still have to do to encourage learner voice?

Any other comments.

The tone of this discussion is conversational. Sometimes things are said that I may wish you to clarify and another question will be asked which is not on the list.

End of Discussion.

**Can I withdraw from the study?** Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. Once the round table discussion is completed, I will transcribe the data. Each participant will be given a draft version to read. You will be given your code or pseudonym (“Round Table Discussion Participant 1”). At this stage you can engage with me and alert me if I have misinterpreted your words. After this process is complete, it will not be possible to withdraw your data.

**How the information will be used?** The data from the study will be combined with that of the other participants and will be used to form the results section of my doctoral thesis. Summary data will appear in the thesis along with anonymous quotations from questions in the interviews. Quotations that are used will never identify any participant by name, subject or role in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ.

**How will confidentiality be kept?** All interviews will be in private. Audio recordings will be kept on a separate device and will be transcribed to my personal computer which is password protected. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I will have custody of all data and my supervisors will have access to it as necessary. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. The anonymised research data and findings will be retained in a secure location for five years after the submission of the research project in line with the Mary Immaculate College Research Management Retention Schedule.

#### **Contact Details:**

If at any time you have any queries with regard to this study my contact details are as follows: Katie Chapple (**Katie.Chapple@mic.ul.ie**). The Supervisors on this research are:

Dr J Fitzgerald, Head of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education      Dr. F O Murchu, Head of the School of Education (Post Primary).

Phone      061      204517      Email:      Phone:      0504      20534      Email:  
**Johanna.Fitzgerald@mic.ul.ie**      **Finn.OMurchu@mic.ul.ie**

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[mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)

**Appendix (XXXIV): Round Table Discussion Consent Form (Adult Participant).**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

Dear Participant,

Many thanks for agreeing to take part in this round table discussion on learner voice. The discussion is due to take place on (date) at (time) in (room) and should last approximately one hour. This discussion aims to collect the views of representatives of all stakeholders in the learner voice research project that has been taking place in our school over the last few months. Please detach and return this form to me at **katie.chapple@mic.ul.ie** or at “School”.

**ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION PARTICIPANT**

1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.
2. I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.
3. I understand that I am agreeing to take part in a round table discussion and this discussion is audio recorded.
4. I am fully aware of the procedures involving myself in this study.
5. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason.
6. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

**Please tick this box to agree to the interview being audio recorded:**

**Signatures:**

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix (XXXV): Member checking stage (Responses in email).**

*This is very interesting reading.*

*There is alot of crossover amongst teacher input.*

*One thing that seems to be coming across to me as I read the teacher input is that there is a similar thread - what is student voice (ie it is more than the students listing off issues and expecting that by verbalising them they get what they have asked for). Maybe this is the key - as schools we need to showcase how to express our voice/opinion/ideas etc and know that*

*putting them on the table they will be discussed, however, a majority decision around moving forward may be made. It strikes me that this is something we do at staff meetings regularly and we get great buy in from each other on things when we have had a robust discussion, various pts of view are heard and then a decision has to be made to move things forward. As adults we can see the rationale for the decision even if it is not what we wanted or whatever but we buy in as part of the decision making and reflection process. These are skills maybe we need to support student voice with? Get under the skin of what student voice is...not just a few statements from students....*

*I hope this makes sense in an email!*

*Anyhow that was what struck me as I was reading and I am not sure I got that across in our original interview - I know I mentioned what do we do with student voice but maybe on reflection I missed the initial bit..how do we get student voice that is authentic and that they know how to use.*

*Thanks a mill*

### **Email 2:**

*Hey Katie,*

*Read through the document - excellent work. One question: is part of this sentence missing? I have no doubt this is exactly what I said but what I meant is below:*

*Teacher 8 further explained that even if the voice of the learner, students themselves can make a decision to present a “polished answer which is formulaic and doesn’t represent their own voice because they think that may do better even if it doesn’t represent their own views because they don’t want to take a chance’.*

*Teacher 8 further explained that even if the voice of the learner is strong, that students have strong personal views and styles of delivery, the students themselves can make a decision in exam situations to present a “polished answer which is formulaic and doesn’t represent their own voice because they think that may do better even if it doesn’t represent their own views because they don’t want to take a chance’.*

### **Appendix (XXXVI): Excerpts from the Online Reflective Journals.**

#### **Reflections 11<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

*I like the idea of doing Katie’s project. I think it’s easy to become stagnant in this job and being involved in these type of projects and keep one fresh and forces one to assess one’s own practice.*

*I think I’ll ask my [-] to do the ‘contract’ task as they are a quiet bunch and not very forthcoming at all – hence the contract style would be more suitable for them. It is also their*

*final exam year and I am aware that it might be helpful to the girls themselves to make weekly contracts. It might even be a welcome task for them.*

*The 'discussion based one'? Will be more suited to my [-] who are a very dynamic and bright group. They like to achieve, are very keen, work off each other and are contribute well to class discussions.*

### **November 2021**

*Have begun the tasks with each group. As predicted, [ ] were very forthcoming and had suggestions to share. I have already begun to modify my lesson plans according to their suggestions. They would like more continuous assessment and creative writing.*

### **Appendix (XXXVII): Learner/ Student Information Sheets.**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

**Who is conducting the study?** This research is being conducted by Katie Chapple, a student in the Structured PhD in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is the research project about?** This research aims to gain perspectives from all stakeholders: students, teachers, management, members of the Board of Management in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ and challenge them to consider how a learner's voice can influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. A case study approach will be adopted and all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the research.

