What Can a Conception of Power Do? Theories and Images of Power in Student Voice Work

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Abstract:

- This article brings together high school students, teachers, and researchers to think about the issue of power in student voice work.
- Each author uses a metaphor or a theory to explain how they think about power in schools and in student voice work.
- The authors, at times, have different ideas about power relations in student voice work.
- We argue that the way we *think* about power has effects on what we *see*, *feel*, and *do* in student voice work.

Keywords: student voice, power, theory, metaphor

Introduction: Power and Student Voice Work (Eve Mayes)

Power has been a recurring issue in research and practitioner work about student voice*.* Historically, student voice work has begun from a premise that educational institutions are saturated with inequitable power structures, processes, practices, and relations. Those advocating for student voice have argued against "the normal asymmetries inherent in school relations" (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015, p. 54), proposing instead new modes of a "radical collegiality" between those previously hierarchically positioned as *teacher* and *student* (Fielding, 1999). This student voice work has been inflected with discussions of the complexities of power in educational institutions: power relations between students and teachers, power relations between students and researchers, and power relations between students.

This article does not attempt to map the terrain of the debates surrounding particular theories of power that underpin student voice work (see, for example,

Arnot & Reay, 2007; Atweh & Bland, 2004; Bragg, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2007; Ellsworth, 1989; Fielding, 2004; Lodge, 2005; McIntyre, Pedder, & Rudduck, 2005; Mitra, 2008; Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015; Nelson, 2014; Robinson & Taylor, 2007, 2013; Taylor & Robinson, 2009; Thomson & Gunter, 2006). Rather, this article performs a collaborative conversation about what a theory of power can *do*: what it makes visible and what it masks, what particular ways of thinking about power help us to describe and explain, and what exceeds or escapes from these theories.

Context

This article began as an "unconference" session at the Cambridge Student Voice Seminar in June 2015. This seminar, like all previous Cambridge Student Voice Seminars (2011-2015),[i] attempted to enact the vision that Alison Cook-Sather co-developed with her collaborators: to create "cross-level, cross-context gathering[s]," bringing "into dialogue differently positioned participants in education … from across different levels of education … and contexts" (Cook-Sather, quoted in Cambridge Student Voice Seminars, 2011). The 2015 Cambridge Student Voice Seminar brought together high school students (from Denmark and the United Kingdom) and teachers/ practitioners and researchers from a range of countries (including the United Kingdom, Sweden, Spain, Australia, and the United States).

The "unconference" session on conceptions of power in student voice work, facilitated by Victoria Wasner, Daniel Bishop, and Eve Mayes, opened with a conceptual speed-meeting event. Configured in two circles (with the outer circle

facing inward, and the inner circle facing outward), students,

teachers/practitioners, and researchers spoke about power in student voice,

beginning their conversations with the following questions.

- What theories/frameworks/concepts surrounding power have you

  worked with in your own work?

- What have these theories/frameworks/concepts enabled you to

  do/say/write/feel?

- What exceeds/escapes these frameworks/theories/concepts? What

  questions do you still have?

Some of the students, teachers/practitioners, and researchers spoke about

power with concepts informed by particular theorists recognized by the academy

(see below). Others spoke about power using imagery, metaphor, or images of

thought, speaking about concrete, material ways of "seeing" power: power as a

pie, power as a *building*, power as a *maze*, power as a *web*. As these

conversations about conceptions of power continued during the course of the

conference and with others after the conference, the ideas for this article were

formed.

      This online article is an enactment of Fielding's discussion of

"intergenerational learning" (Fielding & Moss, 2011). High school students,

teachers working toward postgraduate qualifications, early-career researchers,

and established university academics worked collaboratively on sections of this

article. High school and tertiary students contributed reflections on their

metaphorical conceptions of power. Teachers and higher degree research

candidates partnered with university academics to write sections about the

concepts of particular theorists. This article aims not to set up a binary between

"student" and "adult" researchers, or between school-based "practitioners" and

university-based "researchers." We hope that this article will be of use for

researchers of different ages and institutional locations and positions. Yet even

as we have attempted to work collaboratively, we acknowledge that any attempt

to unwind conventional power hierarchies is always already inflected with power

relations that dynamically shift and change.

Purposes and Questions

The purpose of this article is to explore the effects of various theoretical

and metaphorical tools for thinking about power in student voice work for what is

noticed, asked, felt, and done. Contributors to this online article include students,

teachers, and researchers. This article is deliberately pluralist, bringing together

authors of different ages, differing experiences of student voice, with different

theoretical or metaphorical lenses for thinking about power. Each author gives an

account of the theoretical or metaphorical tools they use to conceptualize power

in schools and in student voice work, and each describes how, in thinking with

these tools, they consider how power is distributed, exercised, and circulated,

and how power relations shift and change.

