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Assessment and student participation: ‘Choice and voice’ in school principal accounts of schooling territories.

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Schooling territories are bounded spaces where policies, bodies, practices, and discourses meet and collide. It is well documented in assessment literature that students who are active decision-makers understand their learning processes and have the necessary wherewithal to access support across schooling spaces. These spaces are co-produced through interrelationships, where youth participation is associated with power, voice, democratic citizenship, legal entitlement, empowerment, motivation and self-confidence. Recognising the growing pedagogical emphasis on locating students as responsible for their own learning, we consider how assessment practices constitute enabling and constraining schooling territories. Assessment for learning (AfL) can be linked with emancipatory practices in schooling territories where learner agency is co-produced through socio-material classroom relations. We use principal comments to map a range of interrelated schooling territories as a relational cartography of spatialised practices and student participation in AfL. Mostly, these territories are teacher imagined and defined, constructed through schooling and policy frameworks, and determined through the use of student achievement and student voice data. These conceptualised schooling spaces are interrogated to consider the positionality of students within AfL related territories. While choice and participation may seem emancipatory, we reveal that AfL practices can serve a rarely acknowledged process of affirming territorial power.

Introduction

Networks of relations, technologies, policies and practices intersect in schooling sites to form territories. In this article pedagogical practices associated with schooling territories are examined in Aotearoa/ New Zealand schools. Our research question pertains to the role that Aotearoa /New

Zealand students take in AfL practices, within primary and secondary schooling territories described by a de-identified sample of school principals. The central problematic addresses youth participation in Assessment for Learning (AfL) practices. We defer to the following definition of AfL. “Assessment for Learning is part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning” (Klenowski, 2009, p. 264). Students are listed first to highlight the central place of learners in AfL relationships.

AfL operates at various levels of an educational system (Nortvedt, Santos & Pinto, 2015) and involves learners (students, teachers and school principals) using information gathered from a range of sources to enhance learning.

With its origins in research that mapped practices to raise student achievement (Crooks, 1988; Black & Wiliam, 1998), AfL is embedded across neoliberal and social justice discursive traditions. If educators are preparing learners with the skills, knowledges and attributes to meet the needs of an imagined society, then AfL practices in classrooms are influential. School principals in this research were asked, what role do students take in regard to AfL practices in their schools?. They commented on varying degrees of assessment related student participation (student voice being an emergent theme) which we drew upon to frame particular territories. “Choice and voice” have been associated with personalised practice, AfL and student empowerment in pedagogic relationships (Milliband, 2006, p. 21). In the Aotearoa/ New Zealand context, student voice has been linked with AfL and promoted as a vehicle to enhance student learning and improve schools (Nelson, 2015). While some of the principals’ comments appeared to offer ‘choice and voice’, we argue that in these circumstances territories can still remain clearly teacher owned and defined.

In this article, we use principal comments to map a range of interrelated schooling territories as a relational cartography of spatialised practices and student participation in AfL. We describe territories that are framed by pedagogic practices, peer feedback, student voice gathering and student and teacher engagement with policy frameworks. In examining these issues we assert that the following is foundational. Firstly, territories can be understood as a “political technology” (Elden, 2010, p. 801) and are a most fundamental aspect of socio-spatial organisation in schools. Within school territories, spatial practices are the routines and networks of everyday life that structure daily lives (Johnson, Chambers, Raghuram & Tincknell, 2004). Secondly, an analysis of territories enables us to unravel taken for granted spatial practices.

Schooling territories convey a blend of “meaning, power, and social space”

(Delaney, 2009, p. 196), and are produced through emergent interrelationships (Massey (2005). Therefore, schooling territories are socially bounded spaces where policies, bodies, practices, and discourses intertwine to produce particular politics. These are the politics of schooling practice architectures that involve the particular specific cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements in schools that can both enable and constrain teaching and learning practices (See Kemmis et al., 2014;) Petrie, 2016).

