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Pedagogies of student voice

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Abstract

Whilst its precise definition varies, the concept of 'student voice' is currently being endorsed and elaborated across a very broad spectrum of contemporary educational thinking, policymaking and provision. Consequently, we can no longer assume that it is necessarily emancipatory (or indeed 'neoliberal') the term designates a diverse range of practices that require careful, situated interpretation if we are to understand their meanings and effects. The paper draws on research into how one organization – the flagship English 'creative learning' programme Creative Partnerships – attempted to 'put young people at the heart' of its work. It analyzes how youth voice was enacted within and through specific sites and practices, and explores the subjectivities, capacities and narratives it offered to teachers, students, artists and others involved. Such interpretive approaches show how the contexts and social positions through which 'voicing' processes are experienced can generate ambivalent effects and reconfigure power relations in schools, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Keywords: student voice; schools; creativity; learning; neoliberalism; participation; collaboration.

Pedagogies of student voice

"Teachers know that I love my mobile. They don't know that I ( ) love my mum"

Since our topic is 'student voice', let us begin with an example of it - with the quotation above. It comes from a 14-year-old girl from an urban, inner-city, multicultural British secondary school, discussing teacher-student relationships during a focus group we conducted while researching 'youth voice' in 2009. Her comment, however, is somewhat obscure: what can she mean?

One response to it might be that the student is simply wrong: to think teachers are ignorant of their students' filial affections is to imagine that they somehow inhabit an entirely different world to the rest of humanity. Student voice initiatives, we often hear, can correct such misapprehensions, and help young people to appreciate the complexities of school life from teachers' points of view.

But perhaps in fact she is accusing teachers of not relating to their students as real people with emotional lives beyond the school? – If so, it is the teacher rather than the student who is lacking and the 'problem' of education one of bureaucracy or performativity that prevents human connection. Again, we might reference literature that celebrates the achievements of student voice projects in restoring richer, more authentic relationships.

That interpretation, however, does not yet tell us what it means for teachers to 'know' that teenagers love their mobile phones. Few images could be richer or more resonant. Asked where he would start in realising his vision of children as 'users' rather than 'recipients' of education in the developing world, the self-styled 'ideas generator' Charles Leadbeater states: 'not with schools… with mobile phones'[i]. Young people's allegedly superior facility with new technologies like the mobile makes them, on this account, the vanguard of progress, inherently more open and more able to adapt than their older teachers. (So perhaps what teachers 'know' in this respect is the

struggle to keep up and the constant threat of redundancy – in many senses of that word.)

But equally, the device figures in techno-pessimist imaginings as the cause and symptom of educational decline; hence the familiar skit in which an entire class of students is shown busily texting instead of listening to the teacher, and the diverse strategies through which schools attempt to control their usage. The mobile also signifies the materialistic, shallow individualism of commercial culture, thanks to its early appearance as the status symbol of 'greed is good' city bankers in 1980s London; more recently in Britain, it has been praised when helping overthrow despots in other nations, but blamed for facilitating looting and riots back home[ii]. Teachers who 'know' students within these frames of reference may equate voice with market diktat, the tyranny of 'customer satisfaction' and catering for the lowest common denominator ('mob rule', one might say). If so, however, perhaps our student's words will pre-empt and allay fears, countering images of digital natives and self-obsessed consumers with the less threatening one of the loving child.

Contemplating the 'actual' words of a student in this way brings us already to some of our key arguments in this paper. 'Voice' as an abstract noun is reified, potentially emptied of substantive content. As metaphor, it evokes notions of presence and authenticity; when it appears in the form of quotations from students, all too often it serves as 'vernacular ventriloquism' (Clarke, 2010), affirming an official and pre-existing position. By contrast, here we highlight the importance of interpretation and aim to produce complex ways of seeing the specific practices, processes and contexts through which what come to be recognized as 'student voice' is produced. At stake in different interpretations of our student's gnomic remark are diverse sets of assumptions and imaginings, not only about schools, but contemporary society more broadly, which offer various, more or less attractive, identities for students and teachers, enable them to tell different kinds of stories about themselves; and they point towards – although do not determine - different educational practices. We use the term 'pedagogies' to capture this range of elements – sites of education, practices of teaching and learning, and subjectivities (Pykett, 2010). The ambiguity of this *specific* 'student voice' illustrates our argument that *any* student voice is largely what we make it, that it has no prior existence and it cannot 'act' alone, whether to

improve education, offer emancipation, or any of the other virtuous aims with which it has been tasked. Exploring its undecideability will however bring us back, eventually, to love.