Some of the contributors work with visual concepts: power as *pie*,

lighthouse, *label*, *see-saw*, *partnership*. Others describe how concepts from a

range of cultural theoretical traditions (critical, poststructural, and

psychoanalytical) and theorists have shaped their understanding of power: from

Freire's dialectical and dialogical understanding of power, to Habermas'

knowledge interests and system and life worlds, to Foucault's conception of

power as relational, to Butler's discussion of performativity in power relations, to

Smail's attention to feeling in power relations, to Spinoza's orientation to

capacities to act in power relations. The headings describe these contributions as

"thinking with" particular visual concepts or theorists. This phrase is borrowed

from Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research.*

To "think with" is to think philosophically and methodologically simultaneously,

using a concept or theorist to extend thought and action—to *think* about what we

do and to *do* what we *think* about.

The driving question is: *What can a conception of power do?* From diverse,

situated positions, students, teachers, and researchers make explicit the ways in

which they understand and feel power, and what these conceptions of power

enable them to see, think, feel, and do in relation to student voice work. The

contributors make visible how various conceptual resources work with "differing

and distinctive concepts of personhood, notions of social action, and the potential

for communication and participation" (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 6). We argue,

in the latter section of the article, that the conceptual resources that we deploy

have consequences for praxis in schools and research.

In exploring a range of conceptual approaches to power in student voice

work, we aim to continue discussions of the "plural and context-specific relations

of power" (Taylor & Robinson, 2009, p. 173) explored in previous research. A

number of the contributions in this article respond to other researchers' calls for

alternative conceptual resources to analyze simultaneous movements of power, and to explore the interdependencies of adults and young people's voices in student voice work (Bragg & Manchester, 2012, p. 149; Fielding, 2004, p. 299; Mannion, 2007, p. 413). At the same time, this article is not arguing that these different theoretical concepts and metaphors bring different perspectives on a singular, particular phenomenon or practice (like a research interview, a classroom lesson, or a school structure). Rather, we argue that thinking with these theoretical and metaphorical practices materializes or produces different relations (between students and teachers and researchers, for example).

The remainder of this article juxtaposes various contributions from students, teachers, and researchers written after the 2015 Cambridge Student Voice Seminar, arranged in a series of hyperlinks. These contributions are assembled to engage with each other, in the hope of sparking new thought between these contributions. As a reader, you may form your own path through the hyperlinks.

Theoretical and Metaphorical Tools to Conceptualize Power in Student Voice Work

Thinking with Pie (Shukria Bakhshi, secondary school student)

As a student, I see power as a pie (Figure 1) which the teachers and the students make over a period of time, and over that time they share this power out between each other, often with the teachers having the larger pieces and the student having the smaller pieces. However, if this pie was made between the teachers only, the larger piece would have been taken by the head teacher and

the smaller pieces for the other teachers and the crumbs of the pie for the

students. Having the largest piece of the pie (having the most power) means

having total control in choosing and planning how to teach the students.

Figure 1. Pumpkin-Pie-Whole-Slice, by Evan-Amos, 2011. Public domain.

Thinking with Freire (Victoria Wasner, higher degree research candidate/teacher, and Alison Cook-Sather, researcher)

We both have been influenced by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's notion

of critical pedagogy, especially his concept of *conscientização* (critical

consciousness or consciousness-raising) and his insistence on dialogue as

central to the educational process. Through *conscientização,* social reality is

transformed through a critical understanding of that same reality (Freire, 1979).

And "only dialogue," Freire (1970) insisted, "which requires critical thinking, is

also capable of generating critical thinking" (p. 73). Through *conscientização* and

dialogue, he explained, we all become "simultaneously teachers *and* students"

(Freire, 1970, p. 53).

Friere's deeply dialectical and dialogical notion of power holds that power is always working both on and through all of us, in multiple directions. Rejecting either/or notions of those who dominate and those who are dominated, Freire's work challenges us to become aware of the ways in which we reproduce power dynamics and ways in which we attempt to disrupt them. We offer two examples of how these ideas have informed our work: they prompted Victoria to rethink secondary students' international education service-learning projects and contributed to Alison's choice to co-create with her undergraduate students a course on advocating diversity in higher education.

Freire's account of the "dehumanizing" disparity between "dominant and dominated groups" (O'Hara, 1989, p. 19) inspired Victoria to consider the service-learning experiences that her high school students are undertaking, and to move from a "traditional" to a more "critical" service-learning model. Service learning is a teaching and learning approach that integrates community action with reflection on action. Critical service learning aims to "deconstruct systems of power so the need for service and the inequalities that create and sustain them are dismantled" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 50). It departs from more traditional models of service learning by its focus on "a social change orientation, working to redistribute power, and developing authentic relationships" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 60).

Adopting a democratic, participatory approach toward the creation of a more effective framework for service learning, a group of grade 11 high school International Baccalaureate (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2017) students are acting as co-researchers alongside Victoria in her role as service-

learning coordinator and practitioner. The group is investigating how they can work toward a whole-school approach to service learning that is driven by a more critical, ethically-sound approach as described above. The research project aims to change teacher-student relationships through a "reconciliation of the poles of contradiction" (Freire, 1970, p. 53) and to model the desired relationships between the "server" and the "served" within service learning experiences—to work *with* others rather than *for* or *unto* them. As a service-learning practitioner, Victoria felt inspired by Freire to rise to the challenge of asking herself, and inviting students to ask themselves, the daring question, "Is service learning willing to make less-privileged people subjects and not objects?" (Rosenberger, 2000, p. 32). A planned starting point is, however, a deconstruction of the idea of *privilege;* in line with Freire's *conscientização,* if our consciousness is to be raised, we firstly need to be critical about what kind of reality we find ourselves in.

