

STUDENT VOICE:

Power, Democracy and Neoliberalism

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Teaching Dissertation

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Submitted by:

Benjamin Kostas Tymukas

B. Media, B. International Studies

Supervisor:

Dr Stephen Kelly

School of Education, Faculty of Arts.

stephen.kelly@adelaide.edu.au

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Benjamin Kostas Tymukas

June, 2019

ABSTRACT

The past decade or so has seen an increase in literature that addresses the concept of student voice. Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (US) have been particularly noticeable proponents of the concept. Within many 'western' democracies (including Australia), the existence of student voice is a mandatory element of education (the US being a notable exception). A core issue with the idea of student voice, is the breadth of activities that this can refer to. Because of this there is a lack of clarity around what student voice *is* and how it should be considered and implemented. Often the term is used in reference to student leadership or governance programs, such as Student Representative Councils (SRC). It can also refer to classroom 'voice' and democratic pedagogical practice. Despite the common presence of some form of student voice in schools, this paper found evidence that these programs are often poorly implemented. The potential benefits are poorly understood and are often not reflected in the data used for quantifying school, or student, performance. This research aimed to answer the question: How can we better conceptualise student voice?

The aims were to create an understanding of literature addressing student voice, and the positive and negative effects of 'voice' that this research supported. Through this, the aim was then to understand the barriers that exist that prevent student voice from reaching its potential, and how these can be addressed. The final aim was to apply the understanding garnered to a school case study. The case study was a flagship student voice program, the Youth Action Team (YAT), which was being operated by the Northern Adelaide Suburbs State Secondary School Alliance NASSSA. The YAT was a student voice program, operating across the 11 member schools of NASSSA, promoting interschool relationships and community engagement.

This paper uses a literature review as data to inform analysis. It explores the way educators and governing bodies conceptualise voice, and questions how current practice can be adapted to provide more democratic, inclusive and responsive education. It finds that there are structural and governance issues that lead to a tendency for student voice programs to lack the support and understanding for success. Bacchi's 'What is the Problem Represented to Be' method is used for a discourse analysis of literature addressing the issue of student voice.

The research finds evidence indicating power and economic factors that are suspected barriers to the realisation of democratic potential in the classroom and in school governance. The value of student voice is obscured by dominant economic narratives, and the power structures that are produced by them.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child stipulates that, where possible, children should be given the opportunity to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives (United Nations, 1989). This declaration asserted that children can, and should be, active and respected participants in their own lives, rather than passively beholden to parents or adults. One manifestation of this new understanding of children and their rights has been a wide spread adoption of student voice (Mitra, 2018). A pedagogical and structural shift has occurred within many schools in recent years to provide space for students to have a voice in their learning and school policies that affect their school lives. This has been particularly noticeable in nations associated as western liberal democracies (such as Australia, New Zealand, UK and US). There have however been noticeable examples of radical pedagogical shifts in the global South, such as Mexico (see Mein, 2009).

‘Student voice’ programs vary in their scope ranging from the extreme overhauls of the governance structure of schools (exemplified in the study undertaken by Quinn and Owen (2016)) or, to simply providing a space for student feedback. As a signatory to the UN declaration on Human Rights and the Rights of the Child, Australia’s commitment to acknowledging the rights of children is more than mere policy; it has become an international obligation. Like many countries that are signatories, Australia now has a requirement for presence of student voice and representation to be present in schools (Pearce & Wood, 2019). This commitment was recently reinforced by the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, a key tenet of which is students having a voice and being ‘... active participants in their own learning and wellbeing...’ (Department of Education and Training, 2018a) as well as the Gonsky Review; recommendation 3 stating that ‘... all students have the opportunity within schools to be partners in their own learning’ (Department of Education and Training, 2018b, p. xiii). Despite these commitments there remains a lack of understanding of the effect of student voice and, seemingly, a lack of commitment within schools to explore this potential. There has been criticism that the mandatory nature of these programs can, in fact, be detrimental as they are implemented with the sole intention of meeting the obligation (Robinson & Taylor, 2013). Dana Mitra argues that Australia specifically stands out for being

both a signatory to the UN convention, and poor at implementing meaningful programs (2018).

All pedagogical decisions on how voice can be incorporated into Australian classrooms, or leadership initiatives, are the remit of the State's education departments and the individual schools. The option of implementing extensive and powerful student voice in schools is then available to teachers and school leaders, however, there are barriers that tend to prevent this occurring in a meaningful way. Outside pressures in the form of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and tertiary entrance scores create a value-oriented education system that discourages radical or divergent innovations. How 'value' is defined is also problematic when trying to understand issues in the way that student voice is conceptualised and implemented. The benefits and potential of the concept and practice of student voice appears to be misunderstood or, at least, underappreciated (Mager & Nowak, 2011; Robertson, 2017; Saha & Print, 2010).

In coming to the concept of student voice I was presented with the case of the Youth Action Team (YAT) that operated as a part of the Northern Adelaide State Secondary Schools Alliance (NASSSA). This was a flagship student voice program that operated across the NASSSA network. The core concept being that participants could 'promote strong interschool relationships' and 'enable students to become actively involved within their school communities' (Northern Adelaide State Secondary Schools Alliance, 2019b). This was a program, valued by the students that engaged with it, and by its adult coordinators, that has been discontinued. The decision to discontinue the YAT program, and the data suggesting that student voice is often poorly implemented, indicates a problem with the way that student voice is conceptualised by teachers, site leaders and policy makers.

This dissertation will try to answer the question: How can we better conceptualise student voice? This will be done by introducing three theoretical concepts of *power*, *democracy* and *neoliberalism*. A review of relevant literature will then be analysed through the prism of these theoretical lenses. The insights revealed through this process will be used to reframe and understand a case study of YAT which made up a leadership group comprised of student leaders across the NASSSA. This dissertation explores a corpus of work that presents

qualitative, quantitative and empirical evidence supporting the benefits of student voice throughout the school experience.

1.1 CONTEXT: NASSSA AND THE YAT

NASSSA is a collection of 11 secondary schools across the Northern suburbs of Adelaide. The group was 'formed to maximise the learning opportunities, career pathways, retention and educational outcomes for all students in alliance schools in northern Adelaide' (Northern Adelaide State Secondary Schools Alliance, 2019a). Through this alliance they are able to maximise engagement with local industry, creating clear pathways into the workforce, as well as ensuring consistent, quality education across the region. A similar consortium of schools exists in the Southern Adelaide and Fleurieu Secondary School Alliance (SAFSSA), though the scope of this program is limited to Vocational Education Training (VET) programs, shared by the member schools. NASSSA's scope is broader, exemplified by the YAT program. The YAT was a student voice initiative, comprised of student leaders across the network that would meet regularly to promote interschool collaboration and community engagement. While other attempts at similar programs exist (VicSRC in Victoria for example), they are not common, so understanding the efficacy of YAT and NASSSA is crucial. While tied to student representation, the YAT was not intrinsically tied to the respective SRC groups from each school, and did not have appointed facilitators at each school, it instead operated as a part of NASSSA. At the time of writing, the YAT program has been discontinued due to concerns that the time commitment was too great for senior students. YAT meetings would take place twice each term and one representative from each school would be expected to attend each meeting. Meetings would be semi-formal, and student focussed. Feedback to co-ordinators identified that meetings were best when student driven, rather than relying on guest presenters. Major projects would be identified at the beginning of the year, and subsequent meetings would operate as progress reports. An example of a project undertaken through YAT was the facilitation of an anti-bullying conference for student leaders. With the assistance of the YAT coordinator, a day was arranged where educators would discuss the issue of bullying and ways to address this. Around 100 student leaders across the network were able

to attend, who could then take the information from the day and tailor it to the specific context of their school.

1.1.1 NASSA DATA AND YAT

A number of documents were made available by NASSSA for the purposes of this study. This information was provided to give an insight into the operation of YAT as well as performance data that pertained to the overall NASSSA network. The data made available included,

- The 2017 YAT annual report;
- YAT student feedback;
- Performance review conducted by the Department for Education and Child Development; (DECD now- Department for Education DfE); and
- VET Course Satisfaction Survey.

1.1.2 2017 YAT ANNUAL REPORT

This report provides a critical summary of YAT outcomes in 2017 and includes some questionnaire data from YAT meetings. Key findings from this include the self-assessed participation data, where YAT members have provided a rating based on Harts 'ladder of participation' (Figure 1.) for each meeting. Also included is an interview with a year 12 student who has been a member of the YAT for three years. The report also attempts to identify issues that the YAT faced throughout the year, and ways to adapt the program to alleviate these.

The report suggests that there is a broad level of satisfaction from students within the program. Meetings were mostly rated at the highest level of participation, though there was a significant drop in response to guest speakers or when meetings focussed on issues related to specific schools. The best meetings involved small group activities as it was in these situations that students felt most confident to contribute. Meetings were consistently rated at a high level of participation. The purpose of this report needs to be considered, as this is an internally developed report rather than a truly critical investigation into the program.

The internal issues identified included a lack of student commitment to meeting attendance and external volunteering, which limited the ability for the group to see progress on programs. A solution proposed to the lack of face-to-face meeting was the need to be better connected digitally, and the need for this program to be better integrated into the individual SRC programs of each school. Another issue identified by the report was the potential impact that YAT commitments could have to other 'core' school work.

1.1.3 YAT STUDENT FEEDBACK

Student feedback from participants was sought from the YAT groups of different participating schools. Feedback focussed on was ways that the YAT could be improved and a reiteration of the goals and scope of the program, as seen by the participants from within the program.

A lack of integration and school support was identified by students as an issue that hampered the potential of the program. While there were loose links to each school's SRC, there was no formal tie between each schools SRC and the YAT. The lack of support and connection to school SRC groups was a key issue identified by students that limited the function of the program. There was not data on the crossover in students, but Saha and Print (2010) found that students involved in some aspect of student governance, were likely to take on additional responsibilities and involve themselves in multiple forms. This suggests that it is likely that YAT members were also members of the SRC programs at their respective schools. If so, coordination between the groups would likely be an easy problem to solve.

