

Introduction

Jerusha Conner, Rille Raaper, Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela, Launa Gauthier

The term ‘student voice’ has become associated with different meanings in education. For rhetoric and composition professors, it may refer to adopting a strong persona and tone in written work. For other instructors, it may be synonymous with students’ participation in class activities and discussion. Among scholars, there are those who equate student voice with students’ perspectives on their experiences as students. When these scholars solicit students’ accounts, whether through surveys, focus groups, or interviews, they will say they have captured student voice. Other scholars, however, use the term ‘student voice’ to signify students’ active involvement in or efforts to influence educational decision making at the classroom, programme, institution or systems level. In this last formulation, student voice generally speaks to issues of pedagogy, curriculum or assessment; institutional policy or decision-making processes; or state or national education policy. Mindful of these varied understandings of student voice, we encouraged the authors in this handbook to engage with the student voice literature, but we did not prescribe one standard definition of the term for them to use. As a result, the authors in this collection put forward different conceptualizations of student voice, some of which position students as data sources and others of which position them as policy actors, actively shaping the educational environment for themselves and their peers.

Indeed, one aim of this handbook is to illustrate various forms of student voice, including student activism, student representation and governance, and pedagogical partnership. While we do not mean to conflate activism, representation, and partnership, we do argue that each can be understood as a distinct form of student voice. Each involves students sharing their perspectives on their experiences as students in order to inform or effect change. Recognizing this throughline

but respecting the critical conceptual differences among these constructs, this book makes an important intervention in an otherwise fragmented literature by gathering a variety of approaches under a common ‘student voice in higher education’ banner, with the intent of mapping the student voice landscape and clarifying the intersections among various literatures as they speak to the concept of student voice.

A second aim of this handbook is to show how these and other forms of student voice are playing out within higher education today. While the literature on student voice in the secondary education context is well-established (albeit largely in western countries, with predominantly white populations), the terminology of student voice has been slower to catch on within higher education. Nonetheless, student voice *is* happening in higher education, just not always named as such. This handbook, therefore, helps to ensure that research is keeping pace with practice and appropriately reflecting developments on the ground. Several chapters in this handbook highlight new innovations in student voice practice or contribute new knowledge gained by listening to the voices of students who have not been as well represented in the existing literature.

A final aim we embraced as editors was to establish an international collection, which includes chapters from the global South as well as the global North, the East as well as the West. We were motivated not only by our awareness of the limitations of the existing student voice literature, which has mainly been based in western nations, but also by our understanding that higher education institutions (HEIs) are highly contextually specific, shaped as much by national policies, traditions and trajectories as by their local histories and cultural practices and those of the people who animate them. We, therefore, acknowledge the heterogeneity not only of student voice but also of HEIs. Just as students do not all always speak in unison, and just as researchers use different concepts to describe student participation in and influence on educational decision

making, so too, institutions vary enormously in their structures, aims, and missions. We sought, therefore, to bring a contextually-attuned, but geographically varied perspective to the study of student voice in higher education.

Editors' Positionality

Our approach to curating the 31 chapters in this handbook was shaped by our own positionality and experiences with student voice. As editors, we are each based in different parts of the world (Chile, England, Pakistan, and the USA), and we brought our knowledge of different higher education systems to bear.

We also brought different types of expertise to the topic of student voice. Jerusha Conner has spent the last 15 years studying student voice and student activism. She traces her passion for student voice to her own experience as a high school student, when she joined with two other classmates to petition their school's principal to allow them to teach themselves, rather than having to repeat a class they had previously taken because the school could not justify hiring a teacher for the three of them. This positive experience cemented for her the importance of students having a say in their education, shaping a core value that has guided her professionally, first as a high school teacher and now as a teacher-scholar-activist.

Rille Raaper is a scholar of higher education in the UK. She is above all interested in what it means to be a student in today's market-driven HEIs and what opportunities students have to exercise their voice and political agency. She takes a sociological approach to student voice, and often critiques the institutional structures that restrict student engagement and voice. Rille's background is in adult education, and she has always been interested in the politics of education and empowerment through education.

Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela has been working in the field of higher education studies for more than a decade. She has placed her work in a global context, drawing especially on social theory, critical sociologies and decolonial theories. She believes in social transformations, values of equity and social justice in higher education and beyond. Most of her research work reflects her interest in transforming the landscape of higher education through critical stances. Carolina's work has included research on the role of students in transforming higher education, especially in Latin America. She believes that both higher education systems and institutions have much to learn from students' voices.