Critical consciousness raising and dialogue are central to Alison's work with students as well. The student-faculty pedagogical partnerships supported through the Students as Learners and Teachers program Alison facilitates have, from their advent, attempted to complicate traditional roles and responsibilities linked to different kinds of power and knowledge that students and faculty bring to pedagogical exploration and practice (Cook-Sather, 2002; Cook-Sather & Curl, 2016; Cook-Sather & Youens, 2007). Inspired to experience and analyze further the dynamic through which students and instructors are both learners and teachers, Alison took on the challenge of entirely co-creating an undergraduate education course, "Advocating Diversity in Higher Education," with a student

consultant in the planning stages and with the 20 students who enrolled in the course. This experience was at once destabilizing and empowering to everyone involved. It unsettled the traditional roles and responsibilities of both teacher and student, and it challenged everyone to empower themselves through actively co-creating the course. Such radical co-creation attempted to keep in play questions of power and the production of knowledge, and to mobilize everyone in the course to question, complicate, and redefine their roles and responsibilities in advocating diversity in higher education.

Both Victoria and Alison endeavor to be and invite their students to be "simultaneously teachers and students" (Freire, 1970, p. 53). Striving to create with students "moments when something can be created that is greater than the customary struggle between opposing elements or the separate voices of individual participants" (O'Hara, 1989, p. 31), they are engaged in the always-unfinished work, to evoke another of Freire's key ideas, of learning and becoming.

Thinking with Legitimacy (Madina Mohammad, secondary school student)

Writing from the perspective of a student, quite often authority can exist without much power, for example with teachers. Everyone at a school has a limited amount of power, and this is based on their legitimate power. In terms of students, they are able to pick the subjects they want to study (for example, in the GCSEs in the United Kingdom, we are able to pick four subjects), however it is also compulsory for us to do subjects such as religious studies, maths, and citizenship. In my opinion students don't possess authority and therefore lack legitimate power. For example, in terms of GCSEs, teachers have the authority to

dictate the subjects they want students to study. With regard to teachers and students, I believe they should have the same amount of voice (not implying teachers have more), however the amount of legitimate power teachers have can differ. Limited power is not a negative, however it must be the right amount of limited power. (This can differ in different contexts.)

Thinking with Habermas (Daniel C. Bishop, higher degree research candidate/lecturer and Susan Groundwater-Smith, researcher)

We write as Daniel, a principal lecturer in sport and exercise science and an educational doctorate student studying student voice in a higher education environment in the United Kingdom, and Susan, an honorary professor of education, long retired but with a passion for constituting student voice as a participatory force directed to authentic emancipatory practice in schools and other educational sites.

We draw lightly upon the work of Jurgen Habermas as a way of organizing our thinking on the potential for students to contribute to conversations about their learning and schooling. Habermas is an eminent German philosopher and sociologist and a leading thinker in the realm of critical theory. He has focused over many decades upon the ways in which a more democratic world has been constantly undermined by one governed by neoliberal mores and heavy-handed bureaucracies. Habermas provides us with social-scientific conceptual resources to consider various knowledge interests and their interaction with system worlds and life worlds.

For Habermas, *technical* knowledge interests serve to predict and control. In today's neoliberal climate, such technical knowledge interests have the

ascendancy. The relationship is a hierarchical one where the lecturer or class teacher holds the power, consulting student views. The notion is that students "speak" and provide their perspectives, and institutions and staff respond, standards rise, and attainment increases. Thus, under these auspices, eliciting student voice is evaluated according to the extent to which this engagement serves instrumental purposes; engaging with students as consultants works under the presumption that it will lead to more improved and efficient educational practices. However little attention is paid to explain the results, situations, or nuances of student feedback or to how and why practices have evolved.

Communicative knowledge interests are those that lead to informed social, mutual, and self-understanding. How and why have particular practices arisen in terms of consulting young people and engaging them actively in inquiry is a matter deserving investigation—perspectives have mutated and changed as the power of students to investigate and understand the conditions of their learning has developed and been nurtured. This form of knowing is naturally more democratic and encourages a level of free thought and speech, with the teacher/lecturer taking responsibility to guide the learner, informed by their knowledge of practice and research (Lovat, 2013). Such an approach is aligned to emancipatory manifestations of student voice. Staff and students share the power, discussing and negotiating what, how, and why things need to be altered to provide an improved teaching and learning experience.