Feedback was taken from students as the program was being reviewed, and issues identified included a lack of support from teachers and leaders within schools and a lack of continued communication between students across the network schools. Participants had attempts at using social media platforms to stay in touch, but these were problematic and did not work as a safe platform to use. Aside from teacher support, a lack of communication meant that continuing work on projects between meetings was difficult and progress was hampered.

1.1.4 NASSSA NETWORK– PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The NASSSA performance review included information on NAPLAN and SACE results, and data from the Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC) conducted by the then DECD in 2017. The NASSSA performance review is primarily focussed on assessing the success of the network based on the academic outcomes reflected in SACE and NAPLAN data. Also included is some information on the ‘engagement’ of students and wellbeing. This data was both compared with ‘historic’ data from individual schools and with an average DfE school score. These two measures both provide an assessment of the overall success of network schools compared to the rest of the state. It also rates the ability to assess the effect of the alliance on individual schools’ achievement. The report provided findings from the WEC as well as attendance rates as a measurement of wellbeing and engagement at the school. The three fields included from the WEC were chosen based on their close correlation to NAPLAN results. Attendance rates were used as a proxy measurement for student engagement.

While, engagement and attendance are on a broadly positive trajectory for the senior year levels, there does appear to be a plateau across the middle school years, and both factors remain below the targets of 95% (most sitting at around 85%). With this as a measure of engagement it would appear that there is a cultural issue within attendance that is not being addressed adequately by the current practice. Engagement at the younger year levels are particularly low and troubling. The data of senior school shows an increase in attendance rates. The performance report does not attempt to draw conclusions from this. It is possible that this is an expected trend, reflecting a drop in disengaged students as they are given the opportunity to leave school. The remaining students at the senior level reflect a higher proportion of engaged students. It is also possible that better access to student voice programs like the SRC and the YAT encourage engagement and sense of belonging to the school and that better access to these should be provided to students in middle school (Keough, 2005).

The WEC data incorporated into the report were ‘Academic Self Concept’, ‘Eating Breakfast’ and ‘Perseverance’. These were specifically chosen as they were most closely correlated with NAPLAN and SACE results. Of these three areas, Academic Self Concept is most related to the subject of student voice. Eating Breakfast relates directly to welfare of the child.

'Perseverance' was tested by the ability for students to remain focussed on a task and is related to 'emotional regulation' and 'executive functioning' (Department for Education, 2018). Data across all three areas was biased to the lower ratings, when compared to the data shown for all DECD schools. There were other elements to the WEC that were not included within the published performance review that could also be useful for determining the efficacy of the YAT program. The WEC provided one section 'school belonging' with two questions on whether the student feels important to the school. The results of this section along with an expanded investigation into this would be useful for determining the efficacy of YAT. Student voice as encouraging and fostering an inclusive and democratic school community that gives students some ownership of their education.

Ultimately, what the report reflects is a preoccupation with quantifiable data explicitly linked to academic results as the markers of the success or failure of NASSSA. Despite findings that suggest links between the wellbeing of students and academic results (Anderson, 2005; Gray & Hackling, 2009) the attention given to wellbeing as a measure of success, or as a path to achieving the academic goals of the organisation, is minimal.

1.1.5 VET COURSE SATISFACTION SURVEYS

Vocational Education and Training (VET) Course feedback shows that student attitudes towards a self-elected and vocational education is more positive than the data reflected in the Performance Review for compulsory school classes. This includes a high self-assessment of their ability to meet deadlines (79%) and cope with school work and VET course work (75%). This is compared to 49% of students at NASSSA schools reported at the 'high' rating of academic self-concept through the WEC data. This suggests that the nature of VET courses led students to feeling more capable of achieving the tasks presented to them. It would be useful to understand if the self-elected nature of these courses, and the sense of ownership and choice plays a part in this.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO THEORIES

The theoretical concepts of *power*, *democracy* and *neoliberalism* are to be explored in depth in the next chapter. These have been chosen as appropriate analytical lenses due to both their relationship with education as a broad concept, and specifically the issue of student voice.

The nature of power relationships affects much of the school experience. This is true both for teachers and students. Theories of power are useful for understanding what voices are heard, and how voices are silenced. Foucault's understanding that 'power is everywhere' (2008, p. 93) is used to explain the complex relations between students and teachers, as well as peer-to-peer, and teachers as employees. Providing students with voice inherently disrupts a traditional power dynamic. This is either in the pedagogical sense of a 'banking' model explained by Freire (1972), or an 'authoritarian' governance structure (Gordon, 2001). Understanding the literature through 'power' as a concept is then crucial.

Democracy is also inherently linked to the idea and practice of student voice. Biesta (2006) and Hart (1992) both argue that participation is a key element to a democratic society and, crucially, *teaching* for a democratic society. Student voice literature often addresses overtly democratic participation within school politics, (see Chappell, 2012; Cooper & Anwaruddin, 2016) the democratic implications of student voice are not limited to leadership programs. Democratic participation can be expressed through negotiating curriculum and through cohesive and collaborative classroom engagement. Ideas like Critical Pedagogy and inquiry based learning, are examples of teaching practice that provides students with voice, that may not immediately be recognised as 'student voice'. Within these practices is the notion of providing ownership and control to students over their learning and they are underwritten with the principles of democratic practice.

Neoliberalism is used as a theoretical frame for the way that it problematises the relationship that schools have to 'value' production. The increasing shift towards standardised testing as a way of determining value in education, reflects a market style shift in the way that the value of learning is defined. Students are beginning to be seen, and see themselves, as 'consumers' or 'customers' in the education chain, rather than recipients of a public service (Biesta, 2006; Mitra, 2018). The theoretical frame of neoliberalism is used to help understand student voice's relationship with 'value'. It will help to understand how neoliberalism as a concept may distort value and silence the value produced through student voice.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 POWER AND STUDENT VOICE

Power is an important consideration when trying to understand students and their voice. The power imbalance between student and adult/teacher lies at the heart of the issue surrounding student voice. The programs themselves in most forms, are an attempt to subvert or redress this imbalance with the understanding that this will make for a more engaged and inclusive learning experience. Power, however, does not exist in a purely linear form, and does not just affect the relationship between learner and educator. Power relationships affect how teachers are able to respond to student voice and constrains and manipulates whose voice is heard.

A Freirean approach to pedagogical reform acknowledges the power imbalance within the teacher and student relationship and links it to the perpetuation of an oppressive societal structure. Freire draws on Marxist concepts of a dialectical struggle between classes producing a new and more equal society. This is then reconceptualised as a way of considering the 'narrative character' of the classroom (Freire, 1972, p. 57). Freire characterises his 'banking' model of education as inherently un-dialectical as it requires a concentration of knowledge and power in the hands of the teacher. In contrast to this, Freire proposes the 'problem-posting' model of education that encourages a co-investigative model, where teacher and student work together with contrasting and competing ideas in a 'constant unveiling of reality' (Freire, 1972, p. 68). Michel Foucault asserts a similar understanding of power in his claim that 'where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault, 2008, p. 95). This resistance may not be extreme or violent in the classroom but may exist in a resistance to the expectations and practice of the status quo. Freire proposes harnessing the resistance, asserted to exist by Foucault, rather than repressing it. Freire is writing with the explicit intention of reforming what he saw as an education system and practice that reinforced generational and systemic oppression. While the inequalities may not be as great and the political system may not be as oppressive, his ideas can provide an insight into ways that our own system can be made more representative and emancipatory.

Though there has been a shift in practice to a more collaborative learning process, there remains within education an underlying dynamic in the way that knowledge being provided to students from the keeper of knowledge, the teacher. This didacticism is described by Freire as a 'banking' system, where the core preoccupation of education is 'depositing' information into students and 'banking' this information (Freire, 1972). Freire critiques this practice on the grounds that it actively reinforces a dominant power structure and prevents students from developing their knowledge in a way that could equip them with important critical and analytical skills. A more democratic classroom, with an analytical dialogue, is seen by Freire as a path for students to cross class or poverty barriers (Freire, 1972). 'The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world' (Freire, 1972, p. 60). Student interaction and ownership of their learning can provide for an opportunity to build and hone the skills and knowledge required for them to become active and equal participants in society. A didactic deposit of information or, 'banking' model of education as Freire puts it, prevents a development of civil responsibility and participation. A more collaborative and consultative educational environment makes it possible to foster those skills, while also addressing the requisite content. While teaching techniques and the goals of teachers have developed beyond the time period that Freire's writings are concerned with, his model is useful for considering other ways that this power structure manifests itself in today's education system. While the 'banking' model of education may not be considered best practice today, the power dynamic that it describes remains within many schools where teachers remain ultimate authorities. In these cases, there is rarely a genuine attempt to provide an outlet or platform for 'resistance' or dialectic conflict. In terms of 'student voice', Freire is describing classroom voice, and the need for students to have ownership and input into curriculum and course content. This does not mean providing students with complete choice of content, but ensuring that they are contributors and partners, rather than passive consumers.

Many advocates for this disruption of the power structure of schools are not calling for a complete redistribution of power, giving students complete control or even something close to teachers. There remains strong advocacy for maintaining the authority of adults and teachers within the school but providing a *genuine* opportunity for voice and student

leadership. It is important to recognise that support for student voice, does not equate to a utopian dream of active and responsible student leadership contributing to the daily governance of the school. Hannah Arendt's theories on freedom and democracy became closely associated with ideas around student voice and democratising education. The Arendtian tradition is a conservative reformative approach to education. While it sees the need and space for serious change in the approach to education practice, and democratic education, it does not extend to the radical democratic reforms of thinkers like Dewey or Giroux (Gordon, 2001). Arendtian education theorists like Gordon, contest that the place for adult authority remains important and has been eroded by education reformers to the detriment of both teachers and students (2001). While there should be room for democratic aspects to the educational setting, Gordon and others argue that 'utopian' ideals have led to an approach to democratic education that doesn't fully take into account important features of the classroom dynamic. The complex social interactions that make up schooling can have repercussions to attempts at democratic classrooms that seek to provide for student voice and disrupt the power dynamic of a traditional classroom. While 'radical' in many ways with his approach to student voice programs, Michael Fielding voices a similar Arendtian objection to a an unchecked reduction in teacher authority (Fielding, 2004). The importance of teachers as engaged and active parties in any student voice program is seen as essential by Fielding. Students and teachers need to work in partnership in this model. While Fielding sees the process as more collaborative, both approaches are unified in the sentiment that teachers need to be heavily involved and invested in the process for it to have a beneficial and productive outcome.