Raised voices in the contemporary landscape

A very broad range of agencies and instruments now compel, direct, invite and / or inspire individuals and institutions working with young people to engage with voice or its cognates of participation, consultation, choice, leadership, empowerment, agency, democracy, capacity-building and so on. In the UK, the New Labour government of 1997-2010 produced a number of policy documents encouraging youth participation, such as *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People* (2001) and *Every Child Matters*, a set of reforms supported by the Children Act (2004). These responded in part to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which enshrines the child's right to have a say in matters that affect them; its implementation is monitored by the Children's Rights Alliance for England, a charity funded by other children's agencies. Young people's democratic rights are also delivered by School, Local Authority, British and United Nations Youth Councils, which are in turn supported by a range of voluntary sector and membership organizations, social enterprises and networks such as the International Democratic Schools Network. The Association for Citizenship Teaching, the Citizenship Foundation and the Institute for Citizenship all provide resources for citizenship education, which was made compulsory in 2002; the Institute for Citizenship's funders include the NatWest Bank, the Swiss Embassy and the Greater London Authority.

Since the 2002 Education Act, schools have been legally required to 'consult' with pupils, and school inspectors comment on their success in 'giving pupils a say'. Consultation can of course be primarily about the extra-curricular; but it can also refer to learner-centredness, students being granted choice and control (for instance over timing of classes, pace, methods of learning or presentation). More rarely, students are imagined as active 'co-creators of learning', who direct and shape all aspects of their preferred educational environment. For some the importance of

student voice is the meta-level reflection on learning processes and styles it involves; 'learning to learn' is seen as essential to creating the adaptive, flexible and 'lifelong learners' demanded by a knowledge economy and the decline of jobs for life. All these developments are said to result in more meaningful learning, more egalitarian classroom relationships, and enhanced performance. In addition, student voice has been construed as a form of expertise that can develop teachers' skills and improve schools (Flutter, 2007) (Cook-Sather, 2011). These interpretations of voice have been developed within, for instance, the National College for School Leadership (a government-funded non-departmental public body), the Specialist Schools Trust (previously also government-funded and now a membership organization), as well as publically-funded academic research programmes (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Rudduck and Flutter, 2003) (Fielding and Bragg, 2003).

The examples above refer specifically to England and Wales, but we expect they will be at least recognizable within other contexts; and whilst we do not wish to downplay the differences between various initiatives, our aim at this point is to suggest that a general cultural shift is taking place one accompanied, moreover, by a significant redefining of the state as not a provider but a funder and monitor of educational services provided by others (Ball, 2007), and indeed by other changes from the welfare to 'pedagogic' (Pykett, 2010), 'post-welfare', 'governance' or neoliberal state.

There has been considerable debate about what the heightened visibility of student voice means. Many educationalists were initially optimistic, welcoming it as the mark of adult enlightenment and readiness to share power; they discussed voice as if it had always been there, 'the treasure in our own backyard' (SooHoo, 1993) overlooked through ignorance, misjudgement, or (in a typically psychologising move) 'fear'. However, evidence that senior staff were introducing student voice with the explicit aim of school improvement rather than emancipation, soon caused disquiet (e.g. Fielding, 2001, 2007). In the field of development studies, participation was even labeled 'the new tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

Critical approaches to participation have often been endebted to Michel Foucault's later

work on governmentality (Foucault, 1991). The concept of governmentality refers to the indirect and heterogeneous programmes, strategies and techniques that have sought to regulate the 'conduct of conduct' in order to fabricate subjects who are 'capable of bearing the burdens of liberty' in advanced liberal western democracies (Rose, 1999: viii). In the process, the modern human being has been defined as a unique individual, possessing an autonomous self that is capable of being worked on through various governmental 'technologies of the self' (Burchell, 1993). Contemporary neo-liberal policies, when they have 'rolled back' the boundaries of the welfare state, have not removed power but instead merely entrenched it further at the level of the individual (Barry, Osborne and Rose, 1996; Dean, 1999). They govern less through the formal institutions of the state, and more through forms of 'expertise' that seemingly lie beyond it – for instance, in the 'caring professions', in the media or the family – and encourage action on the self, by the self (Rimke, 2000; Triantafillou and Nielsen, 2001). Student voice itself can be seen as one such technology (Bragg, 2007)