Finally, *critical* knowledge interests aim to actively overcome and resist dogmatism, compulsion, and domination. We find this mode of working desirable

in its resistance to the impulse to only employ student voice in a celebratory mode. Habermas believes that critical or self-reflective knowing is where the only truly assured and totally comprehensive knowing occurs (Habermas, 1971). This form of reflection enables one to be free to think one's own thoughts; learners are provided with the confidence and power to be in control of their own knowing. To engage in praxis, the relationship between the teacher/lecturer and the learner moves towards power sharing, with the teacher transferring power to the student (Lovat, 2013).

These different approaches take on a different kind of relationship with the practice of education ranging from the "objective" to the "intimate," from the detached to the engaged. Each has a consequence for the ways in which power *over* and power *with* students will be exercised when it comes to eliciting their voices.

The concept of knowledge interests offers a useful framework, but this leaves unanswered the place of students in systems, where technical knowledge interests may render student voice a practice that reorients the student and teacher relationship toward that of consumer and service provider, with student voice becoming technical knowledge for instrumental ends.

For Habermas (1989), social situations should be interpreted as a result of the *interplay* of the forces of life worlds and system worlds (Luhmann, 1995; see also Schutz & Luckman, 1973). This interplay becomes interesting when we examine the place of engaging with students as active agents in the construction and evaluation of their conditions for learning. Habermas comprehends authentic

ways of knowing through critical reflection and engagement, or praxis, and has

the potential to challenge dominant notions of the student-teacher/lecturer

relationship (Habermas, 1989; Lovat, 2013).

By assembling these stances—knowledge interests, systems, and life

worlds—we can better apprehend the contrasting and often conflicting ways in

which the employment of student voice has evolved and developed in both

positive and less positive directions, especially in relation to the exercise of

power by those who may advocate for consulting children and young people. We

are left with several questions: Is it possible to be creative, daring, and

subversive in pragmatic systems where student voice is deployed for

instrumental purposes? How can we re-conceive and re-construct educational

institutions into critically knowledgeable, transformative learning sites?

Thinking with Labels (Megan Prior, secondary school student)

Power is everywhere. I believe it begins in school. It doesn't seem to come

from the grades we get in order to achieve the power in our further lives, but from

popularity, a hierarchy within school, the authority, the status or even looks that

people have which allows them to have the power. This can create power to

become superficial, as the power is coming from statuses or attractiveness not

the accomplishments—which can cause the wrong people to get into power. For

example, some voters allow the influence of looks of the party leaders in

parliament to choose who they vote for.

Power in society can also come from the label (Figure 2) the person is

born into, which gives them the power to influence the behaviour of others. Such

as the royal family. They have power which they have not attained throughout education or other accomplishments. Nowadays, in society, people who are the most influential are the people who maintain power through labels. However most celebrities rarely use their power for good causes.
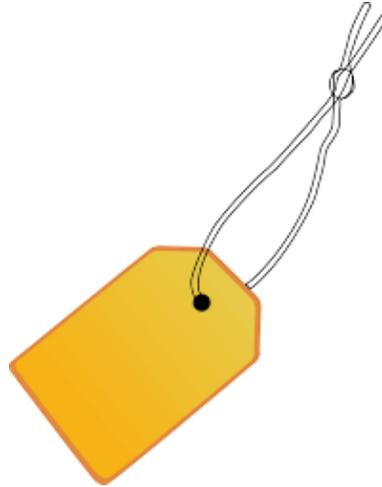

Figure 2. Label with string vector. By palomaironique, n.d. Public domain.

Thinking with Foucault (Emily Nelson and Jane McGregor, researchers)

In a field dominated by critical theory that examines structural views of power—meta-narratives and broad categories of race, gender, and social class—Foucault (the late French poststructuralist thinker) enables student voice researchers to re-focus any analysis of power as an analysis of *power as local solutions to local challenges, exploring microrelations* (Foucault, 1980). Foucault does not talk about power alone but about power *relations*, emphasising that power is a constellation of relational influences. Foucault focuses an analysis of power on *how power is done* by all social actors through the deployment of techniques and strategies at the micro level (Foucault, 1977).

These emergent processes and roles of association and negotiation may result in perpetual asymmetries (Foucault, 1988) such as teachers seeming more powerful than students and having access to greater institutional resources due to their position. However, the microphysics view allows the identification, and hence interrogation, of the factors mutually supporting and conditioning certain configurations of power in classrooms and schools (Foucault, 1980). These seemingly calcified configurations are continuously recursively made or challenged through social actors' interaction and resistance. This perspective contrasts to a binary and finite view of power as possessed by some and not others in a zero-sum game where some have to "lose" for others to "win" (Foucault, 1982).

A focus on how power is done assists with *analyzing ongoing power relations,* particularly once student access to educational debate, design, and decision making has been achieved, and student voice initiatives are underway. Foucault's techniques of power (1977) (highlighted in bold), formed into analytic constructs in the work of Gore (1995, 2002), throw up analytic questions such as:

- What **norms** are promoted here?

- What is **excluded**?

- How are bodies **distributed**, made and re-made by configuring practices and relations?

- Who and what is **individualized** and what is **totalized**?

- How are **surveillance**, potential surveillance, and **regulation** used to work for and against increased student influence?