**What are the benefits of this research?** It is hoped that your participation in this research will support continued development of our approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement for our school community. It will inform the school improvement planning process and collect information from all stakeholders invested in our school community.

**What is involved for the student participants?** As a student participant you will be asked to:

- engage with your teacher using one method of eliciting learner voice in the classroom.
- complete two anonymous student surveys (10 minutes October and April) on your views on learner voice.

In addition to this you **may** choose to:

- take part in a student only focus group where we discuss your thoughts on learner voice with other students in our school. The focus group will be held in the school, during class time and will be audio recorded. It will take place in February 2022 and it will take one hour to complete.

-take part in a round table discussion with all stakeholders (a member of the Board of Management, school management, parents, teachers and students). This will take place outside of school time and will be one hour in length in April 2022.

**What are Focus Groups?** These are groups that come together to discuss certain topics. Students in our school will use methods of learner voice in their classrooms. Students will have different opinions on the methods that have been used. These opinions will be recorded in a focus group. There will be three focus groups with 6-10 students in each group. Taking part in the focus group is optional.

**What are Round table discussions?** Round table discussions are similar to focus groups but this discussion group will have representatives from the Board of Management, members of our school's management team, teachers, parents and students. They will discuss the impact learner voice has had in our school had over the months it has been used. This round table discussion is scheduled to take place in April 2022 and will take approximately one hour to complete. It will take place outside of school hours. Taking part in the round table discussion is optional.

**Can I withdraw from the study?** You do not have to take part in this study. You can change your mind at any time without explaining why. If you decide to drop out of the project, it will not be possible to withdraw your data from the online survey because it is anonymous.

If you decide to take part in the focus group or the round table discussions, they will be audio recorded and after they have taken place, I will analyse the discussion and type a draft copy. Which will be sent to each participant. The participant will be given their pseudonym or code ("Focus Group Participant 1") and asked if the interpretations of their data is accurate. At this stage you can engage with me to ensure that I understood what you have said correctly and at this stage I can correct any misunderstandings. After this process has been completed you cannot withdraw your data.

**How the information will be used?** The online survey is anonymous. The results from the survey will be added to the rest of the results and will appear in summary. If you take part in the focus group or the round table discussion what you say may be used as a quotation and may be used to form the results section of my doctoral thesis. You will not be identified. You will be given a code "Student A" and summary data will appear in the thesis along with anonymous quotations from questions in the interviews. Quotations that are used will never identify any participant by name, subject or role in our school.

**How will confidentiality be kept?** Audio recordings will be kept on a separate device that is used for this purpose only and when the focus groups and round table discussions are finished, I will transcribe the words onto my personal computer which is password protected. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I am in charge of all of the data. My supervisors will have access to it as necessary. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. The anonymised research data and findings will be retained in a secure location for five years after the submission of the research project in line with the Mary Immaculate College Research Management Retention Schedule.



**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents, if you wish to take part in this study, please write your email below and a separate consent form will be emailed to you:**

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Student Participant Assent Form.**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

### **Student Participant Assent Form.**

1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.
2. I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.
3. I know that by signing this form I can take part in two anonymous online surveys. I know that I can volunteer to take part in an audio recorded focus group or an audio recorded round table discussion and have to do these as they are optional extras.
4. I am fully aware of everything that I have to do in this study.
5. I know that I don't have to do this if I don't want to. I know that I can change my mind if I want and I don't have to give a reason why.
6. I know that anything I say or write will be kept confidential.

### **Signatures:**

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick the following boxes **if you wish to take part in:**

Audio Recorded Focus Group with other students (January 2022)

Audio Recorded Round table discussion with all stakeholders. (April 2022)

**Appendix (XXXIX): Screenshots from the Student MS Teams site; invitation to the survey and the survey analysis.**

**Katie Chapple** 24/09/2021 11:08  
Cailini, many thanks for signing up for this group- I really appreciate your help. As all teachers are just beginning, I will wait a week or so to give you the first online anonymous survey which should take about 10 minutes to complete. My aim is to engage with as many of the student body as possible. Over half of the teachers in our school have signed up and are committed to hearing your voices regarding your learning. Thanks for being part of this! 😊

**Katie Chapple** 24/09/2021 11:08  
[Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our School Student Group.](#)

Monday 18 October 2021

**Katie Chapple** 08/10/2021 12:34  
Hi Cailini! Below is a questionnaire which I estimate will take less than ten minutes to complete. It's anonymous and while there are 5 questions, none are required- so you can skip one if you want to. Many thanks again- there's one more of these in April/May and that's unless you want to be part of the focus group- those of you who ticked the box for that, I'll contact you separately in January. Feel free to ask me any questions at any time. 😊 [Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our School Student Group](#)