Assuming the voice of others in sociological data studies creates issues of power disparity between the subjects and the researcher. This should be considered in the same way that Edward Said characterises a post-colonial relationship between ex-colonial powers and ex-colonies (Fielding, 2004). As a 'dominant' power in the relationship between teacher/researcher and student, it is important to, where appropriate and possible, allow the student views to be at the fore. Terms such as 'oppressed' are used by writers like Fielding (2004) as a way of considering young people and students. While the model of oppression can appear superlative when just talking about the power disparity between young people and adults, Fielding argues that it is a useful term for considering the lack of agency felt by

young people (2004). While all students may not face the lifelong inequity that is implied by a term like ‘oppressed’, their experience of school can be alienating and prescriptive in a way that can be compared, if not equated to a type of oppression. The structure of this relationship makes theories that incorporate power and oppression into them useful for understanding this student experience.

While student voice programs have the ethos of redressing a power imbalance between the student/teacher relationship, the programs themselves should equally be critiqued for how well they address power imbalances within the student cohort. Foucault’s assertion that ‘power is everywhere’ (2008, p. 93) is useful for understanding how the power dynamic does not end in a simple binary of those that do and those that do not. Instead, power should be understood as a fluid and constantly shifting force. The power shifts between the student cohort is just as important as those between student and staff. When viewing a student voice program through a lens of power questions are raised not just on whether there is an active and effective student voice program, but who this program caters for. If the program only services students that are already academically dominant or popular, their voice may already be prevalent within the school community, and they may be more likely to be unaware of the ways that the status quo disadvantages others. There is also the chance that these are the students with the least impetus for making changes to the status quo. If one purpose of student voice is to provide ‘power’ to the ‘oppressed’, the most ‘oppressed’ within the community should be targeted for involvement. Critically considering *who* is represented by the student voice program is important for assessing its success, and also when interpreting the data collected from interviews and student engagement data. At the heart of this is understanding that there is an interplay of power that runs throughout every facet of human society.

2.2 EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

“A nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved” (Hart, 1992, p. 4)

If we understand democracy as inherently participatory, or at least requiring all citizens to be equipped with the understanding and agency to participate, education becomes a crucial

element to creating a democratic society. Schooling is the only opportunity that society has to create a relatively uniform experience for the entire population, so provides a unique opportunity to equip and prepare a nation for universal suffrage. The importance of fostering a democratic understanding through school has become of increasing concern in recent years as due to a perceived drop in social capital (Saha & Print, 2010). Saha and Print (2010) believe that the falling membership numbers experienced by democratic organisations (Collins, Hess, & Lowery, 2019) (e.g. trade unions and political parties) indicates a fall in social capital: a necessary element to civil society. This is understood through Putnam's structuralist perspective that sees a clear link between political engagement and social capital (Putnam, 2000). In place of organisational membership, the education systems present an opportunity to provide a space for this social capital to be attained. Student voice programs (particularly in the form of student leadership and student councils) provide a particularly important contribution to this effort as it doesn't explicitly teach about democracy, but *through* it. Biesta asserts that there is a false assumption that 'education' itself creates democratic citizens (2006). Instead, democracy is best learned *through* democracy and democratic practice in the classroom (Biesta, 2006).

Theorists such as Robinson and Taylor (2009) discuss student voice in terms of 'liberation, emancipation and collaboration' (p. 164). These high ideals are however not often realised. Student voice programs, internationally as well as in Australia, tend to be limited in their offering of choice and freedom, adhering instead to the status quo hierarchical structure (Fielding, 2012; Mitra, 2018; Robinson & Taylor, 2009, 2013). There is potential that the limitations imposed upon student voice programs could have detrimental effects, beyond simply providing poor student representation or engagement. A systematic review conducted on student voice and participation did not identify any conclusive evidence for negative effects as a result student voice programs (Mager & Nowak, 2011). Despite this, recent work by Mitra (2018) asserts that tokenistic approaches to student representation can actively contribute to the alienation of students from institutions and democratic structures. More disturbing still are the claims by Fletcher (2012) that student voice programs are being actively corrupted by adults and used as a 'Trojan Horse' to promote the status quo and ideas and practice already in existence. With reference to Harts *ladder of participation* (Figure 1) this would reflect the lowest 'rung' in 'manipulation' (Hart, 1992) but tokenistic efforts towards

student voice could also be considered a way of reinforcing the status quo, while giving the appearance of democratic consultation.

Roger Hart's *ladder of participation* (Figure 1.) (1992) creates a model for assessing the democratic nature of existing student voice programs, and other opportunities that are provided for children to participate in decision making and political expression. The first three rungs of this ladder, which include 'tokenism', are considered 'non-participation'. This classification is important as a common criticism of student voice programs is their tendency to develop into tokenistic efforts (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016; Mitra, 2018; Pearce & Wood, 2019; Quinn & Owen, 2016). Tokenistic efforts at student voice and participation programs are a particular feature of student voice programs in countries where there is a requirement or mandate to provide them (Mitra, 2018; Mitra, Serriere, &

Kirshner, 2014). As a non-signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the US does not have a mandate to provide student voice programs. Because of this, Student Voice is not as prevalent in the US though the benefit is that where these programs do exist, they are more likely to be properly supported and understood (Mitra et al., 2014). Hart's *ladder of participation* would classify many of the programs operating within Australia today as 'non-participatory' by their tokenistic nature. The tokenism then of any student voice programs running in Australia could then be seen as a failure to deliver a mandatory feature of every student's education.

Scholars like Spector (2014) have used the model of Hannah Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism to understand the structures of education and governance that can restrict free thought and ultimately positive developments. Spector (2014) suggest that barriers to using this theoretical framework come from connotations derived from the concept of totalitarianism that make the use of the word seem hyperbolic. Totalitarianism however, can

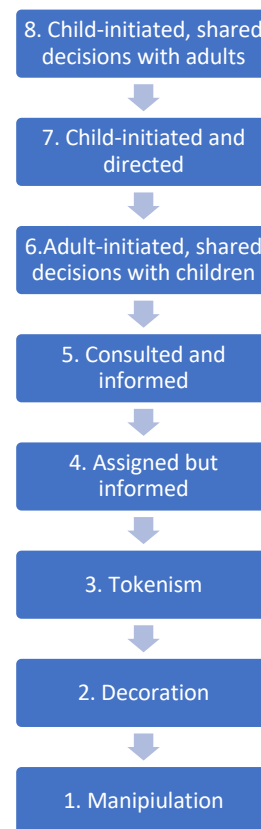


Figure 1: Harts Ladder of Participation- Upper levels (4-8) indicating degrees of participation. Lower levels (1-3) degrees of non-participation (Hart, 1992, p.41)

manifest itself as the progressive and subtle restriction of daily freedoms, and not always in the extreme example of mass murder of which it has become synonymous with (Spector, 2014). In a practical sense, the top down nature of education in countries like Australia, the US and the UK, creates a structure where a relative few dictate and control the actions and decisions available to staff and students (Spector, 2014). In this way, while not totalitarian, some shared aspects can be considered when assessing the limitations and constraints that teachers and students face when confronted with structures like the National Curriculum, ACARA and SACE. Using this framework is not equating the horrors of totalitarianism with NAPLAN but can provide insights into potential issues within this structure. Embedding democratic principles into education is seen as a necessary reform that can both improve the education provided and make more democratic citizens (see Biesta, 2006; Fielding, 2012; Freire, 1972; Mitra, 2018; Robinson & Taylor, 2009). The fostering of democratic participation within education has been shown to lay the framework for developing a broader understanding and contribution to the democratic process, including voting participation (Biesta, 2006; Saha & Print, 2010).

Biesta stresses that the emphasis should be placed on participation. Education is often burdened with the task of merely educating and thus creating active and democratic citizens, as though this is the necessary product of an education. In truth, that relies too much on an individualised concept of democracy and education. The core issue is an assumption that 'education' in itself is what provides for a functioning society and that only properly educated citizens can participate fully within society. Biesta contends that that we should not simply be teaching *'for'* democracy, but *'through'* it (Biesta, 2006). That providing a democratic education system and the facility for student voice, provides students with a tangible opportunity to experience and participate in the democratic practice, in ways that have become less available and obvious throughout society. There has been a shrinking of institutions from daily life and the decline in membership to political parties, clubs or trade unions. These would have once served as micro democratic structures through which political voice could be exercised and understood. The shrinking of these has increased the importance of our education system to provide the structure and opportunity to experience participatory democracy. This means not merely educating about democracy but, providing

real opportunity for the democratic process to be experimented with and understood, and for this voice to have a tangible and identifiable influence on students' schooling.

Democratic student voice is visible formally in student governance, elections and student politics. Just as important as these forms is the idea of democratising the classroom. Concepts like critical pedagogy and inquiry-based learning are examples of pedagogical practices that incorporate democratic and student-based methods. These practices are reliant upon a recognition and valuing of student voice by educators. Critical pedagogy was developed in 'response to the failure of education itself' (Biesta, 2005, p. 143). In the wake of the Second World War, the excesses and abuses of totalitarianism became clear. Through this, so did the education system's role in Germany and the USSR as a tool for embedding ideology into a population. Critical pedagogy builds on ideas of 'resistance to power' constructed by Foucault, and incorporates this into classroom student participation (Biesta, 2005). Critical pedagogy is tied to the critical theory of Freire (1972) and his ideas around questioning dominating ideas and power structures. Other pedagogical practices that incorporate student voice includes inquiry-based learning. Inquiry based learning relies upon classroom student voice as the curiosity and drive of students and their choices for topic and direction of inquiry that makes this method powerful (Bhagat, 2018).

