Finding a voice, finding self

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The term 'pupil voice' has, in recent years, become part of a wider discourse but tends to refer to a limited conception of young people 'having a say' within the bounds of school convention. This article is about what Henry Giroux terms 'border crossings', in which voice develops through a physical and intellectual journey beyond boundaries of classroom, of culture, of home and school learning. The story is told through the accounts of school students who crossed their own national borders to visit schools and families in other countries as part of a Scottish-based project called the Learning School. It was an experience which for them brought into sharp relief questions of voice and sense of self. Through evaluating the experiences of their peers in the schools visited they learned to attune themselves to the hidden voices in classrooms in very diverse cultural settings, experiences which served to sharpen awareness of their own inner voice. Their diaries reveal ways in which the internalized voices of friends, parents and teachers shaped perceptions of who they 'were' and what they believed. Their descriptions of re-entry to the schools they had left behind a year before illustrate some of the tensions that are faced by not only young people striving for resolution among multiple cultural identities but for all students who daily cross the borders of school and community, home and classroom. The broader lesson from this study for teachers is to recognize the hidden agency of the young people they teach and how their sense of self is shaped by the borderlands and 'construction sites' they inhabit. The challenge for schools is to reappraise their own identity and to discover what it means to become a genuine learning community.

Origins and context

Six years ago a teacher in a Shetland secondary school conceived an idea so ambitious as to be barely credible. It involved school students from a number of different countries taking a gap year from their studies to conduct a global self-evaluation project. The plan was for them as a group to spend 4 to 6 weeks in each of six different schools, in South Africa, Sweden, Scotland, Japan, Korea and the Czech Republic as visiting researchers, working alongside fellow students and with classroom teachers to research learning and teaching. In each location these young people lived with host families, in most contexts without a common first language and, in some cases, with no common linguistic ground at all. By travelling round the

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world on a single ticket and living off the hospitality and goodwill of host families, project costs were minimal.

Before embarking on their journey students spent an intensive two weeks familiarizing themselves with research methods including devising student and teacher questionnaires, interview schedules for parents, student shadowing and spot checks designed to ascertain the degree of students' engagement with learning at arbitrary points over the course of a school day. As well as developing the tools of their school and classroom-based research students were encouraged to keep weekly diaries, recording their personal reflections both on their work with schools and on their own developing thinking.

In the 6 years of its existence the compass of the project has extended to embrace schools in Australia, Germany and Hong Kong, with each cohort passing on to the next knowledge and expertise gained. While superficially classrooms in Japan, South Africa or Hong Kong appeared to these young people surprisingly familiar, they were able to penetrate beneath the surface features of classroom life and tune into a range of voices which did not find expression in the day-to-day life of classrooms. As same age peers they were able to engage with their peers in a register less easily accessible to university researchers. In each country they documented ways in which the articulation of voice was afforded or constrained by the structures, conventions and expectations of schooling.

By virtue of being able to follow some of these same young people into their homes and communities, visiting, interviewing and living with families, the Learning School researchers came to broaden their understanding of school-based conventions as having wider cultural dimensions. A Swedish student's assumptions and frustrations at the silenced voice in a Japanese classroom could be more clearly understood through her immersion in Japanese culture, albeit for only 6 weeks or less.

It was through these experiences that the Learning School students came to reflect on their own formative experience and the degree to which their own schooling had allowed their own voice to be heard and, in a deeper sense, to apprehend what 'voice' could mean and the sense of self which it expressed. Through the articulation of their own inner voices, in their own biographies, we gain new insights as to how identities shape and re-form as they travel between home and classroom and across cultures. It is in these 'border crossings'(Giroux, 1992) that we begin to apprehend something of identity as a process rather than an entity, as with each new challenge to their world view these young people find new meanings and new facets of selfhood.

Concepts of self and identity

The concept of self has been a subject of psychological and sociological literature and latterly of interest to neuroscience. A number of tripartite models have sought to explain the layering of 'self', including Freud's ego, id and super ego, Berne's (1961) child, parent and adult, and Damasio's (1999) protoself (the neurological

unconscious self), core self (a conscious self-knowledge) and autobiographical self, the latter a kind of extended consciousness in which the 'I' evolves as it meets new contexts and new challenges to selfhood.