**Katie Chapple** 18/10/2021 20:20  
Hello to the new members who have joined us! The above survey takes about 5 minutes. It's anonymous- so be as honest as you can. Many thanks! [Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our School Student Group.](#)

Friday 22 October 2021

**Katie Chapple** 22/10/2021 15:48  
I have analysed the first 35 of the student anonymous surveys and here are the provisional themes that are emerging... just if you're interested.... *Students valued being included in discussion with teachers and welcomed environments where they feel comfortable and safe where they can freely give their voice. Students feel that they can ask their teachers to revise elements in class before exams and can ask for topics to be included in the classroom. Participating students showed knowledge in terms of their own learning and understood that they have a unique perspective. Students also stated that giving their voice in classes can help the lessons be more interesting and fun, which in turn makes them more invested and engaged in their learning. Participating students were aware of their own individual needs but frequently referred to the needs of their peers. Students also recognised that they had a role to play and stated that the onus is on them to speak up, join in discussions, share opinions and ask questions which could motivate themselves and others.*

See less

## Appendix (XL): MS Teams Invitation to Focus Group.



Katie Chapple 08/03 19:26

Haigh Cailini, I am holding focus groups to discuss the level of success using methods of eliciting learner voice in your classes. The teachers have been focusing on different methods- these have different names and the following document explains them. Everyone who ticked the box to say they were interested in joining a focus group has been sent a form- if you didn't tick the box but you are interested in taking part- here is the sign up form.

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=sjYPwKuxf06lgybZtxieymgauFu4eqFHmC1PyGqiqSNUNDI0NFJPM0VCUU04RkRMNEtaMllwRVZSSy4u>

[See less](#)

3 replies from you

↩ Reply



## **Appendix (XLI) Learner/ Student Information sheet- Focus Group.**

**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

**Who is conducting the study?** This research is being conducted by Katie Chapple, a student in the Structured PhD in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is the research project about?** This research aims to gain perspectives from all stakeholders: students, teachers, management, members of the Board of Management in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ and challenge them to consider how a learner's voice can influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. A case study approach will be adopted and all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the research.

**What are the benefits of this research?** It is hoped that your participation in this research will support continued development of our approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement for our school community. It will inform the school improvement planning process and collect information from all stakeholders invested in our school community.

**What are Focus Groups?** These are groups that come together to discuss certain topics. Students in our school will use methods of learner voice in their classrooms. Students will have different opinions on the methods that have been used. These opinions will be recorded in a focus group. There will be three focus groups with 6-10 students in each group. Taking part in the focus group is optional.

**What do I have to do if I take part in the student focus group?** As a student focus group participant, you will be asked to:

- speak about your experience in using learner voice over the last few months.
- listen to the views of others on their experiences.
- discuss your own opinions prompted by questions (See the Schedule for the Focus Group)

**Schedule for the focus group:** In a focus group the correct procedure is not to mention name of subject used, teachers' names, other students' names etc. Focus only on your own personal experience whether it is positive, negative or both. Firstly, each student will be asked to speak about the method of eliciting learner voice they have been using in their class. The next part of the focus group is a discussion. The following questions will be asked and any student who wishes to speak will be given the opportunity to do so:

What are the benefits of the methods used?

What are the drawbacks?

What do you think is the best method for eliciting learner voice?

What does the school still need to do to enhance the voice of the learner?

Sometimes something will be said in a focus group and it may lead the conversation to a different discussion and different questions related to the research may be asked.



1. I have read and understand the Student Focus Group participant information sheet.
2. I understand what the student focus group is about and what the results will be used for.
3. I understand that I am volunteering to take part in the Student Focus Group, that it will be audio recorded, that my words may be transcribed and used in the written thesis for this study.
4. I know what I have to do in this focus group.
5. I know that I don't have to take part if I don't want to and I can change my mind if I want to.
6. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

**Please tick this box if you agree to the focus group being audio recorded**

**Which method of Learner Voice did you use?**

Negotiated Curriculum and Assessment

Learner Led Learning

Questioning

Student Contract

Student Reflective Practice

Would you prefer a focus group with:

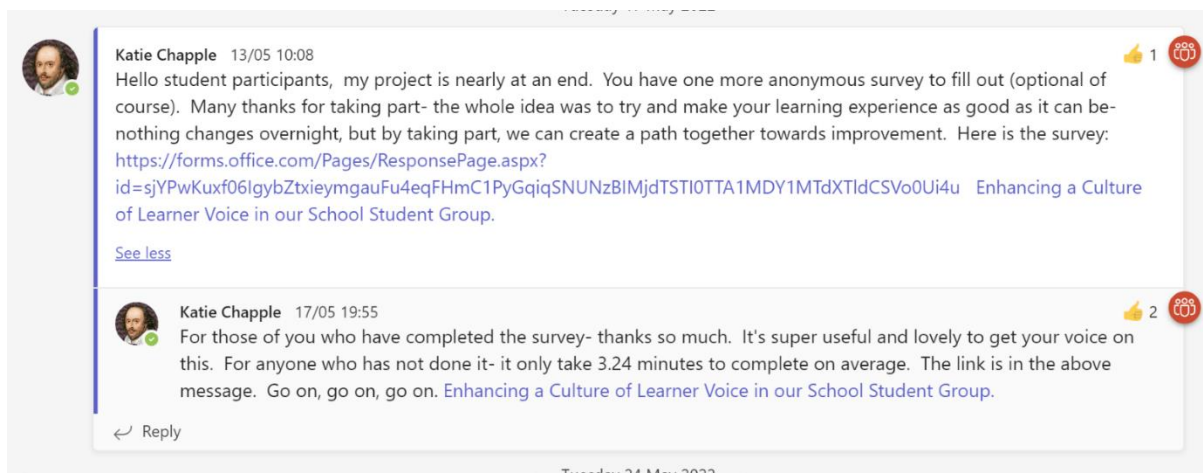
Junior Cycle students only     Senior Cycle students only     I don't mind