Whilst the literature on governmentality includes many nuanced analyses, Pykett et al (2010) are critical of the repetitiveness with which critical pedagogy now identifies a monolithic and inexorable process of neoliberal subjectification at work in any given instance of contemporary curriculum or policy, to which it claims to be the sole source of resistance (e.g. (notably in the work of Henry Giroux, 2005; see also Sloan, 2008). By contrast, Ian Hunter's Foucauldian analysis (1994, 1996) describes the school as a 'pastoral bureaucracy' that evolved in a piecemeal, contingent and plural fashion, 'assembling' from diverse other sources those (Hunter, 1994)(Hunter, 1994)(Hunter, 1994)(Hunter, 1994)technologies that might augment the capacities of populations and thereby establish prosperity and order. His work encourages us to see the school, not so much as a mechanism singularly intent on reproducing compliant workers, citizens or consumers, but as a multi-faceted, sometimes contradictory domain, mobilizing a 'plurality of ethical comportments' amongst many 'subjects' of education, who include students, teachers, administrators, and policy makers (Pykett et al, 2010: 490). Student voice is a case in point: it is realized through and across government departments, acts of law, non-governmental

organizations and quasi-autonomous public bodies, lobbying groups and foundations, research and campaigning bodies, publically and privately funded. It would be reductive to identify a single set of interests that are being 'served' thereby, to claim that voice is either a cover for neoliberalism or emancipatory, or to assume that any particular technologies of voice are necessarily effective and will 'deliver the subjects whom they seek to summon' (Clarke, 2010, 648). Voice is better conceived as being *enacted* and practiced rather than accessed, and as not only limiting and constraining, but also helping to develop positive competencies and capacities (Bragg, 2007; Pykett et al, 2010).

In the rest of this article we explore these issues with reference to the work of one organization, the creative learning programme Creative Partnerships. We trace how the concept of voice circulates and signifies across different domains of education (within Creative Partnerships as an organization, within schools and amongst students), exploring how students as the subjects of voice are imagined, understood, addressed and positioned, the stories that get told about voice, how they relate to other available stories, and the many interruptions to which they are prone. We draw on a research project funded by the Arts Council of England from 2007-9 (Bragg, Manchester and Faulkner, 2009). It involved interviews (with Creative Partnerships personnel, staff in schools, creative agents or practitioners and students); observations in schools and at events, focus groups and 'shadowing' students, in twelve Creative Partnerships regions; and analysis of textual evidence (photographs, minutes, schools' or Creative Partnerships' reports, publications, evaluations, multi-media productions, school application forms).

Creative Partnerships: youth voice as branding?

Creative Partnerships typifies many aspects of the heterogeneous twenty-first century educational landscape. It was funded between 2002 and 2011 as the 'flagship creative learning programme' of the New Labour government, in England. (The Conservative-Liberal coalition government that came to power in 2010 has since withdrawn its funding.) Its genesis is often located in a 1999 report, *All our futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (NACCE, 1999), which tapped into

widespread concerns about the constricting effects of the National Curriculum and target-driven performativity cultures. Creative Partnerships built on traditions of 'artists in schools', although its definition of 'creative practitioner' was wider, and it specifically aimed to foster long-term collaborations. Rather than being funded by the education department, however, it was initially managed by the Arts Council of England and funded mainly by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Government policy of the time identified the arts and creative industries as a means to regenerate socio-economically disadvantaged communities, and it was in these areas that Creative Partnerships was asked to work. Thus its remit straddled 'raising the aspirations' of individual students, contributing to school improvement and performance, 'transforming learning' in classrooms and school cultures, developing new audiences for the arts, contributing to community cohesion ('strengthening families'), and supporting local creative industries. These were goals that by no means smoothly cohered, particularly in a context of marketisation and standards-driven change (Jones and Thomson, 2008). They also reflected contradictory contemporary 'rhetorics of creativity' (Banaji and Burn, 2010), opposing (for instance) artistic originality to the creativity of common cultures, or mapping the supposed attributes of creative people (risk-taking, adaptable, independent, resilient, inventive, entrepreneurial, responsible…) onto the needs of the future workforce.