Common to all these metaphorical models is the belief that self concept is shaped by internal voices, the balance and dynamic of which evolves over time. Mead (1934) located identity in the ongoing internal conversation between what others tell me about myself, my own view of 'me' and my interpretation and re-interpretation of others' view of me. Such a process, suggests Denzin (1992) is related to the context, to the nature of the task at hand, to 'turning point experiences' in which 'the meanings of identity lie in the interaction process and shift as persons establish and negotiate the task at hand' (p. 26). In Foucauldian terminology, identity and agency arise through discourses which generate different ways of knowing self and give rise to multiple identities, located in the larger structures of class, race and gender.

How these themes play out in different cultural contexts provided the focus for a study by Miki Nishimura who had previously been a coordinator of Learning School 2 (LS2). Over the course of a year (2002–2003) she followed a cohort of eight Learning School students from eight different countries, keeping in email contact, encouraging them to keep systematic diary records, asking them to spontaneously record events which had a particular impact on their thinking, a record which they could revisit and unpack at a later date with a more critical distance. Each of the Learning School students was interviewed three times during the course of the study, first in the Shetland Islands at the outset of the project, again in the second month of the project in Malmö, Sweden, and for a third time in Cambridge at the end of the project. It took the form of a collective case study (Yin, 1984) in which an intensive study of several cases from the collective is carried out. In these 'self stories' (Woods & Sikes, 1987; Denzin, 1989) the autobiographical self emerges, assuming new constellations across time and place.

The insights from the Nishimura study provide much of the evidence for this article. Her research is, however, complemented by a substantial body of narrative accumulated in the six successive incarnations of the Learning School. Ninety students from nine countries have been involved, most of them persuaded to keep diaries documenting their experience. All have at some time told their individual stories to academics, teachers, education ministries, inspectorates and civil servants in Edinburgh, London and Cambridge and to similar audiences in eight other countries. They have also delivered papers to the International Congress on School Effectiveness and Improvement in Copenhagen (2002) and Barcelona (2005). In 2003 students from Learning School cohorts 1 and 2 (LS1, LS2) wrote 18 of the 22 chapters in the book *Self-evaluation in the global classroom* (MacBeath & Sugmine, 2002). Sutherland's (2003) study for his M.Ed. thesis involved interviews with teachers in Anderson High School in Shetland where the project originated and which continues to be the hub of the project.

Through this considerable body of evidence we come to glimpse something of a process of self realization and the emergence of new voices as these young people reflect on who they are and who they are becoming. Their depictions of home and

school speak personally and often painfully of culture shock and its impact on their identity.

The Learning School students

For the Learning School students identity is reformed and redefined by three primary contexts—the schools in which they conduct their research, the host families they live with for a period of 4 to 6 weeks, the peer group in whose close company they travel, work and spend their leisure time. All of these three sites are multi-lingual and multi-cultural. As they describe the impact of these new and unfamiliar contexts the impact on their learning is contrasted with their prior school experience.

> I have probably learnt as much in these 10 months as I did in 13 years of school. (Jolene, in MacBeath & Sugimine, 2002, p. 38)

A Scottish student takes a retrospective view of the impact of learning beyond school and the test it has offered to his self awareness and academic identity.

> This year has been a massive education to us all, an almost vertical learning curve. I often worried that I was not using this opportunity to learn as much as I could but now after having stepped back indefinitely from this particular journey I can see how by watching and feeling another culture from within you cannot help but learn infinite amounts. It is the greatest educational tool ever to have at one's disposal. Learning things schools will never be able to teach, through first hand experience, feeding a desire to understand the world in which we live. This year has given me a real thirst to continue to test myself academically and to become more aware of different societies, cultures and people, as I am sure it has to everyone who was a part of Learning School 2. (Colin, in MacBeath & Sugimine, 2002, p. 36)

A 16 year old Korean student, speaking emotionally at a Cambridge conference at the culmination of Learning School 3 (LS3), described how for the first time he had found his own voice after 10 years of school. Preoccupation with hard work, after hours cramming and swotting for exams, had left neither time nor incentive to think for himself or to question received wisdom from his teachers. The Korean researcher Sung-Sik Kim (2002) provides confirmatory evidence for the constraining effects of Korea's school system and casts his own country's national performance (second only to Finland in the 2002 PISA study) in a more critical light.

