Voices and Metaphors

How do the metaphors we use for students shape student voice?

Alison Dow
Director Pou Aroha Student Support
Unitec institute of Technology
By the end of the session we will have

• Identified and shared metaphors for students
• Considered how these metaphors relate to the current public policy context
• “Heard” a little about these metaphors from some Student Voices
• Reviewed a framework for analysing student voice activity
Changes in pedagogy, demography and lexicology?

What metaphors do we hear, know, use, remember for "student"?
What metaphors do we hear, know, use, remember for “student”?

Brainstorm as many metaphors as you can think for “student” – one metaphor per post-it note

What “groups” do the metaphors fall into?

What label can you provide for each group?

What kinds of student voice activities might relate to each group?

How might these concepts relate to your groups:

- Education as a Public Good
- Education as a Private good
- Teaching and Learning as Transmission/Transaction
- Teaching and Learning as Transformation
New Zealand Public Policy Context

The Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Act, 2009

The Education (Freedom of Association) Amendment Act, 2011 ("VSM" Act)

Education Amendment Act (No 4), 2011

The Education Amendment Act (No 2), 2015
Would **stakeholders**, such as staff and students, lose their voice in the council decision making process?

The Government believes strongly that staff and students are crucial to universities and wānanga, and their views would need to continue to be taken into account in councils’ decision-making. The proposed changes would not prevent institutions from having any of their stakeholders, including staff and students, represented on their councils.

Councils will be able to use their statutes to guarantee student/staff representation if they so wish and will continue to be advised on matters relating to study or training by an academic board (required under section 182 of the Act) consisting of the vice-chancellor, staff and students. Furthermore, councils can set up other committees or bodies to maintain a voice for staff and students, and are obliged to consult with these committees under section 182 of the Act.


Johnson & Deem (2003) noted that the “essential questions of whether students see themselves as ‘customers’ or feel enabled to exercise their right to ‘voice’ and ‘choice’ remain largely unexamined areas of policy and institutional practice” (p 297).

Lizzio & Wilson (2009) conclude that “the ascribed or chosen position of ‘student’ affects the role of student representative. As they suggest this “brings to the surface the underlying dialectic between transformative and transactional conceptions of education” (p. 70).
“The consumer/customer versus partner view is a tension for all the organisations in a fee-paying environment. They want to deliver the best service/product they can to students and have a genuine desire to listen and be responsive to students. On the other hand they want to work with students in a meaningful and co-constructed way, along the lines of a partnership model that encourages the development of learning communities”.

(Ako Aotearoa and NZUSA 2013)

111/159 respondents from tertiary institutions viewed their students as partners rather than customers of consumers (Gordon et al., 2011)
A recent focus on student voice

Changing perceptions and conceptions - but little consensus on meaning

A vehicle to support accountability, marketability and reputation on the one hand (transactional); and

To support the institution as a learning community and democracy in education on the other (transformational)

General: Bragg, 2007; Ruddock, 2006; Seale, 2010; Smyth 2008

UK: Walker & Logan, 2008; Trowler 2010; Trowler & Trowler 2010

Australia: Lizzio & Wilson, 2009

New Zealand: Gordon, MacGibbon, Mudgway, Mason, & Milroy, 2011

.....“the student-university relationship is more nuanced and more reciprocal than a simple customer-provider relationship... we are active participants rather than passive consumers” (National Student Forum, 2010, p. 29).
‘Consumers’ and ‘partners in a learning community’

...a consumer on one level because we are paying for something and getting something in return....

...but we also see ourselves as - we work together with our lecturer as well, yeah, we are working with them when they're teaching us.
students [are] the key stakeholders... ultimately there is no tertiary institution without a student... a customer really has no... there's no power to the word

...[staff member] absolutely adores the work we are doing... his door's always open if you pop past and [ask]"do you have a minute?" "Yeah, absolutely, absolutely..."
What do ITP students say about student voice?

we do like having our voice... not necessarily having a strangle grip on it, but steering it in a direction that students want....

I think that student reps don't know how much power they have
What do students want to have a voice about?

- The learning environment including teaching, assessment, course structure and learning resources that support learning
- General facilities and services
- Co-curricular activities
- Wider issues about government policy – fees, loans, representation
- Student driven initiatives and concerns rather than institution or staff led initiatives
Two Models

Trowler (2010a, p. 3)

“The [Market Model of Student Engagement (MMSE)] locates students in higher education primarily as consumers, and is based on neo-liberal thinking about the marketisation of education. From this perspective student engagement focuses primarily on ensuring customers rights, hearing the consumer voice and about enhancing market position.

The [Developmental Model of Student Engagement (DMSE)] locates students as partners in a learning community, and is based on constructivist notions of learning such as the co-creation of knowledge by learners and teachers. This perspective places greater emphasis on student growth and development and is primarily concerned with the quality of learning and the personal, mutual and social benefits that can be derived from engaging with a community of scholars.”
Focus: satisfaction
Reactive voice through feedback on quality and "service" or "programme" delivered
Customer driven...
achieve high outputs, meet student preferences and proactively "deliver" – including employment outcomes.

Focus: innovation and entrepreneurship
Shared voice in decision making
Co-designed and implemented student voice. Inclusion in design of pedagogy, curriculum, services, facilities; student voice fosters agency, creativity
Fosters development as mentors, leaders, agents of change/creativity as part of wider learning/competencies.

Focus: individual success
Limited student voice and involvement in the development and delivery of services and by students and are responsive to their academic needs and development.
Voice activity may be limited to specific/individual academic needs.

Focus: active citizenship, leadership and participatory engagement, a strong sense of belonging.
Students engaged in proactive voice activity, as a partner, stakeholder or member of the community, have an active role in decision making – often formalised.
Institution strongly supports this identity and students are engaged in delivery and are responded to as a partner or member.

Focus: shared development of professional competencies
Voice is sought, taught, learning/teaching.
Voice activity is key to design of all aspects of the institution.
Inclusive of all "metaphors".

Model of Student Voice - Alison Dow's "work in progress"
Student as customer

Student as knowledge creator

Student as entrepreneur

Student as independent scholar

Student as learning community partner/member

Student as developing professional

Economic Value measured as $$ worth

Social/Cultural Value measured as community worth

Co-created knowledge = students and academic and industry partnership

Transmission of knowledge = academics teach, students learn

Active citizen

Proactive Voice

Consumer Reactive Voice

Individual – private good

Collective – public good
Student as customer
Student as knowledge creator innovator entrepreneur
Student as learning community partner/member
Student as developing professional

Economic Value measured as $$ worth
Co-created knowledge = students and academic and industry partnership

Transmission of knowledge = academics teach, students learn
Social/Cultural Value measured as community worth

Consumer Reactive Voice
Individual – private good
Collective – public good

Active citizen Proactive Voice

Individual – private good
Collective – public good
Purpose of student representation?

- student learning and engagement
- democratising governance
- social justice
- identity
- social integration
- marketing the institution

(Trowler, 2010a, p. 4)
there are no right or wrong answers here: you need to reflect honestly on the location and context of your institution and its particular needs”

(Trowler, 2010a, p. 4)