**Signatures:**



**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix (XLIII): Invitation for Learners to take part in Questionnaire two.





The image shows a screenshot of a social media post from Katie Chapple. The post is dated 13/05 10:08 and has one like. The text of the post reads: "Hello student participants, my project is nearly at an end. You have one more anonymous survey to fill out (optional of course). Many thanks for taking part- the whole idea was to try and make your learning experience as good as it can be- nothing changes overnight, but by taking part, we can create a path together towards improvement. Here is the survey: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=sjYPwKuxf06lgybZtxieyngauFu4eqFHmC1PyGqiqSNUNzBIMjdTSTi0TTA1MDY1MTdXTldCSVo0Ui4u> Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our School Student Group." Below the text is a "See less" link. A second comment from Katie Chapple, dated 17/05 19:55, has two likes and reads: "For those of you who have completed the survey- thanks so much. It's super useful and lovely to get your voice on this. For anyone who has not done it- it only take 3.24 minutes to complete on average. The link is in the above message. Go on, go on, go on. [Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our School Student Group.](#)" Below this comment is a "Reply" button. At the bottom of the screenshot, the date "Tuesdav 24 Mav 2022" is visible.


Katie Chapple 13/05 10:08  1 

Hello student participants, my project is nearly at an end. You have one more anonymous survey to fill out (optional of course). Many thanks for taking part- the whole idea was to try and make your learning experience as good as it can be- nothing changes overnight, but by taking part, we can create a path together towards improvement. Here is the survey: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=sjYPwKuxf06lgybZtxieyngauFu4eqFHmC1PyGqiqSNUNzBIMjdTSTi0TTA1MDY1MTdXTldCSVo0Ui4u> Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our School Student Group.

[See less](#)

Katie Chapple 17/05 19:55  2 

For those of you who have completed the survey- thanks so much. It's super useful and lovely to get your voice on this. For anyone who has not done it- it only take 3.24 minutes to complete on average. The link is in the above message. Go on, go on, go on. [Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our School Student Group.](#)

 Reply

Tuesdav 24 Mav 2022

## Appendix (XLIV): Board of Management/ Senior Leader Information Sheet.



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century post-primary school.

**Who is conducting the study?** This research is being conducted by Katie Chapple, a student in the Structured PhD in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is the research project about?** This research aims to gain perspectives from all stakeholders: students, teachers, management, members of the Board of Management in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ and challenge them to consider how a learner's voice can influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. A case study approach will be adopted and all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the research.

**What are the benefits of this research?** It is hoped that your participation in this research will support continued development of our approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement for our school community. It will inform the school improvement planning process and collect information from all stakeholders invested in our school community.

**What is involved for the participants?** As a participant from the Board of Management/ School Management, you will be asked to take part in two interviews about your views on the importance of listening to and incorporating the voice of the learner on approaches to teaching, learning, engagement and assessment. These audio-recorded interviews can be conducted in person or remotely. The first interview is scheduled to take place in September 2021 and the second in May 2022. Each interview should last approximately 40 minutes. In addition to this, you may decide to take part in a round table discussion about learner voice with other stakeholders in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ. This round table discussion should take about one hour and is scheduled to take place in April 2022.

**Can I withdraw from the study?** Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. It will not be possible to withdraw your data afterwards. This is because all data is anonymised and it is not possible to link anonymised data with individual participants. Your anonymity is assured. Your name or the name of our school will not be identified in any part of the study. A code will be applied to all individuals (eg. "Teacher A") and this code will be used in transcripts and published data. Your name will be known only to me and I will have custody of the data. My supervisors in this study will have access to the data but will have no access to identifiers; name, subject or role in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ. The interviews and round table discussion will be audio recorded and your contributions may be transcribed and used in the written thesis.

**How the information will be used?** The data from the study will be combined with that of the other participants and will be used to form the results section of my doctoral thesis. Summary data will appear in the thesis along with anonymous quotations from questions in the interviews. Quotations that are used will never identify any participant by name, subject or role in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ.



**Appendix (XLV): Board of Management/ Senior Leader Consent Form.**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

Please fill out and return to me at Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ.