The continuous thread in the Learning School narrative is of individual lives lived in and through a kaleidoscope of sites, shifting daily from family to peer group to school classroom and back again, each new set of relationships requiring a different linguistic register and social protocol. And as the group uproots and moves every 4 to 6 weeks to new cultural contexts, mores and social boundaries have to be readjusted and relearned. In each situation self concept and self efficacy are confronted by the novelty of the experience.

Few of these young people brought with them research experience or a theorizing of school education. Although some had been able to give voice to their views in school it had tended to be immediate and reactive. For none of them had their school experience afforded them a meta perspective on their own learning or on the

process of education. If there is a single theme running through their accounts it is the rediscovery of self, young people's accounts returning persistently to evolving individual and social identities.

Leaving home

For most of the students involved the Learning School was their first long-term extended disconnection from home. Many of them describe their selfhood as having been defined by parents, by school and by the peer group, all accidents of locality and propinquity.

The greater the distance from the comfort zone of home the more the notion of 'home' gradually assumed new dimensions. A Swedish student, for whom home was hitherto the house in which she grew up in Malmö, now found an expanded and more ambivalent notion of home.

> This is my home, Malmö and the school is my home school and my home is my 'home-home' but now 'home' is something different. 'Home' was always where I lived with my mum and now home is also Logan's house because I stayed there, and Philippa's house, that's home as well. The Czech host sister and everything is the home, and the 'home' isn't clear now. That's the main difference. Much wider and more vague. Home can be so many different things. (interview in Malmö, January 2003, in Nishimura, 2003, p. 32)

Interviews reveal the extent to which students recognized the power of parental influence and how it had shaped and constrained their own views.

> When you have opinions and views, you realise your parents' influence. You do not notice usually how much your opinions are influenced by your parents. I did not think by myself and I used my parents. I should have my own picture. (talk given in Cambridge, June 2003)

In this student's attribution of values to her mother's influence, there is also the implicit acknowledgement of support for dissent, a more hidden but perhaps equally powerful legacy.

> I am very interested in Feminism, something to equalise things, to make society more equal. I got this from my mother and I usually get things from her. But sometimes we have different opinions, but she is always so supportive. (interview in Malmö, January 2003, in Nishimura, 2003, p. 30)

When she faced the problem of uncertainty, she would often make a call to her mother to get her support.

Interviews conducted by LS1 students with students and their parents (MacBeath & Sugimine, 2002, pp. 209–219) document the power of parental expectation and reveal students' anxiety not to let their parents down, illustrating how powerful parental pressure can be in shaping ambitions for the future. These data also reveal the ways in which the weight of expectation not only shapes identity in the positive sense but through resistance and resolve to be different. Parental voice is acknowledged by many of the young people as laying down a substratum of values with which they continue to struggle as they are exposed to the influence of different

ways of being in other families and in the immediacy of the peer group with whom they spend a close and sometimes claustrophobic 9 months.

In Judith Harris' award winning book *The Nurture Assumption* (1998) she provides evidence of a 'Cinderella syndrome' in which the young person as known to parents undergoes a transformation within the peer group, assuming an identity which parents never get to witness because, like Schrodinger's cat or like teachers observed by inspectors, the very act of observation creates a new context and set of behaviours.

The power of peers

In the flow of changing contexts and new challenges there was a constant factor, the group of peers who comprised the Learning School. This was the forum to which students could bring back their thoughts and feelings and developing insights. Within the relative safety of this group emerging ideas could be tested and frustrations aired and resolved.

> I can remember days when it all seemed too much, everyone sitting in a silent room with looks of defeat etched on faces but then something would happen and everyone would rally round more determined than ever to see the year out to a meaningful conclusion. (Colin Bragg, unpublished report, LS2)

Peers could offer support and challenge but as the group developed its own collective identity, its own limits of acceptance and tolerance were also subject to change, affected by pressure from external circumstances and the imperatives of the task in which the group was engaged. As these internal tensions were recognized and worked through, boundaries of 'self' and group became more defined. Students struggled to find themselves within the group, to be accepted, to be team players but also to assert their own individuality.

In the early days of the group's life, differences in expectations, forms of address and cultural norms created misunderstandings. Differing norms surrounding simple acts of giving, taking, and borrowing, for example, created tensions in the early life of the group.

> I sometimes felt angry when one colleague borrowed something of mine or asked for taking something for him. He didn't say any excuses and asked me directly, and to me this sounded like an order. This kind of misunderstanding often happened and each time I found the cause in intolerance of both of us to the cultural differences. (Kazuyo, unpublished report, LS2)

Direct forms of address were perceived as rudeness and circumlocutions interpreted as evasive. But it was through the day-to-day challenges within the peer group to one's own mores and values that the boundaries of tolerance could be pushed back.