Launa Gauthier has worked in higher education for the past 13 years and has dedicated her scholarship and teaching to the improvement of learning and teaching through faculty development and pedagogical partnerships. She found her passion for this work first in graduate school where, as a student, she always felt more like a colleague or collaborative partner to the faculty and peers with whom she worked. These relationships inspired her later on to lead and promote pedagogical partnerships - a deeply contextual, relational, and experiential way for faculty, staff and students to collaborate and learn together.

In addition to our mutual interest in and commitment to student voice, we editors also share several commonalities. While three of the editors identify as white women and one as a non-white woman, we highly value each other's unique lived experiences, including Guzman-Valenzuela's experiences of working in Chilean higher education, Gauthier's work in Pakistan and Raaper's educational experiences from post-Soviet Estonia. We are aware that our intersectional identities may have predisposed us to curate the Handbook in a certain way. However, we have made our best effort to include the greatest diversity of scholarship about students' voices from a wide range of geographical contexts, institutions, settings and

experiences. We also recognise that although the Handbook has been conceived as a comprehensive enterprise, there are still gaps (e.g. LGBTQ students' voices) and challenges that need to be addressed.

Book Structure and Chapter Overviews

The Handbook is organized into five interrelated sections, which can be read together or independently. The first section focuses on theorizing student voice. The second section addresses the voices of students with particular identities that uniquely shape their experiences in higher education. In section three, we turn to student activism as a form of student voice. Additionally, section three includes chapters focused on community engagement and digital media as means of facilitating the expression of student voice. Section 4 explores student representation and governance as a form of student voice, and Section 5 examines pedagogical partnership as yet another way for students to exercise their voice. In what follows, we offer a brief summary of each section.

The six chapters contained in **Section 1**, entitled 'Theorizing Student Voice,' delve into many of the central scholarly debates and historical developments surrounding the concept of student voice. The chapters work across complementary approaches and disciplines of knowledge (mainly but not only education, philosophy, and sociology). While the first four chapters offer a rich and comprehensive overview of the main theoretical dimensions, historical developments and challenges in addressing 'student voice', Chapter 5 offers a case study from Egypt, drawing on Foucault's theories, and Chapter 6 gives an account of a course in which both the teacher and their students reflect on pedagogical partnerships.

Section 2 is titled 'Hearing the Voices of Diverse Student Populations.' The six chapters in this section lift up the voices of particular students, whose social identities shape their

experiences in higher education in unique ways. These are students who, as Bialka puts it, ‘are so often positioned outside of the mainstream,’ and who therefore ‘offer novel ways of viewing issues and highlight barriers that students from privileged groups neither encounter nor consider.’ The first three chapters in this section center the voices of specific groups of students: students with disabilities (Chapter 7), survivors of gender-based violence and harassment perpetrated by faculty and staff (Chapter 8), and student athletes (Chapter 9). The next three chapters present innovative approaches to eliciting and learning from the voices of students who are marginalized on campus, including racial and ethnic minority students and first generation, indigenous students.

In **Section 3**, ‘Amplifying Student Voice through Activism, Community Service, and Digital Civic Engagement,’ we shift our examination from ‘whose student voice is expressed’ to ‘how it is voiced’ in higher education settings and systems. Here, we train our lens specifically on activism as a form of student voice and on digital technologies as a medium for student voice. While the first three chapters in Section 2 also discuss student activism, the authors of these chapters draw attention to the unique concerns of the students who are centered in their chapter: students with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence, and athletes respectively. The authors in Section 3, by contrast, focus more on the mechanics of specific student-led campaigns to effect change than on the factors that motivate students to engage in these efforts. While some of the activist campaigns profiled in Section 3 exemplify identity-based activism, most are connected to broader student movements or to local community organizing efforts. The final two chapters in this section explore digital media as a means of expressing student voice and facilitating students’ civic engagement.

Section 4, ‘Institutionalizing Student Voice through Governance Structures,’ is centered around student voice as it relates to formal university governance structures. The section starts with a chapter that situates student voice within a wide range of governance structures and introduces an innovative conceptualisation of student agency and impact (Chapter 18). The remaining chapters highlight opportunities that exist for students to develop and enact their voice through governing boards (Chapter 19), students’ unions (Chapter 20, Chapter 23), staff-student committees (Chapter 21) and quality assurance practices (Chapter 22, Chapter 24). Collectively, these chapters draw our attention to various factors and institutional structures that enable but also limit and restrict opportunities for students to develop and exercise their voice.