**BOARD OF MANAGEMENT/ SCHOOL MANAGEMENT PARTICIPANT**

1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.
2. I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.
3. I understand that I am agreeing to participate in two interviews: one at the beginning and one at the end of the project.
4. I understand that I can volunteer to be part of a round table discussion in April 2022.
5. I am fully aware of the procedures involving myself in this study.
6. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason.
7. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

**Please tick this box to agree to the interview being audio recorded:**

**Signatures:**

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
If you are interested in being part of the **round table discussion** with all stakeholders in “School”, please sign below:

**BOARD OF MANAGEMENT/ SCHOOL MANAGEMENT PARTICIPANT**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME)

\_\_\_\_\_ (email address)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

wish to take part in the **round table discussion** on learner voice.

**Appendix (XLVI): Parent Participant Information Sheet.**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

**Who is conducting the study?** This research is being conducted by Katie Chapple, a student in the Structured PhD in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is the research project about?** This research aims to gain perspectives from all stakeholders: students, teachers, management, members of the Board of Management in Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ and challenge them to consider how a learner's voice can influence teaching, learning, assessment and engagement. A case study approach will be adopted and all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the research.

**What are the benefits of this research?** It is hoped that your participation in this research will support continued development of our approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and engagement for our school community. It will inform the school improvement planning process and collect information from all stakeholders invested in our school community.

**What is involved for the parent participants?** As a parent participant you will be asked to:

- complete two anonymous parent surveys (10 minutes October and April) on your views on learner voice.

In addition to this you **may** choose to:

- take part in a round table discussion with all stakeholders (a member of the BOM, school management, parents, teachers and students). This will take place outside school time and will be one hour in length in April 2022.

**What are Round Table discussions?** Round table discussions are where people come together from different parts of the organisation and speak about their views and experiences. In this round table discussion stakeholders in our school; members of the Board of Management, members of our school's management team, teachers, parents and students will be invited to discuss their views and experiences of learner voice in our school from October 2021 to March 2022. This round table discussion is scheduled to take place in April 2022 and will take approximately one hour to complete and will take place outside of school hours. Taking part in the round table discussion is optional.

**Can I withdraw from the study?** Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You can withdraw at any point before or during your participation in the study without providing any reason and without any consequences. It will not be possible to withdraw your data afterwards. This is because all data is anonymised and it is not possible to link anonymised data with individual participants.

Once the round table discussion has been analysed, a draft copy will be sent to each participant. The participant will be given their pseudonym or code (“Parent A”) and asked if the interpretations of their data is accurate. At this stage you can engage with me to ensure that I have interpreted your words correctly and amend any misunderstandings. After this process has been completed you cannot withdraw your data.

**How the information will be used?** The online survey is anonymous. If you take part in the focus group or the round table discussion what you say may be used as a quotation and may be used to form the results section of my doctoral thesis. You will not be identified. You will be given a code “Parent A” and summary data will appear in the thesis along with anonymous quotations from questions in the interviews. Quotations that are used will never identify any participant by name, subject or role in our school.

**How will confidentiality be kept?** All interviews will be in private. Audio recordings will be kept on a separate device and will be transcribed to my personal computer which is password protected. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I will have custody of all data and my supervisors will have access to it as necessary. The study will adhere to all relevant requirements in terms of data protection, GDPR, anonymity and confidentiality. The anonymised research data and findings will be retained in a secure location for five years after the submission of the research project in line with the Mary Immaculate College Research Management Retention Schedule.

**Contact Details:**

If at any time you have any queries with regard to this study my contact details are as follows: Katie Chapple (**Katie.Chapple@mic.ul.ie**). The Supervisors on this research are:

Dr J Fitzgerald, Head of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education      Dr. F O Murchu, Head of the School of Education (Post Primary).

Phone      061      204517      Email:      Phone:      0504      20534      Email:  
**Johanna.Fitzgerald@mic.ul.ie**      **Finn.OMurchu@mic.ul.ie**

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC Reference Number A21-014). If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Tel: 061-204980  
[mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)

**Appendix (XLVII): Parent Participant Consent Form.**



**Study Title:** Perspectives on enhancing a culture of learner voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century post-primary school.

Please fill out and return to me at Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ.

**PARENT PARTICIPANT**

1. I have read and understand the participant information sheet.
2. I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.
3. I understand that I am agreeing to take part in two anonymous online surveys. I understand that I can volunteer to take part in an audio recorded round table discussion and that this activity is optional.
4. I understand that I can volunteer to be part of a round table discussion in April 2022.
5. I am fully aware of the procedures involving myself in this study.
6. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason.
7. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Please tick the following box **if you wish to take part in:**

Audio Recorded Round table discussion with all stakeholders. (April 2022)

**Appendix (XLVIII): Contents of the Welcome Pack.**



**Appendix (XLIX): MS Teams Teachers' Page- Screenshot.**

**EC** **Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our school: Teacher Group.** ...  
 Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our school: Teacher Group.

Members Pending Requests Channels Settings Analytics Apps Tags

Search for members

▼ **Owners (1)**

Name	Title	Location	Tags <sup>1</sup>	Role
Katie Chapple				Owner ▼

▶ **Members and guests (15)**

**Appendix (L): Various Posts from the MS Teams Page.**

**Post September 2021.**

When we are asking our students to give an opinions on something, often we are consulting them. Macbeath *et al.* 2003, says that consultation can be (i) direct – where you ask the students direct questions through questionnaires or discussions, (ii) prompted – where there is a stimulus to prompt them to respond to something like a recent lesson or extracts from a lesson and (iii) Medicated consultation – where students are helped to express opinions through drawing or multi-media.