It is important to note here that despite concerns felt, at the time of writing there is a record rate of electoral enrolment for young voters (between the ages of 18-24) (Shou, 2019). While enrolment can be a response to specific political events, rather than a broader understanding or a positive attitude towards the democratic process, it is clear that within the Australian context, that youth voting participation is not an immediate concern. It should also be noted that voting participation within a compulsory system does not necessarily provide an accurate representation of true participation as defined by Hart (1992). Even within a consistently high level of enrolment, a 2017 Lowy institute Poll found 36% of Australians reporting that 'in some circumstances, a nondemocratic government is preferable' (Heggart & Flowers, 2019).

2.3 NEOLIBERAL STRUCTURES

Neoliberalism in recent years has become both, a dominant economic model, and also a guiding principal for practice and policy in a number of fields, including education. There has been criticism of the attempts by governing bodies and school leaders to transpose these principals onto education policy and practice. The effect of neoliberalism upon the expectations and practice of teachers has come under scrutiny from a number of authors (see Bessant, 2014a; Collins et al., 2019; Pavlidis & Baker, 2010), particularly when considering and understanding how it affects the way that *value* is determined. There has been criticism that neoliberal reforms in education has been specifically detrimental to student voice programs by placing pressure on programs to show quantifiable academic *value* for students (Pearce & Wood, 2019). Collins et al. (2019) argue that the nature of neoliberal reforms in education directly and detrimentally affect the autonomy and practice of teachers and, in turn, the democratic possibilities of the classroom.

High rates of school enrolment and completion across the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member states exemplifies the prevailing agreement throughout society that education is good for the individual as well as the broader society and the economy (Bessant, 2014a). Bessant (2014a) argues that through much of the history of public education, the focus has been dominated by a preoccupation with the economic maximisation potential of education. This preoccupation with quantifiable success and achievement is seen by Bessant (2014a) as the manifestation of a neoliberal and utilitarian approach to education that severely limits the autonomy and independence of students. This relationship with education as a service, seems to come in concert with a broader shift towards institutions and governments. Biesta (2006) argues that a fundamental shift has occurred in our relationship with government; where we once had a 'political' relationship it is now 'economic'. The progressive diminishing of the welfare state as we know it has seen citizens' relationship with the state change to 'consumers' that are looking for 'value for money' rather than citizens asking for the delivery of a public service (Biesta, 2006). While there are positive elements to parents and students being more active in demanding the delivery of quality education, the paradox may be that that this demand may undermine and prevent the potential of educators. The limitations imposed on the data used to qualify 'good' and 'bad' education may reflect a narrowing scope of the way to provide the best education for students. Elements like the democratic and civic knowledge gained through student voice

practice and democratic classroom engagement may be lost, as this does is difficult to easily quantify through standardised testing.

Evidence based approaches have seen a dependency on quantifiable performance markers that may be a convenient sample of data but may not provide real insight into learning or development outcomes for students. Examples like this would be attendance rates or university participation. Bessant argues that “On their own, the fact that large numbers of students are schooled, says nothing about the quality of the curriculum or what they are learning” Bessant (2014a, p. 142). Bessant (2014a) instead relates the structure of education to utilitarianism. Bessant (2014a) explains the effect of utilitarianism on education as prioritising the utility and economic value that can be gained from education. It is the product of a society that believes ‘education is valuable because it lifts skills and creates qualifications, jobs and boosts the economy’ (Bessant, 2014a, p. 141). Likewise, the rise in standardised testing and national curriculums can be identified as an example of a utilitarian attempt to create a quantifiable and uniform progress marker, that centralises power, and limits the autonomy and voice of students. An issue that with framing the problem and solution in utilitarian terms may be that student voice programs may be overlooked and understood as distractions from grades or university attainment. This is the case, despite the fact that links have been made between participation in student voice and a benefit to grades and increased tertiary entrance (Saha & Print, 2010), student voice can be seen as a distraction from study as an extra time commitment. An alternative to a neoliberal or utilitarian framework could be a focus on ‘capabilities’ as proposed by Nussbaum (2011) or Bessant (2014a).

A ‘Capability Approach’ assesses whether education provides students with the knowledge and skills to enjoy a fulfilled life, rather than complete predetermined tasks (Bessant, 2014a). Within the Australian Curriculum, capabilities are currently defined in a utilitarian manner, with concern to the ability of students’ competencies in certain areas. Bessant (2014a) however asserts that a capabilities approach should value education for its ‘intrinsic good rather than for its instrumental importance’ (2014a, p. 145). This shift would require a fundamental restructuring and reconceptualization of the purpose and goals of our education system. While this may not be practical or conceivable today, the writing of Bessant and others does provide a critical insight into the status quo of adopting a neo-liberal or utilitarian approach to education. A study by Bourke and Loveridge (2016) suggests that students

themselves see the value of learning in the personal and intrinsic knowledge that can be attained, rather than solely the ability to complete standardised tests competently. Within this Capability Approach to education there is an understanding that the freedoms and voice of young people need to be limited. One reasoning is that the choice made by young minds can impinge on their later choices as adults. Nussbaum's attitude towards student voice can be characterised as 'the younger the person, the more restricted their freedom ought to be' (Bessant, 2014a, p. 146). While Bessant is critical of this attitude, implicit within the Capabilities Approach to education is a measured pedagogical student voice agenda. Both Bessant and Nussbaum assert that education should provide students with an opportunity to make some decisions in the direction and scope of their learning, with limits and guidance from educators. Core to the understanding is that a value exists in the freedom of choice, and in learning, not just the economic benefits of education.

3. METHODOLOGY

This dissertation has used the existing literature surrounding student voice as the 'data' set to be analysed. The data was understood through the policy analysis method of Carrol Bacchi: What the problem is represented to be (WPR)? The findings of this analysis have then been used to better understand the case study of the YAT.

3.1 WPR APPROACH

The WPR method scrutinises what policies determine to be the 'change' necessary and how this implicitly represents what the 'problem' is (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). The method is constructed around the analysis of public policy, but the definition of 'policy' within this is broad and encompasses any document that is looking to steer the direction or scope of a governing body (Bacchi, 2012). Academic literature also sits within the chain of policy, in that it informs and is informed by government policy. This method does not attempt to scrutinise the intentional framing or 'manipulation' of issues in the documents. It instead attempts to 'understand policy better than the policy makers' (Bacchi, 2012, p. 21). The method's aim is to reveal the implied meaning and underlying views behind policy and the 'problem' implicit in the 'solution' proposed in the documents. Rather than simply reacting to or, solving problems, Bacchi asserts that policy play an active role in 'creating' problems (Bacchi, 2009). Documents that propose an alternate practice are, in turn, framing what the problem is by the nature of the change proposed.

Bacchi's method involves posing six key questions:

1. What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the presuppositions of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?
Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

(Bacchi, 2009)

Bacchi's method has been adapted to suit the purpose of this study. This study is not attempting to analyse or understand government or departmental policy so elements of the method will not be relevant for the purposes of this investigation. Rather, Bacchi's method will be used as an analytical tool to better understand the existing literature available and provide a critical view of how student voice is conceptualised within schools. While this literature is within the policy loop, it tends to be written with a different intent to the 'policy' intended for analysis by Bacchi. This method was devised with the intent of elucidating the construction and representation of the problem from presentation of a clear solution, or action from within the document. Some of the literature provided provides the inverse problem: a clear problem and an unclear solution. Because of this, the method used for analysis is an adaptation rather than a straight adoption. Bacchi's method was used as an adapted analytical tool for considering the 'representation' and 'silences' that might be present within the information. Bacchi also suggests that 'since all theories posit forms of explanation, they necessarily contain implicit problem representations that demand scrutiny' (Bacchi, 2009, p. xviii). The questions were used fluidly and selectively as an 'integrated analysis' rather than working through each question systematically for every study. The theoretical frameworks of power, neoliberalism and democracy were used to group related research and ideas, and it was within these frames that they were analysed. It is fair to say that the documents could also be analysed through different frames and are not limited to those chosen for the purposes of this study.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.2.1 SEARCHING FOR THE CORPUS

The corpus was searched using the University of Adelaide Library search function and Google Scholar. The process of finding appropriate literature used key word searches for academic journals. Key words used included 'student voice' OR 'student participation' OR 'youth voice' OR 'youth participation'. Also included search terms around 'democracy', 'education', 'student leadership', 'classroom voice' and 'critical pedagogy'. Articles chosen were those

that related to secondary or primary schools and involved research and analysis of student voice programs with a broad range of scopes including ideas of student politics and leadership, as well as classroom practice.

3.2.2 DATA RANGE

Literature has been taken without a definitive restriction on timeframe. Due to the changing nature of student voice programs, limiting the time frame is not inherently a way of ensuring accuracy in the data. There has not been a linear progression or consistency in an approach to student voice programs that would make recent studies more authoritative. The broad variance in commitment to student voice across different schools and jurisdictions mean that the data collected from studies over ten years can still provide relevant understanding to the effects and limitations of student voice.

Cook-Sather (2014) is key in highlighting the current limitations in student voice literature and understanding there is not clear definition of 'student voice' across the board. Because of this, the understanding of student voice is fractured into a number of different areas with different scopes and focuses. This includes student leadership programs as well as classroom pedagogical practice of different kinds. With the purpose of this study being how to better conceptualise student voice, a wide variety of interpretations and practices can be encompassed. For the purpose of this review, I have accepted student voice as a broad term defined as instances where students have been provided with influence and agency.