Perhaps most importantly, Foucault opens up possibilities for Emily and Jane to look at how *power produces* as well as constrains (Foucault, 1977) in their research work. This process opens up a focus on how teachers who work toward student voice goals use their positional authority, discourse, identity, and pedagogy to elevate student status and influence in agendas normally shut off to students, and sometimes in ways counterintuitive to the democratic ideals of student voice. For example, in a recent classroom-based student voice project conducted by Emily (Nelson, 2014), one participating teacher invited her students to collaboratively analyze their perspectives on "effective home learning." However, in the student/teacher interaction data gathered, the teacher clearly dominated the talk in the classroom and directed student action. On the surface, this practice appeared paradoxical in terms of student voice. Initially, Emily, reading through a critical lens, built a picture of the ways in which the teacher was exerting social dominance (Van Dijk, 1993). In contrast, reading these data through a *productive* view of power illuminated how the teacher used her discourse (a power resource) to scaffold her students to work together as co-researchers, building their capacity to act in new, more agentic ways associated with the democratic ideals of student voice. Using the theorizing of Foucault enabled a more nuanced reading of how all social actors deploy power resources to generate new constellations of influence aligned with student voice ideals.

Thinking with the See-Saw (Krista Carson, higher degree research candidate/teacher)

As a child, I can remember playing on the see-saw (Figure 3) on my own, bouncing up and down aimlessly, not being able to raise myself very high

because an equal weight was needed on the other end. I would call my friends over to help me, but they would often pile onto the opposite end, causing me to hang, powerless, in the air. I couldn't get down until they slowly removed themselves, one at a time, or someone came to join me, righting the balance. This metaphor is fitting because I think about power in schools, and student voice work as well, as a see-saw—an imbalanced one, with more people on one end than the other.

Figure 3. See-saw. By Krista Carson.

In my own context, as a high-school teacher, I often feel like I'm trying to balance the see-saw by consulting pupils about my own practice, how they learn, and what they see as effective teaching and learning, while also ensuring that I meet the expectations of senior managers, exam boards, and external pressures like Ofsted.[ii] Despite my best efforts, I feel like it's a constant battle to stay level; I can empower students to comment on my *own* practice and work alongside me to achieve common aims, but who benefits from the end result? If it's only my *own* personal practice that improves, and the experiences of those few students

whom I teach, then I haven't really moved the see-saw at all. The real struggle comes with how to encourage other teachers to engage better with students and research. How do I get them to join me on a different part of the see-saw?

Part of the problem is encouraging teachers to value and not fear the opinion of young people. Perhaps some of that lies with me, as a teacher-researcher. Instead of waiting for others to join me on the see-saw, I can add weight to my own argument by disseminating and sharing my experiences and knowledge. By making educational research accessible and relevant to teachers, I think we can make real progress in getting more educators and students on board the "student voice" see-saw, creating the balance that's needed for everyone to enjoy the educational experience.

Thinking with Butler (Rebecca Webb, researcher)

I write as someone who was once a classroom teacher, more recently a PhD student, and currently a university lecturer (a teacher of post-graduate students of education) and a qualitative and ethnographic education researcher. I am interested especially in feminist and post-structural ideas that support me in thinking about the connections between the macro and micro workings of power, especially as these relate to gender. Post-structural concepts of power assume that power shifts and changes, and that different "ordinary" subjects can speak knowledgeably about the workings of power upon them, as exemplified beautifully in this collaborative article. Researching and writing in this way helps me to interrogate the workings of power in particular situations to suggest new

possibilities for thinking and acting to challenge established ways of doing things

we find difficult to notice or speak about or change in our everyday school and

classroom practices. For me, this means considering both the institutional power

of places such as schools and universities but also the way that such macro

power interlinks with the micro power of the individual body as she relates to, and

moves in concert with, other bodies in particular times and spaces, producing

particular ways of *being* and *doing* power.

   To help me think through such ideas I have drawn extensively upon the

writing of Judith Butler, who is a political philosopher especially interested in

gender theories. Butler works with an important concept that relates to power:

performativity. Performativity is about the way in which an individual subject is

both acted upon (by all that has gone before her) and acting (in the here and

now) in the world. Both being acted upon and acting occur simultaneously and

depend upon subtle shifts of power between the two. The agency of Butler's

subject is derived from her acting as she reproduces *and* contests the power

contexts into which she steps. This allows for the possibility of her doing things

differently to challenge power norms, what Butler calls a "purposive and

significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations" (Butler, 1992, p. 12).

Butler's performativity assumes that there isn't a sovereign subject who makes

choices of her own volition (even though she may feel that she is acting through

her own free will). Hence, Butler's performative and embodied subject is

"dependent upon structures and broader social worlds" (Butler, 2014, p. 8) but

not ever wholly determined by them.

