

## **A Self-study of Listening to Student Voice in two University Early Childhood Degree Programs**

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### **Abstract**

Early childhood educators' own experiences of being listened to and of developing their own voice is likely to give them insight into what it means to be a listener in professional practice. Universities, students and staff can learn much from incorporating processes to encourage pre-service teaching students to engage in dialogue with lecturers and their peers about learning and teaching in a way that contributes to the program, while building student and staff capacity (Martin & Russell 2005).

Using a self-study approach (Russell 1998), the author described and interrogated her journey as a listening educator, and the processes she and other staff teaching in early childhood programs used to engage students in dialogue about their programs. Key ideas from relevant literature were used in this process (Clark 2005; Freire 1975; Moss 2008; Rinaldi 2006). The aim of the study was to investigate the author's own practices of listening to student voices to inform her teaching, building a foundation for personal, professional and program improvement. Four challenges are identified: considering power relations, understanding the terms listening and voice, handling the content of feedback, and making the process dialogic. Ideas are proposed for improving the feedback processes using participatory methods (Seale 2010).

**Key words:** early childhood teacher education; student voice; self-study; listening pedagogy.

### **Introduction**

This paper focuses on an aspect of early childhood teacher preparation that has received little attention in current literature; student voice in early childhood university higher education (HE) degree programs. It describes, using self-study, my own journey of initiating a process to listen to student voice in two such programs at one university. This paper conveys some of the challenges of that journey, and what I learned in the process. It is hoped that the paper's findings may be useful to others interested in listening to the voices of HE students. Although this study may have some relevance to other disciplines, it is chiefly focused on early childhood teacher education programs.

In early childhood education there is an increasing awareness of the need for children to develop and express their voices, and for educators to listen to those voices (Clark 2005; Einsardottir, Dockett and Perry 2009; Rinaldi 2001). In considering the importance of children's voices to their learning, I asked myself, if I want our graduates to listen to the children they work with as professionals, should I not be listening to their voices as they prepare to become qualified early childhood educators? This question is consistent with the notion that study of one's own teaching can provide a process to 'align teacher intents with teaching actions' (Loughran 2007, p. 12).

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The idea of teachers listening to the voices of learners is not new. In educational philosophy Lipman's (2007) 'community of inquiry' children and their teacher engage regularly in discussion using a framework that enables in-depth exchanges of ideas and in time the growth of the capacity to think. In presenting a case for listening pedagogy, at both early years and university levels, Egan (2009) saw it as consistent with Vygotsky's idea of dialogic practice, which builds cognition, and is used by learners and teachers to build new knowledge and understandings via ongoing authentic exchanges.

Egan (2009) raised the question of how well university education programs develop their graduates' capacity to listen to children. She observed that it is easier for HE lecturers to inform pre-service teachers that they need to listen to children and provide environments where children feel capable and able to express their ideas than to build HE programs which embed listening throughout so that such listening practices become for students a common and familiar way of being.

If pre-service early childhood educators are to be capable of listening to and learning from children they need to be engaged in that process in their own learning. It requires a shift in the view of learning in which those who know 'tell' those who do not, to one in which teachers and learners create meaning together (Friere 1975). It involves dialogue, which is a process of transformation in which participants cannot control the final result, but may come to understand things in a new way (Rinaldi 2006, p. 184). This process creates trust relationships in which dialogue is increasingly sought (Rinaldi 2006, 192). Freire (1975) wrote, 'The teacher is no longer the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself (sic) taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' (p. 53). Listening pedagogy is consistent with the skills that build democratic society. Listening pedagogy may provide HE early childhood lecturers with a way of more thoroughly integrating into their own practice what they are teaching.

My aim in writing this paper was to investigate my own practices of listening to student voices to inform my work as a HE early childhood educator. I wanted to more deeply understand myself as a professional teacher, to uncover underlying assumptions in my thinking and practice, and to build a foundation for personal and program improvement. I aimed 'to provoke, challenge and illuminate rather than confirm and settle' (Bullough & Pinnegar, in Russell 2004, p. 1209). This paper traces my journey of listening to student voices, in which I, 'considered meanings, made discoveries and new connections and expressed understandings' (Clark 2005, p. 35). I used inquiry into my own practice as a vehicle to help me increase my own understanding of the processes by which student voice can be incorporated in HE early childhood programs.