> I have learnt that I should be more open as a person towards the different kinds of people. In the beginning, I found difficult to live with Maiko. Because we are completely different in standards, values and everything. But I suddenly realised she was such a good person. And instead of looking that she is Japanese and I am Swedish,

they are from Shetland, I should see that we are humans. Everybody is a human. (interview in Malmö, January 2003, in Nishimura, 2003, p. 33)

Students discovered both a cultural relativism and a stronger sense of national identity.

> In the process of discussing and just chatting with members in the daily life, I have realised that what was natural and right thing for me was not always the case with them and vice versa and this difference must be trustily natural. Gradually I [began to see] things not just from my view and try to think from different aspects … It was also at the same time that I did start to doubt what I took granted for in Japan and had the better opinion of Japan at the same time. (Kazuyo, in MacBeath & Sugimine, 2002, p. 37)

On a visit to the memorial museum in Hiroshima, Japanese, German, Scottish and Swedish students were confronted, together, with the role of their own nations in one of history's most devastating events. Its impact was brought to bear in the remnants of everyday things—charred clothes, relics of abandoned toys, a melted tricycle to which a child's shoe still adhered. While their discussion around the exhibits had the effect of sharpening national identities, it also brought to the surface and elucidated human values that were deeply shared.

The host family

Exposure to family life in different countries proved, in some ways, to be a more powerful challenge to self than the peer group. While within the peer group there was some commonality of experience and a forum in which fundamental values could be discussed and reviewed, host families provided for many a major shock to their value system and world view.

It was in the context of South African townships that students faced the most profound culture shock and re-orientation of beliefs about self and society. Sophie had stayed with two host families, one in a 'Coloured' community and the other in a 'Black' township. The Coloured family were poor and virulent in their dislike of Black people in general. Knowing that after 3 weeks she would be staying with a Black family it was hard to tread the line between respect for this kind family who had taken her in and the tempering of racist views which she feared might prejudice her against the Black family she would shortly live with.

> I remember that I was sitting in my room with my host sister and she asked me if I wanted to hear a joke. I said yes then she began to tell me a really racist joke and expected me to find it funny. How was I supposed to react to something like that? That was something that I found difficult to understand and cope with in South Africa. (Sophie, Experience Report, in Nishimuara, 2003, p. 59)

Yet she acknowledged how much she had learned from this Muslim family, her warmth for them and how much she missed them later. After the 3 weeks she moved to live with the Black family in the township. On the first day the daughter, who had just returned from a boarding school, expressed her dislike for White people, a 'shock' for Sophie, who had never before had to face such explicit racism. This experience was instrumental in helping Sophie reflect on her own prejudices,

acknowledging her own ignorance as a root of bigotry and valuing harsh experiences as an important 'lesson for life'.

> I have never thought of myself as a prejudiced person. I think that most people sometimes 'assume' things or think that something is a certain way in a country or in a culture, etc., and of course I am one of them. But I have learnt that I can be quite determined about some things that I actually don't know very much about … I am really happy that I have realised how wrong I have been. It is most certainly a lesson for life which I am very happy to have experienced. (Experience Report, June 2003, in Nishimura, 2003, pp. 35–36)

A Scottish student's stay with three host families in Cape Town (Muslim, Hindu and Xhosa families) exposed her to customs such as Manhood training in the Xhosa culture, provided opportunities to visit Hindu temples and to discuss the war in Iraq from a Muslim perspective.

> You stop thinking I am Scottish, he is Japanese, she is South African, you just think they are Learning School members and my friends. Everyone is a different person and has their own qualities irrespective of where they come from, but just because of who they are. People are the same and different all over the world. What I mean by this is that I could be more similar to a Japanese person that I have never met than I am to a Scottish person living in the same street. (Robert, Experience Report, in Nishimura, 2003, p. 61)

The common bond of nationality or locality, which may comprise a substantive aspect of identity, may be strengthened by distance or may diminish in significance. On occasions it helped to reaffirm one's own national identity.