‘Voice’ does not always mean that they have to speak!

**Post September 2021 (Screenshot of the Methods used)**

Friday 24 September 2021

Katie Chapple 24/09/2021 12:53 👍 2

Enhancing a Culture of Learner Voice in our school: Teacher Group. Attached are some documents if you are looking for some more information on the method that you are using. Feel free to ask me anything at any time. 😊

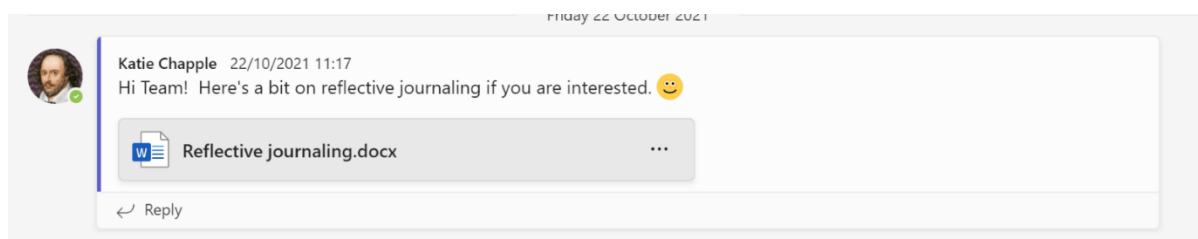
- Student Self Reflection.docx ...
- The Negotiated Curriculum and Assessment... ...
- Student Contract.docx ...
- Learner Led Learning.docx ...
- Questioning.docx ...

↩ Reply

**Post October 2021**

Let's take a minute to reflect on how we are eliciting voice. Think about the last time we invited a student to participate. Who held power in the situation? Was the student able to give an opinion other than what was expected? Think about what cues we give when elicit voice – are we genuinely excited or happy about some answers more than others? What about when someone says something against what we believe to be true. How do we react?

### Post October 2021 (Screen Shot about Reflective Journaling).



### Post November 2021

This week I asked my students to answer anonymously to the question ‘How do I learn best?’. The answers included ‘quietness, praise, happiness’. Think about asking simple questions that you don’t know the answer to like: ‘My favourite class/lesson’, ‘My best success’, ‘What supports me to learn’. See what happens.

### Post December 2021

Listening to the voices of young people requires a lot of different skills. This table from Dennison and Kirk (1990) may help you with your listening skills. We will talk about this in our next ‘Learning Conversation’ on Wednesday.

Stage of the Learning Conversation	Skills for tutors	Examples of tutor prompts with a focus on learning	Examples of tutor prompts with a focus on content
Reviewing the work of the learner in an oral or written way.	-active listening -asking open questions -being non-judgemental	What is going well? What is not going so well? How do we feel about this?	What have you been excited about or interested in, in your learning?
Learning: Identifying new insights and understandings	-empathising -reflecting -sharing insights	How do you make sense of what's happening? New insights you have gained are... Are you noticing any patterns in your learning	Does this connect with previous knowledge? Have you noticed any patterns in this topic? Something you found difficult to understand was...
Applying: Taking the learning forward	-establishing clear negotiated goals	Your next steps will be... What and who do you	What do you want to find out about next?

	-action planning and target setting	need to help you? When will the next review be most helpful?	What questions do you want to ask now? What will you do next?
<b>Review of the learning conversation:</b> Stand back from the conversation and consider how it helped or hindered your learning.	- active listening -asking open questions -being non-judgemental	What did you notice about this conversation? In what ways did you find it effective? In what ways are you finding talking about your learning more effective?	What did you notice about this conversation? In what ways did you find it effective? In what ways are you finding talking about this topic helpful? Is there anything you notice that helps or hinders your learning?

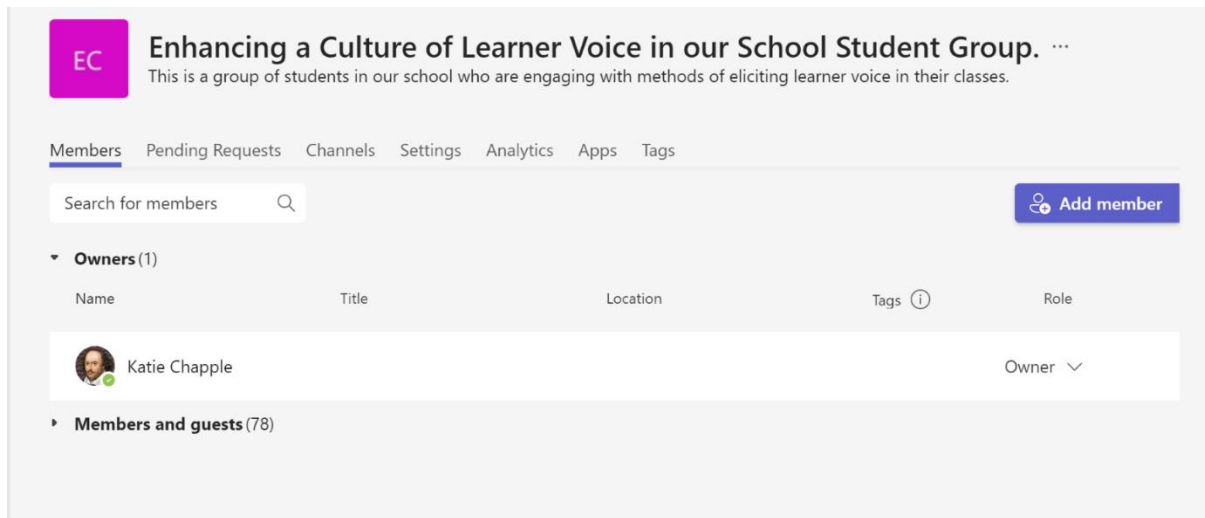
### **Post February 2022 (The Importance of Feedback).**