In 2009, Creative Partnerships' website stated that 'Young people [are] at the heart of what we do' and that,

> Creative Partnerships programmes demand that young people play a full role in their creative learning. We believe that our programmes are most effective when young people are actively involved in leading and shaping them, taking responsibility for their own learning. Creative Partnerships programmes enable children and young people to develop the skills needed to play an active leadership role in school life'

[accessed 07/05/2009]

In this emphasis on young people, Creative Partnerships rides the tide of a number of policy trends, as we have already argued; whilst its choice of vocabulary and tone – positioned

somewhere between the inviting and the imperative - perhaps also reflects the rather conflicting motivations that have been argued to animate them. For instance, the claim to place young people at its 'heart' suggests not only warmth and welcome, but also the organisation's own radical and youthful core – aligning itself with the long tradition in which youth participation, and by extension its advocates, figure as enlightened, democratic and emancipatory. Yet the space Creative Partnerships occupies in order to play such a role is politically ambiguous, since it depends on successive government measures - to, for instance, marketise and diversify forms of provision, reduce local authority or 'state' control in favour of multiple other influences, and reconfigure teacher professionalism – that have been highly contested. Indeed, by referring to its capacity to impose a 'demand' on its partner schools, Creative Partnerships implicitly creates an unflattering comparison between its own dynamism and schools that might otherwise resist or lack the will for change – a portrayal that is perhaps both a symptom of and contributor to the changed power relations between schools and other agencies effected by these policy processes.

Creative Partnerships does not in this statement refer to youth voice as a matter of rights or inclusion, discourses that more readily occupy the moral ground of intrinsic good. Instead, it refers to 'effectiveness', a more instrumental benefit; this could refer to young people's positive influence on the work of Creative Partnerships, and/ or, to the difference Creative Partnerships makes to young people, an issue that focuses attention on individual outcomes. Similarly, the reference to student 'leadership' may be more hierarchical than egalitarian, whilst students 'taking responsibility' for their own learning might imply collective partnership, a mutual balance of rights and respect, or a harsh, individualising, 'survival of the fittest' meritocracy.

In practice, the capacity of Creative Partnerships to enforce change was rather more limited than this formulation suggests. It was not a compulsory top-down programme, but an opt-in one for schools primarily in deprived areas. It has been described as an open and fluid organisation, following a 'vernacularising trajectory' that permitted its 36 regional offices and nearly six thousand partner schools considerable autonomy in realising its aims (Thomson, Jones and Hall, 2009). Schools applied to work with Creative Partnerships, no doubt incentivized in part

by the funding that was available, but had to meet particular criteria to be accepted. The application process therefore attempted to convey the organisation's values and priorities: for instance, asking how schools would involve pupils in the planning, delivery and dissemination of a programme of work. Once a partnership was established, voice was highlighted by, for instance, requesting pupil evaluations of projects. However, Creative Partnerships could not directly control how schools interpreted and implemented these requests, since it operated at arm's length from them.

Senior staff in Creative Partnerships regional offices brought varying levels of commitment to and experience of youth voice, which influenced both how far they emphasized this in their work with schools, and how they understood it. Alongside their work in schools, they could also develop other projects directly, and many of these related to voice: they ranged from film or arts festivals organized by and for young people, support for pre-existing representation initiatives (for instance, MUNGA, the Model United Nations General Assembly), to facilitating consultation on issues such as urban regeneration, school redesign and rebuilding programmes. They worked with both public and private sector organizations: some local councils proved particularly welcoming, enabling youth input notably into a city cultural strategy and a local authority education development plan. Some regions adopted a more self-consciously entrepreneurial tone, for instance describing an urban regeneration project as showing 'private and public sector decision makers that engaging with young people has value beyond ticking a box… [that] if you get the product and the branding right, you can attract private sector investment in young people and cultural/ creative activity'. The regional offices' relative autonomy not only from the national body but also from each other meant that they developed resources and approaches independently: in some cases these were then disseminated more widely, whilst others were quietly buried.

