Questioning Student Voice Practices

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based on research with
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Overview

- Introduce our research with course reps
- Use the data to talk about wider questions around fostering meaningful student voice

Young, H., & Jerome, L. (2020). Student voice in higher education: Opening the loop. *British Educational Research Journal, 46(3).*

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Discourses of student voice

- **Consumer discourse**
- Collectivism discourse
- Rights discourse

A 'good thing'

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Course Representatives (Reps)

- Students
- Volunteer and/or are elected by peers
- Discuss courses at Course Board meetings
- Have ongoing conversations with Course Directors
- Attend training and forums in their student union (in most universities)

- Visible to the wider institution

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Research approach

'A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices that we accept rest' (Foucault,1988a, p. 54 cited in Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004, p. 40)

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National Student Survey (NSS)

- Measures 'satisfaction'
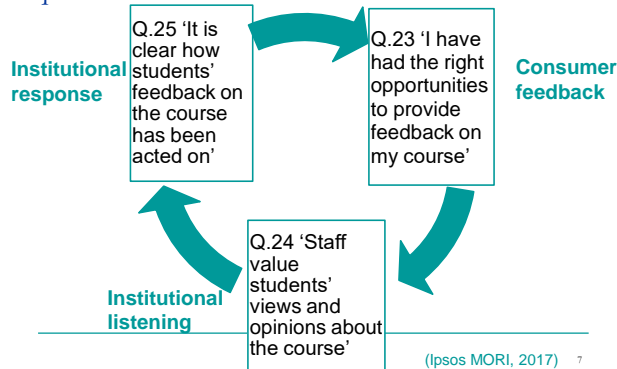- Prospective students can compare data

HOWEVER:
'User *dis*satisfaction may sometimes be an important sign that genuine education is happening' (Collini, 2017, p. 40)

- How can 'voice' be understood outside a consumer discourse of 'feedback' and 'satisfaction'?

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National Student Survey (NSS) 'Student Voice' questions

Institutional response

Q.25 'It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on'

Q.23 'I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course'

Consumer feedback

Institutional listening

Q.24 'Staff value students' views and opinions about the course'

(Ipsos MORI, 2017) 7

Questions raised by the data

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Consumer Feedback (Q.23)

- Course reps are positioned differently to other students:

They tended to describe other students as young, indifferent or uninterested.

'you always find though it's the same people who tend to want to get engaged' (Michaela)

- How can student voice work avoid dividing practices?

Similar to schools (Taylor and Robinson, 2009, pp.167-8)

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Consumer Feedback (Q.23)

- Feedback has to be constructed. It is not just waiting to be gathered:

'some people, they sort of clam up, so then I kind of have to say "well I feel that this isn't working. Do you agree, do you disagree?"' (Charlene)

- How can student voice practices be conceptualised dialogically and democratically?

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Consumer Feedback (Q.23)

- Feedback tended to be understood as about problems:

'And so like a week before [the meeting] they send us like an email to fill out, like "okay, what problems do students have?"' (Yusuf)

- Again, how can student voice practices be conceptualised dialogically and democratically?

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Institutional Response (Q.25)

- Not all feedback can or should be acted on.

Michaela trusted staff and valued responsive changes such as on the need for extra maths and IT developments in halls. However, when she was asked about her answer to NSS Q.25, she only answered with 'Neither disagree or agree' saying "Because there's some things they say there is just nothing that the organisation is going to do…. Like say with that timetabling thing"

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Institutional Response (Q.25)

- Temporal issues suggest students are acting as more than consumers:

Students recognised that their feedback might help next year's students more than them but they felt this was important.

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More complicated than it seems

- More than a simple citizen/consumer binary:

'I'm a great believer in collectivism… [because of the fees] we're now a collective consumer group' (Michaela)

part of a more general and politicised engagement to 'help people' (Sue)

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Concluding questions

1. How can participatory pedagogies and informal conversations be valued without being reduced by measurement?
2. How can 'voice' be understood outside a consumer discourse of 'feedback' and 'satisfaction'?
3. How can student voice practices be conceptualised dialogically and democratically?
4. How can student voice work avoid dividing practices?
5. How can our practices be prefigurative for a more democratic space?

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Thank you!

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