The appropriation and engagement with territories is a key aspect of targeted and managed schooling improvement for those interested in executing change in education. In acknowledging that there are changes in spatial, temporal, cultural, structural, communicative, social and semiotic practices (Thomson & Blackmore, 2006) in Aotearoa/New Zealand schools, we determined to investigate how school principals describe both the role of their students in AfL practices and the mobilisation of youth participation. Participation involves students in their own education in ways that increase their accountability and enhance their learning. There is literature to suggest a link between youth participation, learning and academic achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Learners can be active in using information to enhance learning and this can take place in both cyber and physical territorialised spaces. The research highlights the need for close consideration of student assessment capability, particularly as learning spaces become reconfigured to address the 21st century imaginary (Smardon, Charteris & Nelson, 2015). There have been a range of models depicting progressive levels of student participation in schooling (Hart, 1992, 2008; Lodge, 2005; [Mayes, 2017](#); Mitra, 2008; Shier, 2001) to date. This article offers a framework that extends this corpus of literature by enabling educators to consider the politics of relational spaces in schools that are influenced by assessment practices and how they afford and or constrain student participation. We bring together literature on youth participation, AfL, and student assessment capability in the theoretical framework to illustrate how schooling spaces are framed through the territorial structures of policy frameworks, informal assessment practices and their enactments by students, teachers, principals and wider communities.

AfL policies, processes and practices are elements that inter-relate and co-produce human relationality. We use the notion of territories as a concept method with which to read research data in order explore how youth participation and agency can be conceptualised in classroom and schooling learning relations by school principals. Agency is co-produced in the in-between spaces of policy frameworks, bodies, and objects and artefacts in classrooms (Charteris & Smardon, 2017). Territoriality, as a lens, has not

been previously applied to AfL although the positioning of learners has been widely addressed (Booth, Dixon, & Hill, 2016; Bourke, 2016). We operationalise these ideas in the second half of the paper when we analyse findings from school principal interview data to produce and discuss the relationality of AfL processes and their capacity to affirm particular territorial power structures.

Youth participation and assessment for learning

The notion of youth participation is embedded in the student power movement which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (Mager & Nowak, 2012) and informs the recent movement to include ‘student voice’ in schools (Charteris, 2014; Mitra, 2009; Nelson, 2014; Rudduck, 2007). While some studies point to students being provided with opportunities for participation and influence (Bourke, 2016; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2015), others reveal that there are insufficiencies pertaining to student participation and influence on approaches to teaching and taught curriculum content (Alerby & Bergmark, 2016).

Mitra, Serriere and Kirshner (2014) highlight that in European countries youth participation is mandated in curricula, testing and educational policy structures. However, they observe that youth participation practices are reluctantly implemented in many contexts, including the United Kingdom and Australia. Further, they highlight a damaging effect of evoking rhetoric with no accompanying action. “Tokenistic or symbolic youth participation can be damaging to young people, as the promise of voice without actually being heard can lead to increased alienation and disconnection from schooling...” (Mitra, Serriere, & Kirshner (2014, p. 293). This critique echoes the argument proposed by Fielding (2011), for educators to resist instrumentalist practices that “capture and control young people’s perspectives” (p. 65) as “demeaning trinkets of tokenism” (p. 62).

Improved learning outcomes target social justice imperatives as well as economic possibilities. The policy focus on AfL can be associated with the advanced capitalist drive to enhance human capital that features in policy documents linked with leveraging economic improvement (Sellar, 2015). Assessment for Learning can be aligned with learner agency (Charteris, 2014) that targets the neoliberal goal of producing self-managing students who go on to become ‘lifelong learners’ and contribute to the economy (OECD, 2008). Yet AfL has also been linked with dramatic improvement for low achieving students (Black and Wiliam, 1998). AfL can address emancipatory goals of supporting learners to develop the dispositional capacity to take action on a personal level for increased achievement. This achievement can be seen as an equity outcome and a social practice where learners assist each other to grow their skills, knowledge and disposition to learn. Klenowski highlights that, as students become more proficient in AfL

processes, there as an important territorial shift.

All AFL practices carried out by teachers (such as giving feedback, clarifying criteria, rich questioning) can eventually be ‘given away’ to students so that they take on these practices to help themselves, and one another, become autonomous learners. This should be a prime objective (Klenowski, 2009, p.264).

A focus on students as peer resources and “owners of their own learning” are also identified by Black & Wiliam (2009, p. 8) as important strategies for formative assessment. This active engagement of students with learning processes is a crucial aspect of assessment capability.

Assessment capability

In the New Zealand context of this research, AfL practices have not been split into a ‘for’ and ‘as’ learning (Earl, 2013). AfL is therefore aligned with its heritage of involving students in actions associated with student participation (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This dual focus requires assessment capability on the part of both students and teachers. Hence assessment capability involves teachers using “their curricula, pedagogical, and subject matter knowledge to notice, recognise, and respond to students’ learning needs as they arise” (Booth, Dixon & Hill, 2016, p. 5). Furthermore, teachers “make explicit and illustrate expected learning through their use of learning goals, criteria and exemplars; provide substantive and on-going opportunities for evaluative conversations; and encourage students to use this information to improve their work during its production” (Booth, Dixon & Hill, 2016, p. 7). However, when teachers follow a prescriptive approach to AfL, they can miss out on leveraging the benefits of assessment for learning through blending different elements together (James & Pedder, 2006; Marshall & Drummond, 2006). Flockton (2012, p. 129) signals the central importance of students’ assessment capability.