Section 5, ‘Elevating Student Voice through Pedagogical Partnerships,’ starts with a focus on how partnership is a form of professional development for students (Chapter 25) and how the core partnership value of *respect* is understood and enacted in a South Asian university (Chapter 26). Next, authors discuss the experiences of students and faculty/lecturers who collaborated to co-design and co-teach a student-led course for racialized, minoritized students (Chapter 27) and to improve the design and instruction of an undergraduate course (Chapter 28). The chapters that follow shed new light on student involvement in the implementation of an institution-wide curriculum redesign initiative (Chapter 29) and how the concept of recognition can be used as a lens that guides pedagogical partnership work (Chapter 30). Finally, this section ends with some powerful insights about how local context, meaning, and language matter when developing and launching a pedagogical partnership programme (Chapter 31). Together these chapters highlight the specific contextual challenges and supportive conditions that encourage student voice through pedagogical partnership to generate transformative change in learning and teaching in higher education.

Lingering Questions for the Field

This book sets out to explore student voice in contemporary higher education. Together with the contributors, we were interested in exploring what we mean by student voice, what forms it takes and how it differs across diverse student populations and national settings. By engaging with examples that range from activism to governance and pedagogical practice and that cross a variety of national settings, the book offers food for thought to anyone interested in researching student voice as well as supporting students in making their voices heard. It has been a thought-provoking and inspiring journey for us as editors and for our contributors, and we believe we have managed to create something unique. However, there are still a few lingering questions that are important to highlight and reflect upon. We conclude this introductory chapter by outlining some of these reflection points that we hope act as invitations to discussion and further research.

Student Voice as a Situational Concept

The chapters in this book all highlight how conditions for and understandings of student voice differ depending on national and institutional settings as well as students' social backgrounds and lived experiences. The examples we provided are limited and there are of course many more students and contexts to be explored, for example, raising questions about how student voice or particular student voice practices differ between the global North and the global South and across diverse student backgrounds and university hierarchies. When reflecting on student voice, it is important to question the extent to which enacting one's voice is available to all students and who is more able to find and exercise their voice. Above all, this edited collection cautions us from homogenizing the concept of student voice, but encourages us to treat it with respect, care and nuance.

Geographies, Space and Place in Student Voice Work

This book was centered around exploring different types and practices of student voice. While tracing and theorizing these practices, the book covered a variety of different geographical locations for student voice work as well as spaces and places within which both student voice is practised and related research conducted. While this book offers a glimpse of these diverse and stimulating settings, it is important to question and explore the extent to which student voice work is spatial and geographically diverse. There are different histories and traditions for students to exercise their voice in different countries, and there are different governance regimes that enable or restrict student voice. As editors, we believe it would be important to explore and deepen our engagement with the geographies of student voice work.

Methodological Diversity in Student Voice Research

This book has showcased and celebrated different ways to conduct research on student voice. These practices have ranged from desk-based literature reviews and policy analysis to using interactive methods and student-led research. They have also included in-depth case studies of particular institutional or national settings as well as cross-country comparisons. As we have shown with this book, all these methodological approaches are valid and serve a purpose in advancing scholarly understandings of student voice. This book is an invitation for scholars to be creative in their research on student voice, and it also raises an opportunity to be more reflective about how we do student voice research and the extent to which there are methods and approaches that suit best for working with certain student groups or exploring certain types of student voice practices.

Students as Authors and Co-authors

With this book, we aimed to involve as many different types of authors as possible, including a number of chapters that have been authored or co-authored by students. Student contributions in this book have been invaluable, enabling the book not only to center student voice but also to enhance and empower the actual student engagement and voice. As many of the chapters in this book argue, it is essential to consider how students can be empowered to explore their own experiences and practices of student voice, and what avenues there are for students to share and publish their work.

This Handbook is a product of many insightful conversations and new collaborations that have crossed national settings and higher education systems. As editors, we are grateful to all contributors in this book, and hope that *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Student Voice in Higher Education* provides a continuing inspiration to develop and advance student voice research and practice.



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