While a lot of what we talk about is student voices, feedback is an important part of voicework. When we ask students for their opinions, sometimes we know as adults that their opinions are not feasible in practice. Reporting back to them about why something can't be done or changed is just as important. Saying why it can't be done is important in building a culture of openness and honesty. Having a voice, doesn't mean that whatever the students in your class say, goes! Acknowledging that you have listened and responded is an important part of the process.

### **Post February 2022 (Tokenism)**

Tokenism is when adults consult young people but have no intention in taking on their opinions. We can show tokens of 'voice' when we ask young people to say what we want, or make sure that we only invite those students who we feel will respond in a way that is appealing to us. To make sure that you are getting an authentic voice, make sure that students are allowed to choose whether they take part or not. Make sure that they are being asked about things that are relevant to them, that directly affect them. Make sure that they are told beforehand that they are going to be asked about something so that they have time to think. Make sure that they can respond in any way they want – including not responding at all. Finally, make whatever changes you can, no matter how small.

## Appendix (LI): MS Teams Student Site Screenshot.



## Appendix (LII): Stimuli for the reflective journals.

*Posted on the MS Teams Page (Various Dates)*

*Write about how you feel this week, regarding you student voice journey.*

*Write about a lesson you have learned.*

*Write about a challenge you have encountered.*

*Write about something that has surprised you this week.*

*Write about something that you have learned in the learning conversations.*

*What will you change?*

## Appendix (LIII): Excerpts from the Transcription of Interviews.

**Interview 1 Teacher 1: 13<sup>th</sup> October 2021 (Excerpts)**

**Why did you decide to be part of this project?**

*I think that after a certain amount of time there's a danger of slipping into a comfort zone... which is nice the clue is in the title- it's a comfortable place to be, but there's a danger you could stagnate perhaps, so for me it's time for me to reflect a bit more on my own practice. I kind of like the idea of understanding what works well for my students. The main thrust of it for me is to be a more effective teacher because that's what we are here for.*

*I think I will be surprised [by what the students feel is good] I have a sneaking suspicion that I might be merrily oblivious to what works well for some students, what works well for the majority might not be great for certain clusters.*

### **Why would those voices not be heard under “Normal Circumstances”?**

*I'm thinking in particular of my senior group and they by nature are particularly quiet. I'm not sure if that is because of the dynamics within the group. They don't seem to gel too brilliantly as a group. They don't tend to discuss or put themselves forward orally in class. It's hard to know if one method is working more than another in class.*

### **Is this a listening school? Are we good at this in a general sense?**

*It's hard to fully know. I think we have a good relationship with our students. The relationship with their teachers is good and strong. I think that they are involved [in decision making] with particular projects they might be involved in Transition Year. I'm not so sure if we are a great listening school or whether we just pay lip service or are we ticking a box.*

### **What do you perceive as the benefits and challenges going into this study?**

*More understanding of our pupils and what works well for them, what they find effective, guaranteed it could be small little things, that could be easy to facilitate. I am hoping to bring whatever those elements are into the classroom. If the students feel a part of it, they are guaranteed to be more engaged with it.*

*The downsides, I certainly have a fear to discover that I am doing some hideous things, or that they might have expectations that aren't realistic. For example, going to the Globe theatre to see this play would be feasible. I would hate them to think that we are not listening when we are just being realistic. If they suggested something that I didn't feel like I could follow through with... like something I am not confident about or something that I don't believe in and saying ok 'well now I've given you your voice and now I'm just going to shut it up... put it back in a box!'. However, that said, [this group] are open to discussion so I think that if we were to discuss something that I didn't think was suitable- they are going to be sitting exams soon, I want to ensure that they are getting exactly what they need.*

*There is the threat of criticisms arising to your own practice that you might be uncomfortable with because you do need a certain level of honesty about what works and what doesn't... in a sense it's relinquishing some of the teacher power that you think you have. You are leaving yourself a bit more vulnerable to those who you I don't want to say it... control or have power over but there is that dynamic in the teacher pupil relationship that you really are teaching them. I am a little anxious about what might be thrown up, even though that is why I kind of want to do it.*