3.2.3 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this method are a low level of reliability due to the inherently subjective nature of the method. It is impossible to eliminate the subjective nature of the WPR approach as it requires an individual to interpret the answer to the analytical questions. The choice of theoretical frame assigned to each document will also influence the findings of the analysis. Because of these factors, there is no way to guarantee that this method repeated by another researcher will produce the same findings. No 'scientific' rigour can be attributed to the findings. There are, however, elements of subjectivity when attempting to draw conclusions from any social science data, so this should not discount or undermine the applicability of this method. Bacchi's method attempts to draw out the biases and flaws from within the data and

draw conclusions based on evidence within the text. The conclusions have evidence and validity, drawn from the source data. It is worth recognising however, that there may be alternative conclusions, 'problems' and representations that could be drawn from the same data set.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 UNDERSTANDING VOICE

An attention to, and promotion of, student voice has become widely popular since the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (1989). The modern student voice movement has its roots in John Dewey's *Democratic Education* (1916) and post-war related ideas like Critical Pedagogy. Early radical democratic projects were implemented at Epping House and at St-Gorge-in-the-east-secondary-school and were a rebuffing of the anti-democratic dogmatic education practices that were seen as facilitators dictatorships (Fielding, 2011). Fielding (2011) argues that the radical history of student voice needs to be reconsidered as an important element for a successful adoption of democratic education. Others however, suggest that the roots of democratic education extend beyond the recent years of radical tradition and that modern student voice ideals (particularly where adopted in the classroom) reflect the ideas of the enlightenment (Biesta, 2006). Despite conflicting ideals, there is a large body of evidence addressing the numerous variations in the way that student voice is expressed.

A comprehensive systematic review of student voice conducted by Mager and Nowak (2011) provides important insight into the findings from 32 (of 3102) studies that were found to be eligible. For the purposes of their study they classified the subject as 'student participation' rather than 'student voice', as a means of emphasising active participation as a required element to the studies reviewed. Mager and Nowak were reviewing studies that produced empirical data, with measured effects, concerning a broad range of what they described as 'student participation'. This encompassed student council membership as well as classroom decision making (Mager & Nowak, 2011). Through their study, they found that student leadership initiatives, such as student council membership, showed a positive impact in areas such as 'beneficial effects on life skills; self-esteem and social status; student–adult relationships; and facilities, rules and policies'(Mager & Nowak, 2011, p. 49). All types of student participation included in the study saw a positive impact on 'school ethos' (Mager & Nowak, 2011, p. 49). 'School ethos' as a concept for this study encompassed a number of things, including 'school engagement' and 'better student attendance' (Mager & Nowak, 2011, p. 47).

For the purposes of this dissertation, understanding the relationship between school 'ethos' or school engagement, and student voice is of particular concern. The performance review of NASSSA found, using data from the WEC study, that attitudes towards school ethos were a key issue across the network. Ensuring that the student council is accessible and listened to by the broader student body can help ensure that this improvement in ethos is felt beyond the cohort of students actively involved in participation (Keough, 2005). Keough found through access to forums and regular opportunities for students to meet with the student leadership group, even struggling students felt more attached to the school community and felt 'better about being part of the school community'(2005, p. 155). Fielding notes the importance of ensuring that student voice programs of all types (student politics, leadership or classroom) are constructed in a way that ensures that there is not only one 'type' of student being heard (Fielding, 2004). Class and social divisions were found to be barriers to being 'heard' by Fielding (2004). Forums, such as those discussed by Keough, may prove to be a way to help ensure that the social and academic benefits of student voice programs reach students who feel alienated from school and from power. Data shows that there is a decline in school engagement as students reach middle school (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). With this in mind, it is important to consider how student voice can be incorporated early in schooling, as an attempt to embed a sense of belonging and engagement within the school experience.

Studies at the primary level show a great deal of success can be had encouraging student participation during the early stages of education (see Chappell, 2012; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Quinn & Owen, 2016). Chappell reports a series of student led initiatives around areas like improving the environmental credentials of the school, and as much as 90 per cent of Grade 6 students nominating themselves for a role as a 'school leader' (member of the SRC) (Chappell, 2012). This compares with around 50 per cent reporting as running for student elections in secondary school (Saha & Print, 2009). Primary school may provide an opportunity to instil a practice of leadership and ownership of learning that can carry on through secondary schooling and assuage some of the disassociation and alienation that occurs during middle school (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). As in earlier studies, Mitra and Serriere found an increased attachment to the school and peers when students felt like their voices were heard and appreciated (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). Mitra and Serriere followed the process of students lobbying the district school board to amend their school lunches menu with the

view to catering to students that did not want to eat meat or dairy. The school in question had a positive attitude to student participation with a practice of student led assemblies providing a tangible and regular example of student leadership to the entire student body (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). Students were supported by staff to begin with but were encouraged and allowed to take a lead role in coordinating these events. Researchers emphasised that scaffolding and support of student leaders in creating the foundations for their leadership was an important element to the success of the program (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). It was also important however that, at an appropriate time, students were given the opportunity to lead the program. This gave a clear message to the students attending that their voices were respected and trusted by the adult staff (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). The result of this being that students involved within the lobbying process were not only those with gregarious personalities or high academic results. Students that were shy and reserved or, 'average' students also felt valued and empowered to contribute to the project (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). Ensuring that student voice programs are encouraging and accessible to a broad range of students, rather than exclusive, is an important factor that needs to be considered throughout the life of the program.

An area of interest raised by Mager and Nowak's review was the lack of data produced on any negative effects on students from student participation. Within this review, empirical data was also not found providing evidence for negative effects from tokenistic gestures of participation. Mager and Nowak are cautious in concluding that 'If students are not taken seriously and their participation has no impact on their lives, it will likely have no positive effects' (2011, p. 49). Quin and Owen note that '...student voice programs can quickly dwindle into tokenism if school leaders and teachers are not genuine and committed in their approach' (2016, p. 61). This suggests that tokenism is not something that only happens to overly neglectful or incompetent teachers but is the product of distraction and a lack of 'commitment'. This then creates a risk of 'non-participatory' student voice programs (see Hart, 1992) created through distraction and lack of commitment. A recent study by Mitra is more confident in asserting that 'promise of voice without actually being heard can lead to increased alienation and disconnection from schooling' (2018, p. 475). Other authors also agree that 'tokenism' is detrimental to student voice programs, suggesting that they could produce more harm than good (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016; Pearce & Wood, 2019). Correctly

understanding the possible negative effects, particularly tokenistic gestures, is clearly an area that needs more concentrated investigation, especially if the slide to tokenism is easy, as asserted by Quinn and Owen (2016). The importance of, and potential for student voice in the area of democratising education has been raised by a number of authors (Biesta, 2006; Bourke & Loveridge, 2018a; Chappell, 2012; Cooper & Anwaruddin, 2016; Hart, 1992; Keough, 2005; Mager & Nowak, 2011; Mitra, 2018; Mitra et al., 2014; Quinn & Owen, 2014) and looked at in the Australian context specifically by Saha and Print (2010).

4.2 DEMOCRATIC VOICE

A study by Saha and Print engages with the role of schools in fostering a democratic ethos within the school context, and the long-term influence that this has on voting and participation practices in later life. Saha and Print found that an active involvement in student politics is a good predictor for later political engagement (2010). Similar to the assertions by Biesta (2006), this study found that active participation proves to be a major contributing factor in teaching democracy. Empirical evidence was found linking students voting or running in student elections and a positive effect on attitudes and preparedness for voting (Saha & Print, 2010). This influence also extends to a support for, and willingness to participate in acts like peaceful protests (Saha & Print, 2010). The Youth Electoral Survey (conducted by Saha and Print for the Australian Electoral Commission) found that 81.2 per cent of students had voted in student elections, and 54.1 per cent had run for office (Saha & Print, 2009, p. 29). For students aged 17, student voting participation correlated more closely with the intention to vote as an adult, rather than actual electoral enrolment rates (Saha & Print, 2009). This research suggests that there is a strong association between a participation with politics at school and democratic participation as adults. Importantly, this study did take into account the influence of mandatory voting in Australia and the data collected recorded the attitudes of students, rather than just the raw data of enrolment or voting participation. Similar evidence has been found in the United States (with a voluntary voting system) that links participation in student government to an ongoing voting participation (Callahan, 2013, pp. 38 - 39). Experts within Australia have suggested that the voting age should be lowered to 16 (Petrova, 2019) and the issue has been proposed to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters ("Commonwealth electoral amendment (lowering voting age and increasing voter participation) bill 2018," 2018). While there may not be tangible evidence that the voting age

will change soon, with a legitimate discussion around the issue understanding how to instil an understanding and commitment to voting participation in students has become more crucial than ever.

The study by Saha and Print (2010) observes the role of student elections as a tool for teaching about, and through, democratic process. This study draws on data collected by Saha and Print in their youth electoral study (2009) this includes survey data of students, recording their enrolment rates and preparedness to vote. The study finds that there is a positive relationship between student engagement with voting and participating in school elections and a positive attitude and preparedness for voting (Saha & Print, 2010). The perceived problem is a youth disengagement with democratic practice, that is ostensibly negated, in part, through democratic participation during school. There are suppositions made through the use of this data as students may feel positive towards voting and increasingly prepared to vote, but this may not translate to actual participation once leaving school. The discursive effects of focusing solely on the democratic education attained through student politics, the curriculum gap in Australia is overlooked. At the time of the study there were no courses in politics available at the senior level in NSW and no mandatory civics taught at younger year levels. While there may be a positive reaction and understanding of voting in response to an involvement with student politics, there is not any evidence to suggest that this prepares students for the realities of party politics in Australia. The empirical evidence of the study shows that students that participate in student elections, by either running for office or voting, are more likely to be prepared to vote and have knowledge of Australia's political system. The framing of this however does not take into account the possibility that this may be a correlation, rather than a causation. It is possible that through framing the solution through a lens of democratic participation in the style of Biesta (2006), a potential link is not addressed. It is also possible that a lack of knowledge in voting is preventing students from engaging with the voting opportunities during school, rather than a lack of participation inhibiting knowledge. This would suggest that the solution lies in curriculum. This does not negate the potential for democratic participation, instead it highlights the need for effective scaffolding in the form of curriculum to ensure that the basic knowledge is available to all students.