Four questions informed my investigation. What is my history regarding student voice? In what ways are student voices expressed in our early childhood education programs? What critique can be made of these processes? What issues might need to be considered when introducing a process to listen to student voice in early childhood HE programs?

### **The approach I used**

A review of suitable approaches to conduct my study revealed that personal writing about experiences can be used as a method of inquiry (Richardson and Adams St Pierre 2005). In this approach the writer is a 'situated speaker' who tells what they know about the world from their own standpoint (Richardson and Adams St Pierre 2005, p. 961), and as a result, comes to new understandings about themselves in their contexts and the contexts themselves. A related approach, entitled 'self-study', is concerned with inquiry into one's own practice as a teacher (Berry 2009; Clift 2009), with the researcher's own writing as data.

I could see that I could use writing to achieve my goal of examining my own practices from the 'inside out' (Russell 2004), and so come to understand my own practice at a deeper level. As a result, I could find an improved way forward while also contributing to what Berry (2009, p. 159) calls, 'collective

understandings of the learning to teach process'. I decided to draw on relevant literature to retrospectively interrogate my practices with the goal of improving my capacity to listen and that of the programs in which I teach.

As will become evident throughout this paper, my own approach to learning and teaching comes from a principally socio-cultural and thus constructivist standpoint (Rogoff 2003; Vygotsky 1978), where interaction amongst learners, and with their teachers creates an optimal learning space. Such learner-teacher relationships are underpinned by mutual respect, listening, valuing of both voices in the interaction, the creation of shared meaning and then decision-making about the learning environment. The methods used to retrospectively document and analyse my practice follow.

Over several months leading to a conference presentation in September 2010, I reflected on my professional history, and the more recent introduction of a listening process across the programs in which I taught.

- I wrote a recount of my years as a teacher, over time compiling a personal career history as an educator listening to student voice in a range of contexts
- Next I wrote an account of my years as a program director, focusing on initiatives concerned with listening to student voice and the responses to them. I then analysed it to identify major areas of critique
- Then I conducted a literature review of relevant articles to place my own theorizing and practices within a broader context. I used recurrent themes from that literature to analyse my personal account and to write a critique of the processes I had led to listen to student voice
- Finally, using that analysis, I formulated some issues regarding listening to student voice in HE contexts that may be useful to other early childhood teacher preparation programs as well as the ones within which I work

This reflective paper commences with an account of my history as a listening educator. Four major areas of critique are then presented in the light of relevant literature.

### **Background - Student voice and my practice as a teacher**

When I began teaching in HE I brought with me a long history of valuing learner voices in my practice as an early childhood teacher and lecturer.

When I reflected on my career that extended from the first years of schooling to university, I recognised that my pedagogy was constructivist, that is, the children and I both contributed to creating the learning program. As a class teacher I had gradually built a range of dialogic structures and processes that enabled me to listen to children's voices about their learning and experiences. The program foregrounded children's social and emotional development and learning, and included class forums in which children engaged in dialogue about their learning environment, and contributed deeply to its construction. Parents were encouraged to express their thinking about their children's learning and to participate in class activities and programs. I took this route because from the very first days of my life as a teacher, I saw that alone I could not answer the many learning and teaching questions that arose every day. So to create an effective learning program I needed to listen to children's and parents' voices and build a bridge from school to home, to include their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez 1992, p. 132). In this way the children, their families and I found productive joint ways forward, albeit confined to my own classrooms.

## **Student voice in my university teaching**

When I began my university teaching career in 1991, with colleagues, I again sought learner feedback about the courses in which we taught, distributing in final classes questionnaires, and using the feedback to inform the next course offering. Greater opportunities arose to listen to students' voices in 2004 when I became director of two pre-service early childhood teacher preparation programs. Initially I tried to listen to student voices using the usual online university tools. These student feedback processes run each semester and ask students to express their levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with each course in which they are enrolled. They pose ten standard questions on continua, plus usually two text based questions. These evaluation processes often receive low response rates, probably because busy students need to invest their own time to complete them online, and then receive no response. It seemed that students were often, as Shor (1996, p. 18) said, 'silent spectators in an education being done to them for their own good, not being done by them or with them'. When I considered this evaluative process I realised that students would be justified in thinking that the comments they made were not taken seriously. Those who did respond received nothing back from the university or staff; their thinking appearing to drop into a 'black hole'. To value students' comments would require addressing them and reporting back. I decided, with colleagues, to listen to student voices in a series of four small research projects that focused on an area of concern in the program. One project focused on the study experiences of external students, and another on those who had left their program in the preceding five years. Each study produced valuable data, however a sense of feeling in tune with students' thinking about their studies was absent because the data collection was time-span restricted.

