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Editorial Remarks

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Editorial Remarks

Penny A. Bishop, *University of Vermont*
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With its inaugural issue, *Middle Grades Review* raised some important questions, inviting researchers to share “critical perspectives and broaden the discourse in our field.” We are delighted that so many scholars accepted our invitation. Here, in our theme issue on student voice, we present some of these critical perspectives with readers.

By posing the question – “Student Voice: Authentic or Contrived?” – we hoped to generate dialogue about the role of student voice in middle grades education. Student voice is certainly a catch phrase in education at large, and the term “voice and choice” has been used by middle school proponents for decades. Yet, what does student voice mean? What role(s), if any, should it play in educational reform, school governance, teacher learning, curriculum development, and instruction? When does it contribute to change and when is it tokenistic? Is there even such a thing as authenticity in student voice? If so, what does it look like in classrooms, schools and teacher professional development?

In her invited opening essay, prominent student voice scholar Alison Cook-Sather describes the essays and research within this issue, pieces that raise these questions and others. She asserts, “Student voice work asks us to accept the importance of bringing together different angles of vision born of different positions that, at their intersection, yield perspective that can catalyze insight and inform action.” We can’t imagine a better description of the work these researchers are undertaking, striving to bring a critical lens to what student voice work can foster.

The two essays highlight how identity and power are crucial to understanding student voice. They reveal how student voice can address learning in the classroom as well as provide opportunities for responsive

educational reform. Both Alison Cook-Sather and Emily Nelson depict the difficulties of creating opportunities for students to voice their concerns and interests, and for those voices to be heard and acted upon constructively.

The first two research articles within this issue focus on how attending to inclusivity and diversity in student voice enables us develop a rich understanding of students, thereby better addressing their specific needs through the design of more culturally responsive learning spaces. First, Bogum Yoon illustrates the limitations of dividing English language learners into simplistic ethnic groups. She documents students’ individual differences and learning environments to depict “classroom dynamics that focus on culturally inclusive or non-inclusive pedagogy.” Gholnecsar Muhammad and Nadia Behizadeh also focus on what authenticity means, but rather than examining the learning environment as Yoon did, they investigate how particular literacy practices can enhance student voice in writing, in turn creating greater student engagement and higher literacy achievement.

Finally, Catharine Biddle and Dana Mitra provide an all-important bookend to the issue. They revisit the issue of power dynamics that were first discussed by Cook-Sather and Nelson. They thoughtfully raise and document the inherent difficulties that adults, not students, have in listening to and acknowledging student voice as part of educational reforms.

We appreciate the work of these authors in bringing forward important, and critical, perspectives. Whose voices matter? In what ways? In the spirit of inclusivity and diversity, we invite readers to submit commentary on these articles, thus adding more thoughts and experiences to this essential conversation. ❖