Mitra and Serriere (2012) engage with civic participation in 'elementary' school students in the United States. While the focus of this study is on students in Australian high school years, studies on primary school age students is still useful, especially with the adoption of year 7 into secondary school in South Australia. Mitra and Serriere (2012) problematise the lack of data and attention focused on the civic education of elementary school students and illuminates the 'potential benefits' of student voice activities at the younger years (p.768). The study conducts qualitative research into a student led civic engagement. The developmental differences of primary and secondary school students poses a potential 'silence' that is not adequately addressed through this study. Quinn and Owen (2014) find some issues with younger students not being prepared for elements of student voice. Voting patterns can be divided into popularity factions, undermining positive outcomes with dissatisfaction and resentment. Quinn and Owen (2016) found evidence of students alienated and silenced by personal and social issues within their program, though this was not reported by Mitra and Serriere (2012). It is unclear as to whether instances of this occurring were overlooked or did not occur, though understanding how to prevent this through scaffolding should constitute an important area of understanding to build upon. Disaffection with the school as an institution, and with engagement tends to shift significantly as students move into the middle years. Finding a way to incorporate elements of voice into the younger year levels could assist in instilling a sense of 'civic efficacy' or 'belief in one's ability to make a difference' (Mitra & Serriere, 2012, p. 748). The findings through analysis of these papers shows the represented 'problem' of disengagement and apathy towards the civic and democratic participation. This anxiety is not parochial or freshly formed; the international papers show that concerns about the health of democracy, and education's role in supporting it, are widespread and long reaching (Cammaerts, 2016; Marsh, 2007). There may be a number of ways to address this concern, such as through modifications to the national curriculum, and the promotion of politics (potentially as an alternative to history) at the senior level of schooling. This research does show the potential for student voice to play a vital role in influencing student attitudes towards voting and civic participation.

4.3 PEDAGOGICAL VOICE

Just as leadership roles for students are important for creating a sense of ownership and participation in the institution of the school body for students, student voice in the classroom can provide students with ownership of their learning. Student voice in the classroom is a more immediate and embedded form of the concept and while it does not face institutional or bureaucratic barriers in the same way that formalised student governance might, it still requires attention and reform. Bourke and Loveridge argue the importance of student voice as a classroom tool, arguing that ‘student voice, when used effectively, inherently becomes a pedagogical tool for effective teaching, assessment and social practices in the classroom’ (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018a, p. 146). Student voice in the classroom means incorporating engaging pedagogical practices like inquiry-based learning, that harnesses student’s intrinsic curiosity and encourages them to direct their own learning. It also involves encouraging and providing the opportunity for students to voice their opinion and understanding of the curriculum and course structure. Bourke and Loveridge’s study (2018a) into student responses to the introduction to the National Standards in New Zealand provided an unexpected insight into the student’s understanding of learning. While investigating the immediate responses to the introduction to nation-wide standardised testing and the assessment process involved, students reframed their answers to focus on what they saw as the ‘point’ of learning (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018a).

A subsequent study into how teachers interpreted the initial findings of this study reveal barriers to how teachers understand and are able to act on student voice feedback when it is received. Students were found to more readily express an interest in learning as a tool for social and economic mobility, rather than seeing the value defined by academic results. The standardised curriculum was understood only superficially by students¹ and the results that reflected their attainment of key competencies were seen as secondary to a broader appreciation of learning as a path to employment and adulthood. The focus of these responses, when reviewed by teachers, were reoriented back towards the national curriculum and to the ‘key competencies’ defined through it (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016).

¹ The study was conducted during the first year that the national curriculum had been introduced to New Zealand.

What this highlighted was an evident issue in the way that teachers would interpret and understand student voice data. A predetermined bias skewed the teachers' interpretation of data, undermining the potential for change that it presented. Bourke and Loveridge's findings prompted them to assert that access to student voice is 'just a starting point' as often it is only 'powerful' when it adheres with the existing ideas and practice of teachers and governing bodies (2018b, p. 8). Bourke and Loveridge recommended that student voice training be a part of professional development for teachers to make sure that classroom feedback and voice is understood and acted upon (2016). Elements of both neoliberalism and power are useful frames through which to understand this study. Neoliberal elements contribute both to the 'consumer', value-oriented interpretation of education as understood by students and also in the 'value' orientation of teachers' interpretation of data. As well as valuing learning as a way of developing ideas and knowledge, students clearly saw education through an economic lens. When teachers interpreted this data, they understood the findings through their own 'value lens' in the form of the national curriculum that they were implementing. In the case of the teachers' interpretation of data, this meant (in the view of the researchers) that the potential of the data was wasted as a result of the distortion caused by the value structure that dictated the success or failure of both students and teachers: the national curriculum. This doesn't suggest that there is not value in a national standard of education or committing to achieving competencies in these areas. It does however highlight potential for student voice to be undermined or misunderstood by defining success in education through a 'value' lens. Power structure comes to play in what Robinson and Taylor would define as a 'hidden' power dynamic (2013). What the document does not sufficiently address, is the power relationship between teachers and their employers, (i.e. the government department overseeing the implementation of the national curriculum). Foucault's notion of power as non-linear, complex and universal creates a more nuanced understanding of the construction of power in this instance. Data recontextualised by teachers to fit the curriculum narrative does create a miscommunication of the student voice, but this also needs to be understood through the context of power being imposed on teachers to create visible results.

Studies such as Collins et al. (2019) highlight the importance of schools adopting the principles of student voice into the ethos and practice of the school, rather than just a small element of it. While student leadership opportunities can be powerful, this element of student voice only

represents a small element of student voice (Mitra & Gross, 2009). While it may be a commendable aim for schools to have inclusive and powerful leadership opportunities, the dedication required from both staff and students for these programs to be successful often proves too great. As the earlier literature has shown (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016; Mitra, 2018; Pearce & Wood, 2019), student leadership can be plagued by tokenism and inactivity. The lived effects of a discursive focus on voice through leadership programs may have silenced the benefit of classroom voice. In a review of student voice literature, Robertson (2017) found evidence to show the benefits of classroom level engagement with students as a way of creating democratic classrooms and empowered learners. Providing students with voice at the classroom level, and an ownership of their learning, is beneficial for motivation, engagement and academic achievement (Robertson, 2017; Robinson & Taylor, 2013). Examples of classroom voice are presented on the Australian Curriculum SA website, in which schools actively sought feedback from 'randomised' groups of students which could then be used to create 'visible' changes to teaching practice (Teaching and Learning in South Australia, 2015). Making sure that these changes are visible helps to reinforce that the student's options are valued and their influence tangible. Both academic and perception data in response to these changes showed benefits to the learning of these students (Teaching and Learning in South Australia, 2015). This goes on to also describe a student teacher partnership where students and teachers would work together with a teacher proposing curriculum, and provide suggestions for changes, prior to implementation (Teaching and Learning in South Australia, 2015). Data collected by Davison, Sinnema, Taylor, and Mitchell (2016) into student-teacher partnerships showed a positive effect on both the students and teachers. Within this study, students engaged with classroom practice that went beyond reflexive concepts like surveys, such as enquiry based learning and inclusive class discussion (Robertson, 2017). These provided students with greater ownership of learning throughout the process, learning from and teaching each other. Students appreciated the opportunity to rise to more consultative roles in the classroom and the data showed positive results for both the students and the teachers involved (Davison et al., 2016).

The democratic classroom then, does not simply exist as feedback or guidance in curriculum from students, but also manifests itself as engaging and inventive classroom practice that allow students to express their personality through the classroom. As well as encouraging

collaborative experiences in the classroom and promoting democratic ideas, student voice can be as simple as providing the opportunity for students to voice their identity. In a study on classroom voice, Philip Bernhardt (2009) found students held their 'life stories' and world views important expressions of themselves that had a right to be expressed. Once student asserted "I think it's important because you gotta let people know who you are and where you stand," another, "my personal history is what I am all about; nobody can take that away from me," (2009, p. 63). These views show that 'voice' can be about more than survey responses; it can be about an expression of self. An example of this is in Rector-Aranda and Raider-Roth (2015) paper on student agency in an online classroom simulation. Through this scenario, students took part in the Jewish Court of All Time (JCAT) where they assumed the role of historical and literary figures from around the world to take place in an online courtroom simulation. The simulation involved an online courtroom scenario, relating to significant events relating to either Jewish history or current events. Significant classroom work was required, to provide students with a strong understanding of the context of the event and the background of their character. The researchers found that students felt compelled to not only represent the voice of their character, but also include their own personality and views into the simulation (Rector-Aranda & Raider-Roth, 2015). Students felt emboldened and appreciated in the democratic space created through the forum. The research suggests that because students were able to make a personal connection with the content, the task became intrinsically motivating for them (Rector-Aranda & Raider-Roth, 2015). Students were willing to commit extra time to preparation and contribution to the forums.

Another study that addresses this sense of self in student voice is Bernhardt (2009) reflexive study of an autobiographical task. Many students responded very positively to the opportunity to voice their identity and 'story' within the context of a classroom (Bernhardt, 2009). The alienation that appears to occur to students during middle school (Mitra & Serriere, 2012) may have some correlation to a heightened sense of self and world view at this age. As much as a 'political' expression seems to reduce this sense of alienation (Heggart & Flowers, 2019), it may also be that having the opportunity to assert their 'self' into schoolwork and make that 'self' heard could help. Through introducing Freirean concepts of pedagogy into a prison classroom, Kilgore (2011) was able to build a

respectful and productive teaching environment. Kilgore was teaching an adult cohort in a diverse and volatile environment. Unlike the classes discussed earlier, the students were not required to attend and had incentive not to attend, as this would allow them to work in the prison factory and earn money. Other research into the non-compulsory education sector shows that this is an important area for student voice, as mutual respect becomes crucial for success (Samways & Seal, 2011). By negotiating the class structure, curriculum and assessment practice with his students, in an otherwise highly regulated and inherently restrictive environment, Kilgore was able to build a successful and respectful learning environment (2011). Based on my own experience, teaching in a youth detention facility, I would assert that classroom voice was paramount to success with students and extended research into how to best facilitate voice in restrictive learning environments could be beneficial.