In my own research, I write about the example of some junior-aged children in a primary school in England that champions children's rights in its pedagogies and practices (Webb, 2015; Webb & Crossouard, 2015). As an ethnographer, I observe that some boys seek ways in which to perform a particular masculinity to remain together in "a pack" and to create distance between themselves and the girls (and some other boys) as they move down corridors between their classroom and the school assembly hall. In the moment the boys are performing a group subject position of powerful young men. This performance of masculinity occurs here despite the fact that the pedagogic student voice principles constitute the children's rights policies and practices in the school. These policies and practices in the school aim to break down and challenge traditional binaries (between boys and girls in this instance) with their egalitarian ideals of power to "free" children from the tyranny of having to behave as "typical" gendered subjects. However, the boys manage their performative corridor practices with skill and panache: They configure themselves to re-form and intermingle with other girls and boys as they approach the hall where adult eyes are once again upon them. In so doing, they demonstrate that they are fully aware of the empowerment orthodoxy of children's rights which they are expected to perform. In this example these boys are caught between the power of the performative culture of masculinity and that of the children's rights discourse to challenge it.

Butler has been my "help-mate" in aiding my sensemaking of the intricacies of the performative power dynamics of gender norms in this children's

rights school which are part of broader social worlds beyond the school gates.

Her ideas, helpfully, complicate a too-straightforward reading of the possibilities

of student voice discourses in educational institutions and have encouraged me

to look for nuance and subtly in micro changes of power in the everyday, linked

to wider social structures.

Thinking with Pens (Lily Flashman, secondary school student)

I see power in education as different pens. The teachers would represent

a fountain pen (Figure 4), which produces stronger, more prominent ink, and the

students would be a common ballpoint pen (for the North Americans) or biro (for

those from the United Kingdom or Australia) (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Stipula fountain pen. By A. Litterio, 2011. Public domain.

Figure 5. Bic Cristal. By Trounce, 2008. Public domain.

Despite the differences in the ink and the pens themselves, both pens have the ability to write the same message. The content of the writing is no better from a fountain pen, yet it holds a certain sense of prestige. In education, the teacher walks in with an instant sense of authority over the pupils, but to earn absolute respect, his or her teaching must have substance and ingenuity. Without it, the teacher's power remains superficial. The teacher has the power to refine students into their best selves, so that one day they, too, will end up as a fountain pen that not only looks good on the outside, but writes with passion and quality.

Thinking with Smail (Colleen McLaughlin, researcher)

I write as a teacher, academic, therapeutic counselor, gardener, woman, manager in higher education, and colleague. My actions in all these spheres have been influenced by the work of David Smail, among others. Smail was a leading clinical psychologist who developed what he called a social-materialist psychology, which placed distress firmly in a material context, recognizing that our feelings, thoughts, and behavior are shaped by economic and social circumstances. His key ideas inform my understandings of what is occurring around me in every domain and also influence my planned attempts to shape the future. Center stage are the concepts of power, distress, and human wellbeing.

Smail argues that like plants, shaped by the soil, climate, and gardening care received, people are social and material beings. "We are all feeling bodies

in a social world" (Midlands Psychology Group, 2012, p. 93), and this is the most fundamental embodied aspect of our humanity. Distress and flourishing arise from the "outside inward" and are not the consequence of an inner weakness, defect or extra-human strength. "Our understanding and assessment of the world around us is mediated socially by the people and things we come into direct, bodily contact with" (Smail, 2005, p. 8).

So our interactions with everyone matter, as do our understandings and interpretations of others' actions and feeling, for we shape our social and material world. As a manager of a department and as a teacher, I am very focused upon using power in ways that create institutions, classrooms, and processes based on solidarity and collectivity. This is what Smail called the "loving use of power." This practice applies to child-adult relationships in particular. "Nothing will eradicate the disparity of power between adults and children and we might, rather than trying to get rid of it, attempt to find ways of using for good rather than ill" (Smail, 1987, p. 115).

How then to not wipe out the reality of the power difference? How can we keep boundaries that are helpful and do not enhance the difference? Smail argues for comradeship and friendship in professional contexts, not the professional distance of the skilled intervener. He argues for relationships characterized by "taking care." The two big influences are ordinary human compassion and understanding, and coincidence with social and material circumstances. These perspectives are far from the current constructions of the teacher or consultant as expert, skilled technician and detached. They also are

based on notions of trust between children and adults that have been undermined in our recent times. Notions of empathy, mutual accountability, and solidarity toward the stranger underpin them (Layton, 2009). These practices are not soft or unchallenging in action; they are demanding and counter to much which exists in current systems.

My experience is that, in recent times, there has been a successful transfer of responsibility and accountability to the individual, and that the power of the teacher or manager to affect the material and social conditions is limited. How to engage with these circumstances in a constructive way is the main challenge I am left with. In student voice work the key issues are the essential aspects of mutual understanding and solidarity toward young people and the parallel relations and responsibilities we also have to colleagues and institutions. We need to reconstitute and redefine notions of accountability to ones that are mutual and characterized by taking care; we need to shift from individual subjectivity to relational subjectivity in education and argue for schools and classrooms to be characterized by vulnerability and dependency (Layton, 2009).