One regional office was assigned particular responsibility for raising the profile of student voice within the organization as well as in the wider sector, under a director with previous experience in a Teaching and Learning unit in higher education. His key tactic was to establish

groups of students known as 'Young Consultants', working both with the regional office and where possible within schools. (Elsewhere schools often called these 'Creative Councils', 'Think Tanks' or similar, and they were a prime means through which schools responded to Creative Partnerships' demand for student involvement.) Their role was to shape programmes of work from the outset, for instance by recruiting the creative practitioners or arts organizations with which Creative Partnerships and schools would work. Its ethos of 'nothing about us without us' constituted a form of branding for the regional office and to some extent Creative Partnerships nationally, establishing expectations, standards and 'good practice' for colleagues and partner organizations. It may have had more traction with secondary age students than primary given its underlying image of an assertive, confident and independent decision-maker. The choice of name suggests a certain professionalization of 'youth', as a form of capital to be exploited (and indeed once established, these groups were often called on by other local bodies). A rights-based approach, as mobilized here, tends to assume a universalized and individual subject, abstracted from social differences such as gender (Burman, 1995). In practice, however, this model was generally acknowledged to attract more female than male students: arguably, it involves 'feminized' skills such as self-awareness and emotional literacy, albeit naturalized and presented as the route to social progress (Burman 2005).

Paradoxically, whilst the expression of views was seen as both a right and as having inherent value, the groups were also seen to need training and development to exercise voice in an acceptable or appropriate manner; for some individuals this extended over a period of years. The regional director explained that such intense investment enabled work and dialogue at a higher 'creative level'; yet one might wonder whether it at the same time distanced them from their peers, and whether less polished 'youth perspectives' might have provided as much or more critical substance. We return to these issues below.

A number of other regional directors came from backgrounds in primary education and progressive child-centred pedagogies – in particular at the time of our research, the educational philosophy of Reggio Emilia. Accordingly, they developed professional development programmes

in this area for teachers and creative practitioners, including visits to the Reggio Emilia community in Italy. Such work could impact rapidly on classroom practice: Reggio Emilia concepts of child-led curriculum, its stress on all sensory aspects of the environment and on multiple forms of self-expression ('100 languages') offered an appealing definition of creative learning, suited the skills of many artists, and fitted well with many established progressive traditions. It also offered positive identities to teachers, allowing 'stories' to be told that emphasized teachers' professionalism and the skills it took to be able to observe and follow children's own interests, with artists as a 'resource' rather than 'saviour' (Owen and Jones, 2008). However, it struggled to make the same inroads into secondary teaching, where constraints and pressures were more intense, as it did into primary.

Progressive education and the developmental psychology on which it is often based have been argued to assume a free, naturally creative and curious child, different in some respects to the Young Consultants' rational decision-maker, but also decontextualised, not yet embedded in relationships, and ungendered (Burman, 2005; Pykett, 2009). Yet 'voice' pedagogies take place and acquire meaning in specific contexts and spaces, and there are powerful imaginaries associated specifically with the deprived communities in which Creative Partnerships worked. A 'cultural deficit' model, for example – traceable in discourses of 'raising aspirations' - attributes poverty to personal inadequacies (lack of skills, ambition, education, discipline, and so on) and thus blames the poor for their poverty. Some discourses of creativity also differentiate a metropolitan, culturally sophisticated urban centre from its benighted margins (that is, the housing estates or suburbs where students often lived), distinctions that emerged when some professionals lamented the fact that students had 'never been into the city centre' or had 'nothing to write about' because they had 'no life experiences' (which appeared to mean, they were unfamiliar with particular art forms). Whilst these discourses seemed sympathetic, they tended to disparage students' home lives as uncreative and to view non-participation in the arts as self-imposed, the consequence of a lack in their families or communities. The emphasis on environment within the Reggio Emilia approach may in this context have represented a search for new ways to address the spatial

dimensions of (creative) learning.

Youth voice in schools: multiple mediations

Creative Partnerships' work in schools was mediated through heads, teachers, its creative practitioners (mainly artists) and its creative agents (who worked across schools to broker collaborations). In this section, we give a necessarily brief sketch of how these many local mediations affected student voice practices.