4.4 STUDENT VOICE AND POWER

The opportunity for voice is crucial for all students, but, it becomes far more powerful and influential when awarded to students that may find their voices marginalised in broader society. Pavlidis and Baker (2010) have critiqued the limits of some student voice programs, in their lack of breadth and diversity when collecting voice data. There is understandably an issue, especially at the higher levels of voice (i.e. student leadership), in attracting and providing for a limited 'elite'. Students that are marginalised as a result of their race or socio-economic status, are less likely to be engaged in student voice, while having the most to gain (Callahan, 2013). Walsh, Black, Zyngier, and Fernandes (2018) conducted a study into an Indigenous leadership program which saw an extreme shift in attitudes towards leadership and connection to community. The study used data from an evaluation of the Richmond Emerging Aboriginal Leadership (REAL) Program, which is a Victorian program supporting emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to build skills which will help them become active contributors to their communities. The program consists of a series of intensives, over four days during the school holidays. This operates in collaboration with, but outside of school, though students are nominated to participate by their teachers or schools (Walsh et al., 2018). Through focus groups conducted with 54 REAL and 16 non-REAL students, the data collected was compared to reflect the impact of participation in the REAL program. Overwhelming evidence was found to show an increased understanding of, and belief

participants leadership skills. Around 90% of real participants responded in the top two positive categories for questions on their understanding of leadership or confidence in their abilities as leaders (Walsh et al., 2018). This compares to around 50% for non-REAL participants (Walsh et al., 2018). The study indicates that without support, indigenous students do not feel capable or confident in their leadership understanding or abilities. The students chosen for this program were not 'at risk' or chosen based on 'deficit', it is instead an attempt to support students with the most potential (Walsh et al., 2018). The assumption within this data is that if the same criteria (most potential) were applied to non-indigenous students (and non-REAL participants), their responses to leadership would be more positive. Silenced within this problematisation is the broader role of supporting indigenous adults in leadership positions. These are related practices and not mutually exclusive, though the promotion of youth leadership without a supported adult leadership program is problematic. There is also not a long-term assessment of attitude shift in these students. While the short-term improvement is powerful, if this was not then supported, there may not have been the opportunity for change. Within the program, there does not exist any embedded questioning or challenging of power and dominance structures, but relies on a self-improvement, and individualistic model of leadership. There is not the 'collective and inclusive' element identified as fundamental to the success of student voice by (Pearce & Wood, 2019).

A systematic review by Pearce and Wood (2019) synthesised findings based on a comprehensive review of student voice data, to create a framework for guiding student voice work based on four core and interrelated themes. The authors identified the lack of consistent framework through which student voice is devised and understood as a key problem. The themes of voice were *Dialogic*, *Intergenerational*, *Collective and Inclusive* and *Transgressive* (Pearce & Wood, 2019). These themes were elements identified by the others as crucial to the success of student voice work, if it is to be more than a tokenistic gesture. *Dialogic* – refers to the need for ideas to be collaboratively created through a dialogue between learners and teachers, rather than a 'banking' model of education described by Freire (1972) (Pearce & Wood, 2019). *Intergeneration* – this theme covers literature that highlights the importance of adult's involvement supporting and scaffolding student voice. Pearce and wood assert that 'considered and thoughtful involvement of adults is crucial to the success of student voice work, particularly with very young people' (2019, p. 120), this is

a sentiment echoed by others (see Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Quinn & Owen, 2014). The theme *Collective and Inclusive* promotes the importance of recognising the factors that might inhibit students from being heard and creating practice that ensures true collectivism and representation. Voices that are ignored or 'hard to be heard' may not prevent 'success' of a project in a pragmatic sense, but it will limit the potential. In a project that is attempting to redress imbalance in power relationships, it is also crucial that this sentiment is extended throughout the power relationships of the school (Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Quinn & Owen, 2014). Voices that are suppressed through structural or social barriers existing within the framework of a student voice program present an extant and serious impedance on student voice practice (Pavlidis & Baker, 2010). The authors also draw on data that critiques voice programs and curriculum that emphasises an individualistic ideal. The authors here argue that these practices do not represent the emancipatory potential of student voice, but can reinforce and strengthen existing power structures amongst students (Pearce & Wood, 2019). At its worst, student voice represents not reformative or democratic potential, but the ability to create self-reliant and efficient neoliberal citizens and a part in in securing a more effective and efficient form of governing' (Pearce & Wood, 2019, p. 122). *Transgressive* – the authors assert that student voice can and does have the ability to shift power relations and make changes within both the school community and more broadly. Where student voice fails to do this this is due to a program's 'lack the will, ambition or impetus to achieve transformation' (Pearce & Wood, 2019, p. 123). Through these four themes, the authors outline a potential framework for assessing how student voice can be successful, and a diagnostics tool for determining potential issues with existing programs. This work asserts the importance of the radical tradition of student voice and promotes an emancipatory style of voice. The problem is formed by a high expectation and belief in the potential of student voice. The key contributor to this problem, as represented by the authors, is the belief the that the neoliberal performance expectations imposed on teachers. Through curriculum demands, the potential of student voice is fundamentally undermined. The author problematises the ideological adherence to this in the face of its failure.

An article written by Bessant (2014a), explores the potential and also the limitations of the Capabilities Approach for shifting the focus of educational success away from utility and value. Bessant critiques dominant, neoliberal framework of education, for its promotion of

utility and 'value' based education. The problem represented in this way highlights the issue of neoliberalism as a practice, in that it demands production of value, even if the classification of that value is flawed. This process then limits the ability to produce value through means outside of its restrictive defined path. Bessant frames the problem as a product of value oriented, utilitarian education operating within the overarching economic framework of neoliberalism. Value is determined through a curriculum-oriented lens with university entrance as a key criterion of success. The Capabilities Approach diverges from a dominant economic model that 'measures the real value of a set of options by the best use that can be made of them. Options are freedoms, and freedom has intrinsic value' (Nussbaum, 2011). When arguing for a Capabilities Approach to education policy, it is worth acknowledging that this is a radical divergence from the economic and social reality that adults face. Elements of utilitarianism are built into the social fabric of our legal system and proposing, or striving for, a rejection of this for students ignores the reality of the restrictions imposed throughout life. Nussbaum's vision of the Capabilities Approach argues for governments restricting choice only in extreme circumstances (Nussbaum, 2011). Bessant promotes the Capabilities Approach as a remedy for education policy, but also criticises its progenitors, Nussbaum and Sen, for the limits they set on the autonomy of children. While the Capabilities Approach goes some way towards redressing the restrictions on student choice, Bessant ultimately finds that it falls short of its potential by restricting the choices made available to children (students) (2014a). Short of calling for 'unfettered' freedom of choice for students, Bessant's adaption of the Capabilities Approach calls for educators to mediate and assist students in their choices (Bessant, 2014a). This calls for an almost individualised consultative process between students and teachers and a fundamental shift in the role of teachers. Bessant then is not forming an evidence-based recommendation, but a theoretical proposal in the way that we conceive of students and young people.

5. SYNTHESIS/DISCUSSION

5.1 STUDENT VOICE

Access is key to the success and the legitimacy of student voice programs. Access is also intrinsically linked to the understanding of power. The complex relationships of power between students, teachers, peers, and employers all effect the access that student have to student voice. The benefits of student voice proposed throughout the literature are undermined if they are not available to all students. These papers show the interplay of power structures and the limitations that this can impose on student voice, either through an exclusion of voice, or through a restriction of autonomy and power awarded to a voice program. They show that power is complicated and non-linear, replicating the description offered by Foucault. Teacher-student dynamics form one element, but each relationship is affected by power (teacher-employer, teacher-curriculum, student peer relations, marginalised-dominant, etc.). Attempting to assess the elements of power influencing the dynamics of a program are crucial to determining how to achieve the best from the program. There is also a lack of attention in the literature of how students from different socio-economic backgrounds experience or participate in student voice.

Without an adequate proposal of how choice can be incorporated into the economic reality that students face, student voice could become what Pearce and Wood might refer to as a 'middle-class project' (2019, p. 122). There remains a break between the admirable goals of students being awarded choice in their learning, and the possibility that students may need imposed structure, albeit 'paternalistic'. Economic mobility is perceived as a core benefit of formal education by students and the curriculum was understood through this frame; as a path to employment (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016). Neoliberalism affects not only the school curriculum, but the global economic model that it sits within. Bessant has acknowledged the 'seemingly never-ending exercise of neoliberalism extending its reach as a mode of government' also affects the management of universities (Bessant, 2014b, p. 172). Given that

employment and university entrance are subject to the dominant framework of neoliberalism, extreme divergences away from this reality may be 'emancipatory' but impractical. If student voice programs become too preoccupied with the radical tradition that writers like Fielding (2011) call for, there is the risk that only students and schools with an economic safety net will feel comfortable engaging them.

For 'freedom of choice' to be truly emancipatory, it needs to acknowledge barriers that could entrench social structure, rather than disrupt it. The extreme adaptation of the Capabilities Approach argued for by Bessant (2014a) may need to take into account the different experiences of students and how that would affect 'choice'. An element of cultural capital may be required for students to be able to make the requisite decisions that will empower them with the chance of social mobility. For students from middle class backgrounds, with parents that have been to university, they will have a path to follow or reject, with the likelihood of a safety net to fall back on. Working class students, or students from low socio-economic situations, may require a more structured schooling experience, especially at younger year levels, to provide them with the options of choice later (Bessant, 2014a). Silenced within the problematisation of lack of choice disrupting the 'emancipation' and 'freedom' of students is the possibility that this may not benefit all students equally. The choices made by different students, and their aims, may differ based on social status and class. Research would be needed to understand if these limitations exist, and if so, how to best scaffold students through their choices to empower them. Ultimately Bessant concludes that the guidance and 'good judgement' of teachers is key in determining how best to provide choice, and find a middle ground between paternalism and libertarianism (Bessant, 2014a).