Thinking with a Lighthouse (Emily Cowley, secondary school student)

As a student, I see power to have both negative and positive connotations, for it can be used to suppress and to intimidate, yet it can also be used to enlighten others and improve the world around us. The picture of the lighthouse (Figure 6) displays my metaphorical concept of power.

Figure 6. Lighthouse. By bykst, 2016. Public domain.

The lighthouse is the community, the business, the school; it is the collective group of people who are in immediate range and have possible access to this power. If we take the concept of school, the lighthouse would contain the students, the teachers, the cleaners, the senior staff, and in some cases the parents. The steps show the constraints of the system as students can only go in one direction and only learn in one specific way. The people mentioned above would then be "arranged" on the steps inside the lighthouse in order of power, with the students nearer the bottom as they often have less access to power and less influence (especially when trying to reach power alone rather than in a group). After years constricted in what they think, they don't try to ascend the stairs as staying on one step requires much less effort and hurts others less than stepping on them to reach the top does. The teachers and senior staff would be placed close to the top as they have more influence on the light bulb—the person who is in charge of the lighthouse, in this case the head teacher. The light that this bulb emits is the power of both the individual and the whole community.

Alternatively, the power could also be knowledge, with the ascension of both students and teachers being their progress to greater knowledge.

Power is also light. What comes to mind when you think of light? Happiness, an ability to see and an attraction? Then you are optimistic because light can also be blinding, damaging, and unreliable—like power. For instance, power can cause happiness; if you've worked for your entire life to become powerful, when you get there you're bound to be happy. Light allows you to see in the darkness, and a brighter bulb in a lighthouse allows you to see further into the ocean, just like a more powerful person will have a larger influence over the world. And if light is sight in darkness, then powerful people may be able to "see" themselves out of dark times. Light attracts people like a moth to a flame, so people will be attracted to the more powerful person (the brighter light) which would lead to more respect, dominance and career prowess as people who are even more powerful, "the owners of the lighthouse" are more likely to choose them.

For the pessimists, light can be blinding like power, which could lead to intimidation and suppression of those working below. It can also be damaging; lots of light leads to sleep deprivation, which could then lead to insanity, and power comes with problems and responsibilities that could keep you wide awake at night. Finally, light can be unreliable. Like a torch that flickers out when you need it most, powerful people can also abuse the power they have and disappear when they feel like it just because they can. But in a perfect world, shouldn't

power be like a penny pot where everyone can deposit and take from freely?

Then why haven't we, one of the most intelligent beings, on earth changed that?

Thinking with Spinoza (Eve Mayes, researcher)

As a person who has studied and taught in secondary and tertiary

institutions, I understand power as force, but also as capacity. I think about

power with the conceptual resources of Baruch Spinoza, a 17th-century Dutch-

Jewish philosopher, and with the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's reading of

Spinoza (Deleuze, 1988). For Spinoza, power manifests in two modes: as

potestas and *potentia.* The Latin word *potestas* is associated with power in its

fixed, forceful, formal, institutionalized mode, concerned with the formation of

subjects—students and teachers, for example (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 128-129;

Negri, 2004). Power as *potentia* is fluid and dynamic—formed in immanent (here-

and-now) relations, becoming perceptible in flashes, where a body's capacity to

act increases (Deleuze, 1988). To think about power is to question a body's

capacity—what *power* to affect and to be affected that the body *feels* in a

particular moment in time, in particular historical, material, textual, and affective

conditions that are continually changing.

Thinking about power in this way sharpens my analytic focus not only to

official institutional manifestations of power (such as the structures and roles that

determine who makes decisions in schools), but also to the immanent conditions

of, for example, a student voice meeting or a participatory research event.

Analyzing what is happening here-and-now in the student voice event, I replace

Deleuze and Guattari's word "body" for the word "voice":

> We know nothing about a [voice] until we know what it can do, in other
>
> words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition
>
> with other affects, with the affects of another [voice], either to destroy that
>
> [voice] or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions
>
> with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful [voice]. (Deleuze &
>
> Guattari, 1987, p. 257)

To think about how bodies, voices, and affects may enter into composition with each other, destroy or be destroyed, exchange or join together in particular school or research configurations expands analyses of power relations to include the flows of affect formed or deformed or re-forming in these configurations. *Affects* are intensities before and beyond human perception, distinguished from *emotions*, which are the labelling of these sensations in language. Rather than attempting to "neutralize" the feelings around power relations (an impossibility), the focus shifts towards examining how each part of a school or research configuration affects what happens and what is felt. What happens and what is felt, for example, when a student observes a teacher's class as a researcher, or when teachers and students talk about school in a small group configuration in a school staffroom, or when a group of students presents its research in the school hall to the whole school? These configurations may variously compound, destroy, conjoin, or compose bodies' capacity to act. And these capacities are not all felt uniformly—differentially-positioned bodies will feel the impacts of a school or research configuration differently.