> I became more Japanese here. My host family made me aware of 'I am Japanese'. My host mother always stresses the differences between their own culture and mine, Japanese. I showed pictures of my family and discussed about my parents and I came to understand more about my parents after discussion with her. I compared two cultures a bit and explained my opinions. I became very curious about my background—Japan, Asia and the world … One day I went to the public library that has books about Japan written in Japanese. Now I am reading about the Second World War. When I read it, I become more aware of the fact that I am Japanese. (interview in Malmö, January 2003, in Nishimura, 2003, p. 44)

School and classroom

The essential purpose of the Learning School was to work with schools in different countries for an extended period (4 to 6 weeks) to support the participating teachers and students in self-evaluation. For students this was the task for which they had been recruited. Their focus was not themselves but the students and teachers with whom they would liaise on a daily basis. This was very demanding, leaving little time for introspection. Individual anxieties or tensions being played out within the peer group had to be left behind as these young people adopted a 'professional' role, what may be described as a transition from an autobiographical to a biographical role. Getting to understand and document others' experiences shifted the focus from self to others, requiring the skills of ethnographic research—the lens through which these young people could perceive a Czech, German or South African student's experience 'from the inside' as it were.

Analysing other students' learning in a range of cultural contexts could not but help Learning School students reflect critically on their own learning.

> I have been researching and observing students learning but also learning myself. As I saw learning in five different schools and many classrooms I also saw what I would have been like in those situations and would have loved to have been able to evaluate my own preferred style of learning. It has also made me appreciate that only so much is down to other people and that if you really want to succeed you need to put in the effort yourself and in the end you're the one who will benefit. (Robert in an interview in Cambridge, 2002)

Working together to analyse and synthesize their findings for disparate teacher, academic or policy-making audiences brought a whole new raft of skills and insights. Preparing to speak in public, to give shape and voice to a complexity of ideas and impressions, to separate the objective from the subjective, to speak in two voices, one with academic distance, one fraught with emotion had, in the testimony of many, done most to raise self-esteem and personal authority.

Perhaps not surprisingly Learning School students had to deal with resistance from teachers—in some cultural settings more overt, in others more difficult to perceive and interpret. Sutherland's 2003 study of teachers in Shetland documents the nature of the difficulty faced by some teachers in hearing student voices. The challenge to their own identity after 20 years or more of teaching had been a challenge too far for some staff and student data had been benevolently dismissed. Other staff, more open to critical feedback, admitted to dilemmas in marrying the validity of the evidence and the pressure to simply cover the curriculum with optimum efficiency. Stewart Hay (architect of the Learning School), challenged by the feedback from Learning School students, admits to the difficulty of relinquishing control.

> I think two things have happened over the four years [of the Learning School] to my teaching. One, I have attempted to be reflective and to act on that reflection and to cut back on my level of control, and two, I have not succeeded in perhaps—managing the balance. (interview, in Sutherland, 2003, p. 52)

What is revealed in these interviews with teachers is that if student voice is to be understood it is only by grasping the complexity of voices which find, or are denied, expression within the organizational life of schools. Schools are places in which voices carry, and carry in differing bandwidths. There are voices which demand to be listened to by virtue of their status. Some are strident voices while others speak softly but with inherent authority. Over the years, teachers', students' and parents' voices have been silenced by rules, by conventions and mores and by the weight of historical inertia. Nor do students or teachers speak with one voice but it is in the counter weight and balance of the school acoustic that cultures thrive or wither.

As Karolina, a Swedish student in LS2, writes, it takes courage for both students and teachers to confront the known and embrace the uncertainty of what is as yet unknown.

> One thing that Learning School did for me and probably for everyone else that has done a similar thing is that it has opened the doors in my mind and I now believe that I can do

> anything. The question we all have to ask ourselves is, are we brave enough to jump out there to the unknown not knowing what we might find or would we rather stay on the safe grounds? One last word is, jump! It is only you who are holding yourself back. If you do not take the step out you might regret it for the rest of your life but if you do you can always come back to safety again. (MacBeath & Sugimine, 2002, p. 36)

The comment from Karolina suggests that there may be a return to the 'safety' of one's prior conceptions of the world and one's place in it, regaining a sense of self uncontaminated by the challenges to values and identity. In Butcher's (2002) study of East Asian students returning to their home country after studying in New Zealand he describes re-entry as inevitably one of struggle and 'grief' as these cultural travellers try to achieve a cognitive resolution between old and new ways of seeing the world and their own extended place in it.