5.2 THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Power relationships, democracy and neoliberalism are intrinsically tied to the conceptualisation of student voice. Throughout the literature presented, these theoretical concepts provide useful lenses through which key understandings can be gained. While each concept can be used to understand voice individually, they are also each tied and interrelated. For example, democratic practice and possibility in the classroom is influenced by the dominating power structures and the neoliberal pressures that are created through it.

Exploring power provides insight into the barriers to effective reception of student voice as, explored by authors such as Bourke and Loveridge (2016). Considering voice through the prism of power also highlights the importance of student voice as an emancipatory force, that can help to resist and disrupt existing power structures, evidenced through the work of Walsh et al. (2018). In considering the conceptualisation of student voice, the literature suggests that power considerations need to be explicitly addressed. The complexity of power, as a non-linear and ever-present element, as suggested by Foucault (2008) ultimately means that there is no clear resolution, or a single problem represented through power. Understanding the voice of students through a post-colonial frame, as suggested by Fielding (2004) does provide a potential starting point. While the nature of students' oppressions will vary, and oppressions within peer-to-peer student relations will exist, acknowledging a level of 'oppression' in the student existence does provide a basic operating model to work from. Students, largely, experience a mandated regime through education that forces them to modify their time management, clothing and movements. Student voice as a path to redressing this 'oppression' requires acknowledging this and actively conceiving of student voice as a mandated right, rather than a concession.

Where student voice exists, democracy should be present. While the definition, appearance and extent of democratic representation may vary, the core concept exists within the act of providing voice and acting on this. Democracy is most visible through student elections and leadership programs though classroom voice is just as crucial for creating a democratic education (Collins et al., 2019). To create a participatory democracy and to foster democratic engagement, Biesta (2006) argues that teaching *through* democratic practice is key. Conceptualising student voice as a crucial element to fostering a support of democratic principles and practice should be fundamental.

Neoliberalism influences both the power structures described above, and the democratic practices of schools through the utilitarian success model that it imposes on practice. Understanding neoliberalism as a conceptual pressure on student voice is then important. The benefits of democratic practice may be lost through the neoliberal value markers that dictate and guide school policy and practice. The concept of student voice needs to be understood as a potentially powerful contributor to 'school ethos', wellbeing, democratic literacy, and academic achievement (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018b; Davidson & Major, 2014;

Mager & Nowak, 2011). It needs to be acknowledged that the neoliberal value structure, dominant through school governance structures may obscure these benefits, with the exception of academic achievement (Bessant, 2014a). The goals of the market style approach to education may be aimed at producing the most evidenced based 'value', from the resources made available. It is possible that the narrow view of 'value' that is produced through this model is silencing and undermining the potential benefits that can be seen through voice programs. In conceptualising and committing to student voice, educators may not need to overhaul the dominant governance structures that dictate practice, but they do need to be acknowledged. Through recognition of the lived effects produced through these, it is possible that voice programs and democratic classroom practice can be better understood and, in turn, better supported.

5.3 NASSSA AND YAT

When assessing the findings of the NASSSA performance review, it can be seen that the modes for assessing success are defined through a value framework informed by a neoliberal model. The data focus is largely concerned with quantifiable results in the form of NAPLAN and SACE. Student engagement data (most closely associated with student voice (Mager & Nowak, 2011) is determined only through attendance. While the areas of concern raised through the performance review, correlate positively with student voice programs, the focus of the data obscures any potential benefit that could have been attained from the YAT.

When considering the case study of the YAT, the findings of this research raise a number of questions. To determine the suitability and validity of student voice programs, frameworks such as those proposed by Pearce and Wood (2019) and Hart (1992) should be applied. There is also an audit available through the Australian Curriculum SA website. While the annual report shows evidence of Hart's Ladder being used by students to assess the program, further information is needed to know how representative the program was. Interviews with non-participant students would provide some further insight into how accessible the program was, and what kind of voices were heard and what were silenced. As the YAT is a representative and leadership position, encouraging the broader student body to nominate and elect members could be a potential change.

For this program to realise its potential, there would need to be an integration between the YAT and the partner schools. This means responding to the student feedback and encouraging SRC collaboration and support of YAT projects. It would also mean allowing democratic principles in the classroom, as well as for leadership roles. For the conceptual interschool leadership programs like the YAT to work well, there needs to be a whole of school commitment to recognising the importance of students' voices and opinions.

A key issue raised by the schools, and by students was finding the time to be able to commit to the YAT. While this research has found issues with the dominance and reliance on neoliberal value structures as a way of measuring success of students and schools, this is a reality that students face. Students and teachers across year levels have extreme time pressures applied, but the most extreme examples of this are at the senior levels. The findings of this project suggest that students in primary school are capable of meaningful achievements through student voice programs (Fielding, 2012; Quinn & Owen, 2014). With this in mind, there is no reason that the core leadership positions in student voice should not be given to students in middle school. While the YAT is not exclusive to the senior year levels, there may be a reliance on these students to steer the group. Traditionally these are roles appointed to senior students, and the time commitments were an issue that contributed to the cessation of the program. With school ethos as a core effect of student voice, (Heggart & Flowers, 2019; Keough, 2005; Mager & Nowak, 2011) it could be powerful to provide leadership opportunities to the cohort of students most likely to experience disengagement. There is the potential that shifting the focus of the YAT to the middle school years could show benefits to the program without the need for any radical disruption.

6. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis applied using the WPR approach, it is clear that there is a weight of evidence to support better implementation and expansion of student voice programs. It is also clear that student voice cannot be limited to student governance, which by its nature, only directly affects a small subsection of students. 'Voice' needs to be considered an integral part of pedagogical practice, at all levels. Student feedback needs to be considered and acted upon, assessment should (where appropriate) allow for personal expression of students' views and understanding, while scaffolding and supporting growth. As teachers and policy makers, our conceptualisation of student voice needs to shift from a tokenistic afterthought, to the fundamental right that it is. Programs like the YAT hold potential for growth and development in the students engaged within it, and larger programs such as VIC SRC show the potential for coordinated, multi school governance programs. The findings show that well scaffolded and supported civil participation, facilitated through a program like the YAT, can benefit the students involved and the broader community. Greater ties to the community, better attachment and positive association with voting and civil participation are all potential benefits from participation. Areas that may need to be addressed include how the broader school communities of NASSSA related to or interacted with the YAT. Further investigation would be required to ascertain how students that were not directly involved in either the SRC or the YAT at their school felt about student voice programs like these. Student voice needs to ensure broad inclusivity and availability to be considered legitimate and to achieve its potential. It is also important that flagship leadership programs do not operate in a vacuum and that voice is awarded throughout the education chain. For a pedagogical and governance topic that has international attention and United Nations recognition, there a serious lack of direction or guidance from the Department for Education. The extent of the attention provided on the DfE website is a brief explanation of how student voice, in the form of SRC, that can be incorporated into the governing council of schools (see Department for Education, 2016). The website does clarify 'having a student as a member of council is optional'(Department for Education, 2016). Of the benefits to the students, there is only a superficial mention of enhancing leadership skills in students and there is no attempt to link or correlate student engagement with a robust and strong student voice initiative. Links to further information are directed to the VIC SRC website which promotes an extensive

interschool network of SRCs that operate across the state. While ultimately the role of designing and implementing student voice falls to the individual schools and the site leaders, I would argue that it is crucial that there are clear signals from governing bodies (state and federal departments) that student voice is valued. Site leaders and teachers are conditioned and compelled through a neoliberal framework to provide evidence of value, as justification for their practice. The findings of this research may not justify a modification of how this value is determined, but they do suggest an adjustment of *what* is valued. A benefit to grades is an aspect of student voice (Robertson, 2017), but so is an attachment to community (Walsh et al., 2018), an increased sense of civic and political responsibility (Cammaerts, 2016; Cooper & Anwaruddin, 2016; Saha & Print, 2010) and an increased attachment and engagement with schoolwork (Rector-Aranda & Raider-Roth, 2015). Different forms of student voice, will affect the student cohort in different ways, with the exception of 'school ethos' which is evidenced to be benefited by *all* forms of student voice (Mager & Nowak, 2011). The disparity of effect and the diversity of voice mean that value may not be clearly demonstrated through the constrains of NAPLAN or end of year exams alone. To reflect the true benefits of education, value needs to be reflected through more than this narrow grades-based framework.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

While there is a large body of research on the subject of student voice, the breadth of the topic means that there remain gaps in the literature that require further investigation. There remain gaps in any long-term data, relating to student voice, following a shift from primary to middle school and the alienation and disassociation that occurs during this period. Area schools could provide the opportunity for researchers to analyse data of students throughout their entire schooling (reception to year 12). Comparing the experience of students with active and consistent student voice programs beginning in primary school and extending through to the senior years and assessing whether this makes a difference to their attachment to the school. Further research into the voting habits and attitudes could also provide interesting results.

A better understanding of the social and interpersonal politics that exist within school politics and student voice programs could also be helpful for determining the best way to facilitate student voting. At the primary school level, Quinn and Owen (2016) found evidence that this was a detrimental product of class democracy. Understanding how class, social status or race exclude or affect students at senior levels could provide insight into ways to adjust existing programs to make them more equitable. While the benefits of student voice have been extensively covered, there is limited information on possible negative effects (Mager & Nowak, 2011). There appears to be a sizable gap in any literature or studies conducted with the purpose of investigating negative effects from student voice. Students that feel disaffected or alienated by the process may be lost in this gap.

The 'digital revolution' is an element that has not been addressed extensively in the literature found. The case study for classroom voice conducted by Rector-Aranda and Raider-Roth (2015) shows that an integration of digital literacy into voice can be beneficial. There may be room for exploring student's relationship with technology to understand how this might be affecting or enabling voice. A reported issue that the YAT faced was the inability for students across the school network to stay connected. Digital engagement has been engaged with widely in a number of pedagogical areas, so understanding how to implement and incorporate this into student voice programs would be a valuable undertaking.

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