So, similarly-feeling colleagues and I decided we needed to find another way to build a stronger listening culture. We wanted to create dialogic structures to hear clearly and in an ongoing way from students about their study experiences, and looked for appropriate ideas.

The processes we introduced were designed to listen to student voice much more effectively than the university-wide twice yearly one, or the aforementioned individual research projects. These new processes were dialogic and built into classes. After some discussion in the staff team the processes were implemented.

## **Processes introduced to improve listening to student voices**

The program-specific initiative commenced in 2006. The process collected feedback from all students about their program in class time, demonstrating that the feedback was valued, and acknowledging its role in teaching and learning. Each semester, staff year level coordinators identified one course suitable for the data collection. With permission from teaching staff about 20 minutes, usually at the beginning or end of a tutorial, was allocated in week 8 of a 12 or 13 week course. Staff informed participating students that the program team valued their feedback, and wanted to engage them in a more dialogic process than the university one allowed.

Students were asked to brainstorm and record in groups of approximately 4-6 members under two headings: 'commendations', that is, what they considered supported their studies for the current semester, and 'recommendations', that is, what they thought could improve their study environment. The focus was not on specific courses, but on their whole semester experiences. Responses were recorded on either overhead projector transparencies or paper, then group reporters presented their responses to the larger group to check clarity of meaning but not to evaluate them. Group agreement was not required; it was sufficient that one person wanted a comment recorded. All responses were then transcribed by the program administrator under 'commendations' and 'recommendations', and also by themes, identified post hoc. Any comments that could be seen as personal attack were removed. The next step was to enter into dialogue with students. Year level coordinators invited relevant course coordinators to a meeting in

which each item raised by students was discussed and a response formulated, usually through staff discussion. Then the whole document for each year level was sent electronically to all students enrolled in courses at that same level.

Subsequently, students began to report informally in conversation with me that they felt as a result of this process that their thinking and ideas were valued by staff, acknowledging its dialogic nature. Several mature aged students said to me in a discussion about this process that they really felt that staff in our program listened to students.

For me as program director, the process provided a helpful source of data for staff in understanding students' perspectives, deeply informed reaccréditation processes, and was also recognised by university leaders who asked me to present to other program directors about what we, as a team, were doing. As with many initiatives however, over time critique emerged.

### **Critique of the process to listen to student voices**

Critique of this listening process provided an opportunity to strengthen my thinking, to better understand what we were doing and its effects. Four key critiques are reported and discussed in the light of relevant literature, together with how, as a consequence, I reframed my thinking. They are presented as challenges.

### **Power relations in HE contexts**

The first challenge regarding listening to student voice concerned whether students should be encouraged to exercise power in their programs in this way, to express their voices and have their ideas acted upon. Who was best placed to make program decisions, staff or students? A fundamental difference in understanding about who could or should exercise power in making decisions about the program was revealed. I found myself in a quandary. I could now see that a common understanding about the relative exercise of power between staff and students needed to be developed.

When I commenced my self-study I considered the high status and positional power of teachers, when compared with students. As a teacher I had found that when students have few legitimate outlets to express their ideas and have those ideas acted upon they seek other avenues to express their power. Consideration of the role of power in learning contexts was the next step in my analysis, and commences with a discussion of what is meant here by the term 'power' in social relations.

Power, a word often used to describe a dimension of interpersonal interaction, is inherent to all human relations (Dell 1989), but exercised in differing amounts (Foucault 1978). Power circulates within social contexts, rather than being a possession of individuals (Osmond 1978). When power is more evenly distributed between the teacher and learners, school children have been found to be happier and more engaged (Schmuck & Schmuck 1992). Power is exercised in HE contexts. Lecturers are familiar with student behaviour that Shor (1996) called the Siberia Syndrome, 'a defensive reaction to the unequal power relations of schooling, which include unilateral authority for the teacher and a curriculum evading critical thought about the history, language and cultures of the students' (p. 13). It can be observed when students position themselves far from the lecturer, and engage in other activities such as whispering and texting, meeting minimal attendance requirements. Shor (1996) observed that students in programs where learning processes and content are not negotiable become increasingly alienated. Shor's ideas implied that when power was legitimately shared between teachers and their students the learning environment was improved.