In placing students at the centre of assessment practice, the advice is consistent with the best of current thinking, including the ideas behind “assessment for learning”, the use of assessment feedback to enhance teaching and learning and professional learning designed to assist teachers to enhance their students’ assessment capabilities.

Notions of assessment capability, AfL and youth participation, are all elements that conjoin in, and are enacted through, assessment territories. This interrelationships between these elements and assessment territories which produce schooling practice architectures is an area requiring further research, a lacuna that this study speaks to.

Assessment territories

Participatory schooling spaces are co-produced through emergent schooling interrelationships (Massey, 2005). Therefore current changes in spatial,

temporal, cultural, structural, communicative, social and semiotic practices in schools (Thomson & Blackmore, 2006) open up further opportunities to rethink schooling territories. With pedagogy shifting to locate students as responsible for their own learning and teachers as “curators of learning experiences” (Imms, Cleveland & Fisher, 2016, p. 3), it is timely to consider how assessment practices and, in particular, AfL constitute schooling territories, if spatial practices are to be examined in this milieu.

Territories are bounded portions of relational space (dell’Agnese, 2013) that fuse meaning and power (Delaney, 2009). As relational space, territories can be theorised as conceptual, imaginative, linguistic/discursive and affective. Territories define “the spatial scope and limits of sovereignty, jurisdiction, administration, and citizenship” and are entangled in enactments of the “social” (Delaney 2009, p. 196). Deterritorialisation occurs when there is an interruption of the norm or a temporary break or shift in these boundaries (Strom & Martin, 2013). Schooling spaces are political territories where power and agency are fluidly produced and enacted. There are both subtle and overt struggles for sovereignty, ministrations of jurisdiction and administration, and fluid, socially negotiated relations that determine both social inclusion and ostracism.

While territory can be likened to the concept of boundary described by Akkerman and Bakker (2011) “as a sociocultural difference leading to discontinuity in action or interaction” (p. 132), for us in this article it evokes a political connotation. Territory is a socio-spatial concept that encompasses activities and choreographies rather than inert grids of easily traced relations. We draw from conceptual moves in human geography (Massey, 2005) and geophilosophy (Strom & Martin, 2013) that leverage the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to consider practices in education. This application will enable educational researchers to see schooling territories in a way that has not been addressed by sociocultural frameworks.

Assessment territories are spaces where the “sayings”, “doings” and “relatings” of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 30) that are associated with assessment are co-constituted. They are spaces where there is both confluence and disjuncture, where policies, practices, bodies – material and non-material elements - conjoin and collide. Learning (AfL), when seen as a complex choreography of these elements, is shaped by and mired in power relations (Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007). Learner agency is produced through AfL power relationships that are enacted in socio-material schooling territories. Territories reify power. When power is attributed to the territory itself, we see that the attention is deflected from the relationships, ideologies, and processes that underpin the maintenance of particular territories and their boundaries (Storey, 2013). Thus as Storey points out, the production of territories are embedded in the maintenance of, or resistance

to, the power enactments of dominant groups. Learning can therefore be perceived as “a cultural struggle for autonomy and self-determination” (Escobar, 2001, p.162) within and across the AfL territories.

Mapping the territories

The data we report in this article comprise a qualitative component of a case study which investigated practices that support student participation and assessment capability. We contacted all schools across New Zealand and invited them to participate in an online survey. A total of thirty-one of the one hundred and sixty-five principals who completed the survey responded to a request for a follow-up interview. In the study, undertaken in accordance with University ethics procedures, data from these school principals (who were given pseudonyms) were analysed to investigate how they conceptualised AfL territories and youth participation in their schooling contexts.

A particular question on youth participation was framed as follows: *What role do your students take in AfL practices in your school?*

The transcribed interview documents were imported into NVivo, a qualitative software program for data management and analysis. While we work with the voices of the principals in this article, we acknowledge the tenuousness of attributing truth to rational, individual humanist subjects, presenting voices as “present, stable, authentic, and self-reflective” (Mazzei, 2016, p. 152). There can be a flawed assumption in interview work that individuals convey consistent messages that are commensurate with stable subject positions. It is well established that a range of discourses and subject positions are evoked during interviews and it is a mistake to assume that there is an essentialised subject participant who “knows who she is, says what she means and means what she says” (MacLure, 2009, p. 104). By taking a tentative stance to the ‘truths’ conveyed and purveyed through interview based research, we endeavour to recognise how interactions and meaning are “a shifting carnival of ambiguous complexity, a moving feast of differences interrupting differences” (Scheurich, 1997, p. 66).