*It's good to reflect on practice because we definitely don't do it enough, I'd say, because we are so busy as well though. The system doesn't allow you to actually draw breath.*

### **Interview 1 Teacher 8 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021 (Excerpts)**

#### **Why are you taking part?**

*I've been teaching for 30 years and I was at the point where I have seen a lot of changes. When I started my teaching life, English was my subject and discussion was very much a part of the class, student voice was really prominent in my classes and I felt over the last number of years that the students were not as vocal as they had been. I was curious to see would it help- had something changed in my style of teaching? I had a subject change- had that made an impact? Or was it that students had become quieter because of a number of other factors? I was interested in finding out what would really happen if I really focused on this, intensely for a period of time and really try to elicit more of the student voice in my classes.*

*When you start out you haven't established yourself, you don't have a reputation, and I was sort of worried that maybe it was something to do with me. I had noticed that they were more passive and I wondered if that was a pressure they felt particularly towards exam years. Have they been disempowered?*

*There is a lot of stuff going on for example Debating, where the student voice is at the heart of it all but again, we showcase that enough. You have students giving presentations in class, you have students debating, we have student who are voicing their learning and yet there is very little opportunity for inter-class activity- I know that's gone at the moment, but even before Covid, I felt that we should actually showcase more of the learning that is happening for other students. If you have students who have been working on communicative tasks they could show [younger students] and they could empower the learner more.*

*I spend quite a bit of time speaking in another language and trying to get students to speak can be a challenge. I am hoping that through this practice they will become more confident in speaking aloud, and hearing their own voices, in giving presentations and become orally more proficient. I think it will encourage a culture of listening as well as talking as student voice is only one half of the equation but if you want to hear someone you have to listen as well. I think that students don't realise that they can learn as much from each other as they can from the teacher in the classroom. I feel that the greatest learning can take place when a student has learned something from another person in the class rather than from me. [ in one instance the teacher recalls a piece of writing a student had created which was very funny and was her personality and this had a tremendous influence on the class as a whole] and it really upped the ante and everybody became much more aware of their voice in their writing. And their work improved massively. I benefitted as a teacher and the students benefitted too.*

Challenges.

*Space is a huge challenge in our school. It would be lovely, at the end of a period of work, to bring in another group of students to listen to that work. Where do you do that? We have a hall but that space is generally booked for teaching or for guest speakers or whatever.*

*We have very particular challenges with this project and the biggest one, will be the mask; it is really an impediment- it's visual- it's stopping them from talking. There is a swathe of students who find it a real obstacle and let's say you have a student who is trying out a question or an opinion for the first time a student who is a bit shy and they have taken that step to put up their hand and participate and you can't actually hear them and you have to ask them to say it again and it's awful because it's been a leap to get to that stage.*

### **Interview 1, Teacher 13, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2021 (Excerpts)**

*As teachers we are interested in our learners and this would be rewarding for both teacher and student.*

*Having a voice in what they have learned. In giving them a voice they are willing more to look at where they didn't learn something- the usual thing, give them back the tests, they don't look at it, they don't want to know. They look at the mark and they don't really want to know why they did or they didn't get the mark. If it's a satisfactory result they don't go over any mistake. If it's not [satisfactory] they are disappointed. It's trying to turn the disappointment into the learner learning something from their mistakes. That would really be my motivation behind getting involved in it. They will be more self-reliant. Look at where you have made the mistakes- we all learn from them.*

*I also think that it is important to call it- and say look this is your voice in learning. It gives a bit of status to them and their learning. It gives it a label and it gives it importance.*

*As a school we are conscious of giving them a voice. We have so many pressures with schemes of work. We need to give this the importance that it deserves. By giving it a name, it's making you do it. Time is where we are falling- we need to get this done. All this is a fantast idea but you don't want to be a poem behind or a chapter behind anyone else- you can't. I love it in theory and I probably don't practice it enough because of time.*

*We should incorporate it more into our plans. When we are making out our schemes of work at the beginning of the year, we should really put in time for feedback.*

*I am rigidly doing this with my first years. I feel that if you start with a group, they know no different, it's hard to jump in with leaving certs.*

**Appendix (LIV): Screenshots from the MS Teams Teacher's Page: Vygotsky.**

From

<https://www.slideshare.net/CarolAtole/chapter3perspectiveandapproachesinthestudyofhumandevelopmentpptx>

### Vygotsky's Theory of Cognitive Development

**Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)** was a psychologist and founder of the sociocultural theory of developmental psychology.

**Development** is influenced by **Culture**, **Social Interactions**, and **Language**.

**Basic Assumptions**

- Development is a result of social interactions.
- Culture plays a role in cognitive development.
- Development does not always precede learning.
- MKO (more knowledgeable other) influences development.
- The ZPD is best completed with help of adult.
- Learning occurs most in the ZPD.
- Language is very important to development.
- Thought and speech combined is self-speech.
- Self-speech helps children work through problems.

**A child's play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired.**  
-Vygotsky

**The Zone of Proximal Development**

External Social Speech → Private Speech → Inner Speech

From: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html>

## Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory



**Appendix (LV): Student Training for Voicework.**