Shor's (1996) description of a non-negotiable program is consistent with what Freire (1975) calls 'banking education'. Freire (1975, p. 54) argued that transmission style teaching in which learners

receive their education from experts who hold the power, has the effect of 'anaesthetizing students and inhibiting their creative power'. Educational programs are thus most likely to be effective when students have legitimate opportunities to exercise power. It thus follows that if HE programs can develop processes to engage students in dialogue about their programs such alienation may be minimized.

For students to have such opportunities staff would need to engage in a discussion about working towards building learning and teaching contexts in which students can legitimately participate. The following questions, stimulated by Rinaldi's listening pedagogy concerning teacher's images of their learners (2001) are pertinent. Do we see our students as unequal, powerless and unknowing, or as equal, able and competent? Are we willing to share power with students? What might be the benefits and limitations?

These are critical questions that upon reflection are essential to any listening process in an HE program, yet they were not included in the process I initiated. As a result, without discussion around these key questions which could have resulted in the establishment of shared understandings, support for the process diminished.

### **Understanding of the terms 'listening' and 'voice'**

A second challenge arose from my own lack of understanding of the terms central to this initiative to listen to student voice. My self-study led me to the realisation that when we began this listening process I did not have a shared, in-depth understanding of the terms 'listening' or 'voice', and as a team we had not discussed these terms. Shared understandings among staff of the meanings of these words, in retrospect, appear to be critical to the introduction of a listening process. Furthermore, notions of voice and listening are intertwined; one cannot be said to have a voice without being listened to, or to listen if there is no voice to hear.

In response to this challenge, in the next step in my self-study I considered the terms 'listening' and 'voice' in relation to current practices in our programs, initially drawing on the ideas of Carla Rinaldi, well known Reggio Emilia pedagogue and foremost listening pedagogy authority.

Rinaldi (2001) proposed what she called 'listening pedagogy'. This pedagogy is concerned with listening as a tool for teaching (Rinaldi 2001). In her words, it is concerned with children's 'search for meaning' (2001, p. 2). She observed that helping children in this search is the central role of Reggio schools. To find meaning children ask questions about why, how and what. In this way, they theorize about their worlds and develop understandings. When they share their theories they show how they think about and interpret everything around them. In educational settings sharing involves children, educators, and parents listening to each other's meaning making, actively, thoughtfully and respectfully. This process is the foundation of what Rinaldi calls 'the pedagogy of relationships and listening' (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 3). To be able to listen to children, educators need to open themselves, 'to otherness' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2006, 15), to be available to hear voices outside their own frames of reference, and to allow change. As Rinaldi (2006, p. 195) said, an educator can 'discover her competence by listening, not only by talking'.

Rinaldi (2001, p. 3) described a culture of listening in the following way:

...the chance to listen and be listened to, to express ... differences and be receptive to the differences of others. The task of those who educate is not only to allow the differences to be expressed, but to make it possible for them to be negotiated and nurtured through exchanging and comparing ideas. In this way not only does the individual ... learn how to learn, but the group becomes conscious of itself as a

‘teaching space’, where the languages are enriched, multiplied, refined and generate but also collide, ‘contaminate’ or hybridise each other, and are renewed.

When I considered Rinaldi’s ideas about listening I saw that in our attempts to listen to students, we had not done the groundwork needed to begin to establish a culture of listening and voice. The considerable and necessary process of development had not occurred. Recognising the difficulty of establishing such a culture in a university context, I argue however that Rinaldi’s ideas can be useful to an EC preparation program in the following ways: the setting up of regular pedagogical meetings in which the idea of a culture of listening could be discussed. In time and with agreement, a process could be developed in which ideas could germinate. Rinaldi’s writings on this topic could provide possible stimuli. Should staff decide to move a program towards a pedagogy of listening, these sessions would provide staff in-service learning that would enable them to move towards the setting up of student forums or the like that were embedded in their teaching, including online. Using action or similar research methods, documentation of the dialogue and the implementation of the processes eventually decided upon could contribute to the building a listening model suitable for the HE context.

The third challenge emerged from the introduction of this process to listen to student voice. It arose from the unanticipated reaction to the content of student feedback.