Research has identified a range of motives amongst headteachers for becoming involved with Creative Partnerships (Thomson and Sanders, 2010). For instance: some saw Creative Partnerships primarily as a way to broaden their extra-curricular provision; some were seeking to boost their local reputation through a 'high-impact' project; others were focused on improving results, which could mean directing funds towards high-achieving pupils, to those at risk of exclusion, or towards teachers or departments deemed to be weak. Some identified Creative Partnerships with 'the arts' and thus with specific subjects, but others endorsed its vision of transformative creative learning across the curriculum. The broader context of educational competition and the relentless drive for 'school improvement', however, played a large and sometimes defining part in heads' responses to Creative Partnerships. Schools in disadvantaged communities were particularly likely to suffer from market segmentation leading to a concentration of 'low'-achieving students, poor public image and league table position, as well as high staff turnover, sickness rates, and difficulty recruiting. Thus while Creative Partnerships sometimes seemed a useful 'badge' and a way to articulate schools' values and priorities, it could also be dropped when heads or other key personnel left, or if its work seemed risky (Thomson et al, 2009). It also meant that youth voice projects were subject to some pragmatic manipulations, according to Creative Partnerships personnel: for instance, if public display or presence was involved, heads were often said to choose 'star' students to represent the school; or, high-achieving students such as those on the 'Gifted and Talented' register were asked to form Creative Councils or Young Consultants groups, with an eye on how this would play with parents[iii].

Teachers could feel de-professionalised by the presence of artists if they were billed as the solution to substandard practice (Owen and Jones, 2008). At best, though, teachers' sense of professional identity and competence was reinforced by collaborative work; the Creative Partnerships coordinator role could also help retain key teachers, since it represented promotion without managerial responsibilities. In relation to 'voice' specifically, the small numbers involved in the Young Consultants or Creative Councils often enabled teachers to develop meaningful and sustaining relationships that proved elusive in large and busy classrooms.

In many cases, teachers who were not themselves directly involved in Creative Partnerships were asked to nominate students from their classes or tutor groups to participate in initiatives. Such an approach might have been pragmatic and/or unavoidable in large schools; however, the outcome of a series of individual decisions made in this way tended to be student voice groups composed of those who were high-achieving and/or active in other areas of school life (for instance on the Student Council). This impacted in turn on how other students perceived them, as we discuss further below.

Creative practitioners too came from diverse backgrounds that shaped their understanding of student voice. Some drew on discourses of emotional intelligence or literacy, describing for instance how they 'exposed their own vulnerabilities' and showed their 'genuine care' in order to encourage students to 'open up'. A 'pupil voice toolkit' produced in one region took participants through exercises to 'challenge preconceptions about each other' and acquire 'skills/awareness' about 'honesty, responsibility, personal space, constructive/positive feedback', arguing that only after this groundwork had been completed could evaluative discussions about the school take place. Although the pack was ostensibly aimed at teachers and students, however, there was little evidence to suggest they shared this diagnosis of the barriers to youth voice, lacked these skills, or would be able to act on them once acquired.

Other creative practitioners saw themselves as social advocates of oppressed and marginalized social groups, and hence as providing skills and empowerment for young people to explore their experiences. Whilst this position challenged 'cultural deficit' discourses, it prioritised

a specific realist aesthetic that was arguably remote from many students' cultural preferences, and its concerns and practices struggled to find a place in central school processes and curricula. One project in a school on an isolated housing estate, for example, engaged students in creating some powerful audio documentaries and dramas on subjects such as gang culture, crime and youth relations with the police, which proved highly popular with their peers; yet the initiative did not survive beyond the period of Creative Partnerships funding.

Creative practitioners were often conscious that their treatment of young people – as 'adults', 'equals' or as a 'client group' – contrasted strongly with teacherly modes of address, particularly in schools where an authoritarian or hierarchical ethos was deemed the solution to low standards. Some played and even relied on such differences, collusively suggesting school was 'boring' compared to 'creative' work, and depicting teachers as dull ('too busy ticking the box to think outside it' as a creative practitioner commented). In some cases, they positioned themselves on the side of young people against both the school and what they imagined as artistic elites prejudiced against youth audiences. Unsurprisingly, however, teachers tended to claim that equal, respectful collaborations enabled Creative Partnerships to have more enduring impacts.