For some, but not all, of these young people, there was a return to their old school following their Learning School adventure. Going back to school is, on the basis of evidence from this and other projects, likely to involve a culture shock in re-integrating with the familiar which is now also perceived as unfamiliar (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). Alan (2002) describes a tension between assimilation and cultural dissonance, a 'flickering' between cultural identities (Campbell, 2000). Arencibia and Moreno (2005) use the metaphor of the return of the prodigal son, a starting over again but with a changed reference point and period of quarantine in which recovery is premised on the ability to inhabit more than one world and to gradually move between them with less discomfort.

With a new meta perspective on schooling some found it hard to adjust to the passivity and intellectual constraints of school life and learning. Others, though, were able to channel their energy into changing their schools. One success story comes from Hong Kong where a student returned to his school with determination to implement a school-wide self-evaluation project. Galvanizing his peers and enlisting the support of his principal he maintained the momentum of his learning, realized his own self-efficacy and put in place a mechanism for all students' voices to be heard.

The experience of different national cultures presents us with the challenge to identity writ large but for many young people the short journey from home and community to school and classroom creates a dissonance which never finds easy resolution. Weiss and Fine's collection of essays in their edited book *Construction sites* (2000), chronicles how young people construct meaning from their experience in differing situations and through the interplay of various sites. In one chapter Ward describes how Marie's mother teaches her to survive in a racist society and school system. She teaches her children how to take a critical perspective, how to detect racial stereotypes, to understand how images shape perceptions and often distort the truth. Most importantly Marie's mother instils in her daughter a desire to resist internalizing other voices, those of the media or other stereotypical characterizations of African American people. Consistently through these accounts we learn that lessons learned in the family fail to connect with what is learned in school. The evidence is that the academic self-esteem of Black girls declines cumulatively through school and that for protection of self a school identity may be temporarily

assumed. And boys too have their own struggles to overcome, as one Jewish student says:

> You've got to leave some things at home to make it here. If you come to this school and bring the baggage of your home background, you'll likely meet with more failure than success. (Reichert, 2000, p. 266)

A wider learning

For the young people involved in the Learning School project it was an education beyond school. It made them more reflective and critical of received wisdom and more aware of their own 'potential' in the strongest sense of that abused notion. Referring to travels of the mind and confronting one's own preconceptions and limitations, Colin describes this as 'the greatest educational tool ever to have at one's disposal'.

The depth of experience offered by the Learning School is not available to the majority of young people or their teachers. Yet intellectual excitement and challenge to inert ideas is what schools are for. They can allow vicarious journeying and offer opportunities for self reflection and for personal and social development in a more profound sense than that curricular label implies. In the telling Platonic metaphor, the intellectual journey is portrayed as an escape from the flickering shadows of the cave wall to catch sight of another world of ideas beneath the commonplace. Teaching is a subversive activity, wrote Postman and Weingartner 35 years ago, casting schools as places of inquiry and informed dissent, and teachers as architects of new cognitive and affective structures (Postman & Weingartner, 1971). In a performativity climate where any risk of departure from the curriculum carries high stake consequences it requires both courage and prescience on the part of teachers to tune into the secret harmonies, to hear the discordant voices of their students and, as Giroux (1992) suggests, to make visible the limits of their own voices as teachers.

> By being able to listen critically to the voices of their students, teachers become border crossers through their ability to not only make difficult narratives available to themselves and other students but also by legitimating difference as a basic condition for understanding the limits of one's own voice. (p. 170)

The potential and limitations for such radical reframing in differing cultural contexts is made apparent by the Learning School research. 'Tolerance of ambiguity' has been shown by Hofstede (1980, 2003) to be subject to greater constraints in countries of the Pacific Rim, yet as Cheng (2005) and others indicate there is a sea change, or perhaps more of a slow swell, in Asia Pacific countries which is widening the scope for divergent voices to be articulated. The precedents in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong from the successive visits of the Learning School suggest that the door is opening wider.

The experience of young people from eight quite different cultural backgrounds suggests ways in which 'voice' can be understood both in its organizational context and in the internal dialogue which reshapes a sense of identity and extends the possibilities of the self. While the lessons of the Learning School are premised on a

physical escape from the classroom, the potential for virtual travel of the mind remains the seminal challenge to schooling in the twenty-first century. The notion of the network learning community has entered the policy discourse but will mean little if the voices—of teachers and students—continue to be submerged by the grand narratives and their overpowering version of the way things are.

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