### **The challenge of the content of student feedback**

The process described previously to gather student feedback each semester necessitated that student views about their studies become known by staff and students at that level in the program, and so were not private. This open process risked staff unease if comments were critical. As an educator, I have long recognised that feelings of discomfort when one receives such comments can be difficult to deal with, however I have also found them to be a stimulus for change and improvement in my practice. Rinaldi’s (2001) ideas are useful regarding this critique. She observed that the role of educator brings with it discomfort at times, but that this feeling can lay foundations for openness to change and improvement. She wrote, ‘Listening is not easy. It requires deep awareness and a suspension of our judgements and prejudices. It requires openness to change. It demands that we value the unknown and overcome feelings of emptiness and precariousness that we experience when our certainties are questioned’ (p. 4). Rinaldi (2006) also said, ‘there has to be the possibility in schools of any kind, the possibility in any group, to create connections but also to live with differences and conflicts’ (p. 207).

I could see while I was willing to accept discomfort in response to critical comment, and had normalised it as part of my own pedagogical practice, I had not considered carefully how other staff with different perspectives of it might feel, particularly as feedback was being circulated openly. As the program director, I needed to consider any possible difficulties experienced by colleagues who had perhaps initially agreed to the process but who now might feel unhappy about critical comment that was being disseminated. To be effective the process of listening to students needed to be accepted and engaged with by the staff team as a whole, and a process to handle critical comment decided upon. Otherwise the process risked being seen as surveillance rather than as program improvement. An initial in-depth exploration of the processes being used and how they might work in practice was needed to build a safer way for staff to engage in a dialogue with students.

### **The challenge of making listening processes dialogic**

The notion that the listening process be dialogic produced a related and further challenge regarding how possible it was to create a dialogue with students about their program within an essentially hierarchical university structure. The university wide processes, and indeed the small scale studies previously conducted into the program all offered students the opportunity to give feedback, and lecturers with the

option to read it, however they were not dialogic. The university process is a controlled one, in which access to student comment is not open to all. Only the course coordinator can see comments across her/his course, and has the prerogative to share or not share with others teaching in that course. Otherwise staff can access only the comments students make about the classes they teach.

Dialogue is critical to any listening and voice process, yet it entails openness regarding what is said and thus invites scrutiny. The processes used, however, need to be respectful of all those concerned. Open dialogue amongst the staff team about what to do with critical comment in particular was needed. Engagement with the notion of dialogue as a way of providing opportunities for learning may have been helpful. Employment of relevant literature to inform thinking would have provided insight into the values underlying such a dialogue, and guidance about how it might be conducted.

In their paper on student voice, Robinson and Taylor (2007, p. 8) consider dialogue to be part of feedback processes. They argued for four core values, 'the conception of communication as dialogue, the requirement for participation and democratic inclusivity, the recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic, and, the possibility for change and transformation'. Applied to the HE context, these values provided me with a lens to critique the University's online feedback processes. I could see that these one way communication processes do not engage students in dialogue, and are undemocratic. They position students as low power participants who provide input but have no role in determining the structure of the evaluation system, or the processes used. Furthermore, they do not provide students or even the staff team with access to the body of that feedback, thus they are exclusive, not inclusive. These processes leave decisions about change and transformation in the hands of administrators and line managers.

Such hierarchical processes are based on the assumption that student feedback to staff is largely an individual matter that is extended to administrators and line managers largely for staff performance management purposes. A more democratic, inclusive process would give the staff team an overall picture of the program from the perspective of students through an ongoing student-staff dialogue process. The tension between the desire to provide privacy to staff regarding student comment on their teaching and the need to obtain real insights into students' perspectives so they could participate in an ongoing dialogue with staff about program development and improvement would need to be resolved if genuine participatory dialogue processes were to be created. The absence of dialogue also made change and transformation less likely, consolidating existing structures and power relations, controlled by those who say who can speak and when, and how what is said can be used (Fielding, as quoted in Robinson and Taylor 2007). To be authentic and educative, evaluative tools need to be participatory (Seale 2010), and to include the possibility of creating joint understandings and new knowledge (Fiske 1990).

### **Learnings from my self-study of a process of listening to student voices**

Using self-study, I have grown my own understanding of the notions of voice and listening and how we might use them in our early childhood HE programs, and of the challenges that adoption of a listening process might produce. As a result of this self-study, the following issues may be worth considering.