We noted above that Creative Partnerships aimed to 'transform learning' and 'improve schools'. These goals were interpreted differently, but overall, 'student voice' can perhaps best be understood as a means of realizing them. Students were 'enrolled into the architectures of governing' (in John Clarke's term, 2010) because they were imagined to be less 'set in their ways' than (some) teaching staff, and to be naturally inclined towards student-teacher 'partnerships' and to dialogic and experiential learning models – that is, to the pedagogies favoured by the senior staff or Creative Partnerships personnel trying to effect change. Sometimes staff admitted explicitly that they had 'led' students to particular choices; equally, however, they 'heard' students selectively, often unconsciously. Thus if students were invited to comment on or research 'what makes a good lesson', 'what is a creative lesson', or 'how does creativity happen', to give some common examples, their conclusions were in an important sense already scripted. Yet sourcing such views to students was considered an essential part of their impact. In some rare and

unfortunate cases, senior managers used student opinion as a 'truth' with which to shame staff and enforce change. More often, however, student voice had a performative function: young people's skill, commitment, eloquence, good manners, and so on, demonstrated the validity of the egalitarian principles for which they argued, inspiring teachers to make changes through moral force rather than more legislative, top-down methods. What may have been harder to debate, however, was whether these pedagogies might have hidden costs for particular social groups (those less 'entrepreneurial'), whether student 'responsibility for learning' might blame individuals for failing, or what wider socio-economic shifts might be driving them.

Making sense of youth voice: student perspectives

Above, we indicated how students were imagined by various parties involved in Creative Partnerships, as bearers of rights, as individuals in need of saving or as seekers of personal autonomy, and so on. We now want to suggest how young people were to some extent 'made up' (constituted) by the particular practices in which they engaged, and how they made sense of them from particular social positions and locations.

Work on Creative Councils or as Young Consultants, as we have noted, involved students becoming familiar with local cultural industries, often by visiting organizations and events, sometimes by commissioning and recruiting practitioners. Students also learned, through experience or induction, some general skillsets of participation, such as public speaking, running meetings, organizing conferences, sometimes even campaigning and lobbying. Some were trained in social science research skills in order to conduct evaluations of projects or gather student views on teaching and learning; some learnt about pedagogical approaches so that they could run workshops for their peers or for teachers. Creative Partnerships often brought to all these activities a distinctive emphasis on branding and image. As Thomson et al (2009) have argued of the Creative Partnerships programme as a whole, such activities often enabled schools and students to tell 'new stories' about themselves, which could be immensely significant to 'failing' or 'low-achieving' schools.

Although these activities were envisaged as contributing to the common good of the school, there was sometimes a lack of clarity around the kind of 'student voice' they represented. This might have been in part because of the link to 'creativity', which could be seen as a minority concern; or because the students involved were (generally) not elected or assigned a representational mandate. Thus, although they were assumed to be working 'on behalf' of other students, they were not necessarily required to report back to them or in some cases even to seek their views. Schools appeared to operate a trickle-down/up theory of their impact, in which the groups were supposed to appeal to teachers on the one hand and fellow students on the other, without particular regard to the challenge of satisfying both constituencies simultaneously (for example, being an active learner but also cool; or negotiating a 'creative' identity alongside its potential gender and sexual associations). Having time out of lessons and out of school often appeared to other students to be an enviable privilege and this alone created resentment, especially in underfunded schools where similar opportunities were rare. These difficulties could be intensified where the groups were perceived to be composed of already high-achieving or relatively privileged students.

For their part, students in the voice groups often became aligned with certain dispositions towards learning, notions of social mobility and getting on in life: 'I have a dream,' ran one student presentation at a public seminar, 'that we will come to school in business suits, to prepare us for the world of work…'. Refusal to participate, as Kesby (2007) argues, becomes less intelligible from the perspective of participants, and some of these students seemed to become less patient with and distanced from others who did not share these visions. These were usually described as 'chavs', that is, white working class students, although other existing social divisions within the school, based on ethnicity, gender and 'ability' labeling, also came into play. This is not a criticism of Creative Partnerships or student voice *per se*, since it echoes what other educational research has repeatedly found. However, it does show that voice is not a social panacea, and that it is important to address pre-existing power relations in student voice processes. Equally, however, the image of the 'participating student' left little room for scepticism – for instance, about the

(in)sincerity of youth consultation initiatives, although some young people involved were doubtful that they would do more than advance their individual career prospects. The creative industries were presented as glamorous and exciting places to work, glossing over issues of low pay and exploitation, and with little attempt to discuss the wider economic contexts of the de-industrialized areas in which they were located.