To attend to these here-and-now moments and movements of power as *potentia* compels the student, the teacher, and the researcher to continually attend to micro-intensities: the subtle glances, noises, movements, and affects at work between bodies in a student voice event, thinking about how these micro-intensities work, and to analyze them in relation to the other conditions of the event: the location, the space, the time of day, the texts and resources used, other objects and matter, the temperature, the questions asked, who is present, and who is absent (Mayes, 2016). Each element, then, is crucial in the student voice encounter, to be evaluated through what is produced in and through the relation. Does this particular relation diminish or block the power to act, or does it increase a felt sense of power (the capacity to act, speak, listen, and live) (Deleuze, 1988)?

Discussion (Eve Mayes)

Theories of power are known and felt in their effects in the world. The students who have contributed to this article have eloquently described these effects for the numerical majority of bodies in schools (students): not given "authority" nor "legitimate power" (Madina Mohammad); access only to the "crumbs" left over (Shukria Bakhshi); with the potential for fear, "intimidation," and "suppression" (Emily Cowley).

Other contributors have worked with conceptual resources that diagnose and describe these power asymmetries: manifesting relations of domination (Freire, 1970), with technical knowledge interests seeking to control (Habermas,

1971, 1989). Thinking with Foucault, Emily Nelson and Jane McGregor argued that student voice work does not equalize or neutralize power relations, is accompanied by resistances, and is productive. Thinking with Smail, Butler and Spinoza, a number of the contributors entangled feeling, vulnerability, and capacity with analyses of power—as saturated in the learning or research encounter, and as affecting how power relations are apprehended and understood.

These conceptual and metaphorical tools used to think about power have consequences for what is seen, asked, felt, and done in student voice work in schools and research. A conceptual or metaphorical tool "co-produces the thinker" (Stengers, 2005, p. 195), attuning the researcher (whether positioned in the role of student, teacher, or academic) to note particular practices. The tools we use to think about power have consequences for who is included and who is not from student voice work in schools and research. The way we consequently think about power dynamically interrelates with what we notice and feel—what is found to be exciting, disturbing, confusing, or wonderful. How people "see" and "feel" power also shapes and is shaped by what he or she thinks is problematic in the "architectures of practice" (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) that the school embodies—the school's sayings, doings and relatings—and what he or she thinks needs to change.

The tools we use to think about power need to be attended to in student voice work. While these conceptual or metaphorical tools for power may be unacknowledged or invisible, they are visible in their effects. Researchers,

whether young or old, may deliberately think about and articulate what their conception of power does, or they may take these assumptions for granted. Yet, even student voice work that does not explicitly name a theory of power has implicit theories of power (for example, that power should be "equal" between adults and young people, and/or that hierarchical school relations marginalize students' voices). The educational sociologist Deborah Youdell (2006) argues that all research (including research done by students and with and by adults) is "theoretical," and that it is impossible for research to be only "descriptive" or "practical" (p. 60). We need to examine our common sense assumptions about power—to make them visible, in order to interrogate what they produce in our work.

In plugging in other visual images or conceptual resources, new ways of thinking/feeling/acting may be rendered possible. "Plugging in" is a phrase describing a process, borrowed from Jackson and Mazzei's writing about qualitative research (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2013). Jackson and Mazzei, in turn, borrow this phrase from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). For Jackson and Mazzei (2013), "ideas, fragments, theory, selves, sensations" are plugged in, with "ceaseless variations possible" then made possible for writing (p. 262). When different concepts are "plugged in" with particular data, different relationships are constituted among texts, creating new combinations, raising different questions, and foregrounding different relations. To "plug in" a theory or a concept is not to divide theory from praxis (see Taylor & Robinson, 2009, p. 163), but rather to illuminate how theory and practice "*constitute or make one another*" (Jackson &

Mazzei, 2013, p. 264, emphasis in original). The conceptual and metaphorical tools we use to think about power matter, and they are intertwined with differences in our school and research practices.

Questions for Further Consideration

The following questions are intended to be of use for individuals or groups to use in responding to the provocations of this article.

- Which theories/conceptions of power resonated with you in reading this article? Why?

- How can you refine or extend one of these theories/conceptions of power?

- How would you describe the habitual ways of thinking about power in educational institutions?

- Consider each conception of power discussed in his article. For each conception, consider its consequences for students, teachers, researchers, and schools.

- How do you understand the role of "student voice" in power relations in schools? Does student voice challenge, unsettle, and/or potentially reinforce or bolster particular power relations?

- Who is included and who is excluded when we have discussions about power relations and theories of power in schools?

Acknowledgments

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[i] The 2015 seminar was the fifth Cambridge Student Voice Seminar, designed to

be part of a month-long residence of Alison Cook-Sather, the Jean Rudduck

Visiting Scholar at the University of Cambridge, and organized, over the years,

by Julia Flutter (2011-2015), Helen Demetriou (2011), John Gray (2012-2015),

and Bethan Morgan (2011-2015).

[ii] Ofsted, which stands for the Office for Standards in Education, Children's

Services and Skills, is the United Kingdom's non-ministerial department that

inspects and regulates "services that care for children and young people, and

services providing education and skills for learners of all ages" (Ofsted, n.d.).