Before building a process to listen to student voice those leading the process need to engage in deep discussion about the underlying philosophical values and understandings involved, for example, what is our image of our students, how is power distributed and exercised in the program currently, and how might we want it to be in the future. What do the words 'voice' and 'listening' mean in this context? Widespread acceptance of and commitment to the process chosen is critical. Other topics for discussion might include, how might we respond to critical comment from students? What can be learnt, and what guidelines are needed to create a dialogic process in which staff and students feel that they are part of a

safe yet constructive learning process? A set of principles could be developed for the building of listening processes that could be taken to students for consideration.

Upon this foundation, listening pedagogies could be created which are consistent with those early childhood graduates might expect to use as professional educators. Staff could invite students to work with them on developing suitable processes to express voice and to listen, to consider a range of proposals, their strengths and limitations for the program and for individuals. They would translate the principles into new behaviours and actions. Staff-student teams could critique any suggested processes regarding whether they favour particular groups and exclude or discourage others. Language, power relation and culture would be relevant here. The processes developed need to be sensitive to all concerned, and dialogic, and as a result, may be best located at the program and course level, added on to the university-wide student feedback data collection. The processes would be better incorporated into the program's pedagogy, rather than added on.

The processes decided upon need to value all voices, and be educative in intent. That means that initially some voices and listening may be low skilled and overly critical. The offering of inexpertly expressed critical comment is not an argument for cessation of listening, but rather for the program to grow all participants' levels of expertise in expressing their voices constructively. Processes need to be transforming and empowering for both students and staff (Seale 2010). At the same time as supporting program improvement, listening processes would also provide students and staff with a professional learning experience regarding pedagogical documentation that may also be relevant to other professional work contexts. Staff expertise could extend to include knowledge of pedagogies to create learning environments in which student voice was encouraged and responded to.

## **Conclusions**

A considerable body of literature now exists on children's voice and its role in inclusive, liberatory and non-biased pedagogies (Clark and Moss 2001; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999), providing both the strategies that could be used and the arguments for them. University early childhood programs may choose to draw on this literature to develop beginning educators who are experienced with learner voice and its potential contribution to education and care.

There are likely to be many challenges in the processes needed to develop such educators. Perceptions of staff and students in HE contexts tend to be shaped by their previous experiences in education (Martin and Russell 2005, p. 11-12). Thus, there is a need to, 'make conscious and explicit' the issues involved in seeking and valuing student voice. Martin and Russell call this process 'reframing perceptions'. If staff commit to such a project all aspects of the program, principles, structures, practices and behaviours would be subject to scrutiny and perhaps change.

The use of processes to implement listening pedagogy across a program sets up an expectation that part of being a learner is engaging in authentic dialogue with one's teachers about the learning and teaching processes, which, over time drives betterment and change (Barrow 2010). Such processes offer much more than a one way, online feedback data collection which removes from both staff and students the professionally enriching opportunity to engage with each other about learning and teaching.

Using a self-study approach, I have employed Rinaldi's pedagogy of listening (2006), to trace my own experiences as a HE educator deeply interested in listening to student voices. I have used Rinaldi's and other literature to examine current structures and processes employed to listen to student voice in two early childhood programs at one university. At a personal and professional level this self-study of listening to student voice has been useful to the development of my thinking and practice. It has provided me with a platform to rethink and reframe my own practice, to scrutinise existing practices and find

democratic-based directions for practice. It has committed me more deeply to building pre-service early childhood students' capacity to value and listen to children's voices. I know that to develop the competence needed to listen to those voices, these students' own voices need to be valued. Participation builds both capacity to express one's voice and the skills to listen to others.

During my journey as an educator I have, to quote Martin and Russell (2005, p. 7) become 'addicted' to listening to my students' voices. Their ideas often confirm my own hunches about courses and programs, and also challenge my thinking about learning and teaching. As well as a beginning point for discussion within my team, I hope this paper will stimulate discussion in comparable HE programs. I recognise and honour the contributions of those students and staff who have contributed their expertise and energy to the listening process in our HE context. The words of Martin and Russell (2005, p. 35) are relevant here. 'Teaching and learning to teach are not about 'getting it right... They are more about 'getting in touch' with how and why we are teaching as we do and with the full range of effects we are having on those we teach'.

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