Accounts of youth voice often suggest that it arises spontaneously, from the desire of young people to be 'heard'. Yet it often emerges in conditions that are both structured and heavily incentivized. In the case of Creative Partnerships, for example, incentives took the form of trips away from school, snacks and drinks at meetings, branded goods (bags, stationery, etc); access to expertise and skills; close attention and respect from creative practitioner(s) and other adults, sometimes in sharp contrast to relationships with other teachers. This is not to suggest students did not deserve this, or to belittle their contribution, but rather to request closer attentions to the enabling conditions and contexts of voice.

For some students, involvement with Creative Partnerships projects resulted in substantial personal benefits and change, whether in their self-image, commitment to education, choice of career or path of study. An interesting question, however, was to what extent this change was due to audience and context: that is, to being recognised and regularly reaffirmed in their new identity and role (sometimes counteracting established reputations as 'trouble makers' or 'low ability'). Where students' achievements were not witnessed or recognized by others in the school or wider community, their effects were diluted and in some cases even counter-productive. One regional director observed astutely that some young people who had worked with his office over a long period found it hard to transfer or to capitalize on their accrued expertise and opted for lower status career paths on leaving school than he felt they should have had. This may suggest the importance of context, of the collective social relations and specific spaces in which students are embedded to sustaining 'empowered' identities (Kesby, 2007), and which again the abstract and individual nature of 'voice' tends to discount.

The pedagogies that seemed to us to respond sensitively to such issues, or to mobilize

young people's existing strategies for negotiating these complexities, did not necessarily resemble the codifications by which 'youth voice' may now be most familiar such as cadre groups. One primary school for example, situated in a diverse urban area, had to confront the danger or shame associated with some ethnic identities - mothers in hijab who were spat at on their way to and from school, and children ashamed to admit Pakistani origins – that complicated a celebratory approach to multicultural 'voicing'. Their responses involved moving between different 'spaces' – for instance, developing twinning relationships with schools in Lebanon and Pakistan, but also, transforming the (symbolically central) school hall into a creative studio via floor-to-ceiling blackout curtains – and collaborations between teachers and artists, the latter funded in part (and again symbolically) from their core budget. A term's work on global citizenship with Year 1 and 2 (5-6 and 6-7 year olds) began assembling in the hall junk materials brought in from home, and developed very differently according to each year group's interests. Year 1 did junk modeling, while Year 2 children focused on environmental issues. 'Voice' here was not mythologized as somehow spontaneous – it had to meet the curriculum aims– but conceived as a 'three-way partnership' of teacher, artist and children, evidenced by the fact that it led in unanticipated directions. Towards the end of the term, the school arranged to meet with some other local schools in a nearby park, to share work. The children decided to 'protest' about the environmental impact of plastic bags, designed their own placards, banners and eco-bags, and made up chants and songs as they walked through the streets on the way to the event. Brief as this sketch is, it attempts to show how pedagogies might take account of power relations, of students' existing identities and locations whilst encouraging movement across different contexts, and be sustained by collective responses oriented to solidarity.

Conclusion

As we have argued, accounts of student voice imagine a subject that exists prior to education or to the participative process in which it engages. The Foucauldian perspectives on which we have drawn here argue that this subject is instead *produced through* particular disciplinary technologies.

This does not mean that the subject is determined by them - that students cannot contribute and make a difference to educational processes. It does however mean that we need to ensure that those subjects have access to the material and symbolic resources they need in order to realise voice. It requires us to look beyond the ideal, context-less subject so often imagined in discussions of voice, to the located student whose learning is shaped by their gender, class, ethnicity and by the affordances of the particular context in which they are located. These social subjectivities, relations and situatedness are crucial to defining one's own story and place in the world.

To return to love, then as we promised. What would it mean for teachers to 'know' that their students 'love (their) mum'? – It would mean acknowledging the impossibility of being the autonomous, confident, articulate and (self-)knowing subjects that the school and 'voice' practices demand. To be loving involves acknowledging our vulnerability, dependence and need for others, and this seems to us to be a better image and starting point for conceptualizing the process of 'finding' voice: as a journey to unknown destinations, as an emergence of understanding rather than a (re)statement of what one already knows – and above all as something we do better with, than without, the company of others.

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i http://www.icwe.net/oeb_special/news169.php (accessed 12/08/11)

ii See for instance: http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2011/08/blackberry-london-riots/ (accessed 11/08/11)

iii 'Gifted and Talented' was a controversial government initiative to give additional support and stimulation for high-achieving children.