We elected to use AfL territories to inform our analytical framework, looking for bounded portions of relational space (dell’Agnese, 2013). This involved working between AfL concepts in the literature and our data to consider how relationalities associated with student participation were framed in the schooling spaces described by the principals. References to spaces in the schooling contexts became apparent to us in our analysis. Therefore, rather than analysing the text for discourses, or characterising particular thematic ideas from the principals’ comments, we elected to move to a more epistemological focus that investigated the spatial practices and territories evoked in the comments. The data was inductively coded in this way through the use of Nvivo. As an analytical tool, the concept of territory

illustrates the relational flows and spaces for participation in the schooling contexts described.

The following comments are drawn from 10 of the interviews and were selected on the basis that they best describe the politics of classroom territories and provide insight to a range of conceptualisations of student participation in AfL. The data below comprise an arrangement of principal voice through which territories are mapped and are included as illustrations intended to enable the reader to recognise and relate to the described territory. Table 1. Indicates each principal’s pseudonym, the type of school they are from and their location. The majority of respondents in the study were primary principals and the data informing this paper reflects this.

Table 1. Information about principal participants.

Pseudonym	Type of School	Location of School
Ben	primary	rural
Lynette	primary	urban
Jill	primary	regional
Trina	secondary	urban
Helen	primary	regional
Dana	primary	regional
Suzanne	primary	regional
Grant	primary	urban
Mark	primary	urban
Eliza	intermediate	urban

We offer a caveat that these excerpts from principal interviews do not convey particular truths about the research settings or that the principals can be categorised as interested in only one territory. In developing this methodological cartography we used the following question to guide us.

What territorial relations are highlighted in student roles identified by school principals’ discussion of AfL?

AfL is enacted in different ways to inform a range of purposes. During their interviews principals were asked to describe AfL practices in their schools and did so, describing AfL territories in a range of ways. Although they are articulated separately for clarity in this article, these territories overlap in

practice. We map the following territories (teacher defined, imagined deterritorialised, peer feedback, schooling framework, policy defined, student data defined, student voice determined, student co-determined) as described by the principals, using their words to illustrate the conception.

Teacher defined territory

Ben describes how teachers take the lead when working with students, to set and articulate their goals for them. The territory described is determined by the teacher and aimed to address a linear conception of ‘closing a gap’ (Sadler, 1989).

They [the students] are included when the teacher is talking with them and setting individual goals. Even in the classroom, they will sit there and they will say ‘This is where you are at’ and ‘here’s the next step, which you need to do’. They will give them a broad picture overlay of ‘this is where your learning for the next period is going to be’ and ‘this is what we are looking for’ and ‘this is what we expect you, at the end of that time, to be able to do’. So, a child is made clear of the goals and ambitions that they have. (Ben, primary principal)

Rather than describing how teachers can generate learning goals *with* their learners, Ben describes how goal-setting is something teachers do *for* students, thus controlling and defining the territory.

Imagined deterritorialised territory

The notion of deterritorialisation has its origins in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). It is a “temporary break of the stratification” (Strom & Martin, 2013, p. 222) and involves a “movement or process by which something escapes or departs from a given territory” (Patton, 2009, p. 190). An ‘imagined deterritorialised territory’ is a projected ideal. There were examples in the data, where principals were discussing their vision for other forms of practice which differed to the ones dominating their context.

Lynette imagines an ideal of different AfL practices in the school. She talks about deterritorialising classroom practices so that students are not ‘done to’ through assessment practices.

I’d say that at the moment they mainly have it ‘done to’ them. They do the test and they get given the results. There are little pockets around the school of students using rubrics but it’s still very much teacher focused. Teachers can release control of the process and trust that something they can do for students [is something] that they can get students to do. (Lynette, primary principal)

Lynette articulates a vision for student participation that she recognises is not presently the case in the school. She sees a shift in territorial positioning where learners can take up some of the decision making and responsibility in

classrooms. This deterritorialising process suggests a shift in teacher- student power relations and extends across the school community. Lynette continues, identifying student, teacher and parent education in the renegotiation of schooling territories. This departure from previous practice can take time in respect to the professional learning, and planning for AfL in teaching.

I think teachers and students and probably parents need quite a bit of support and understanding [of] what it would look like and that it wouldn't have to be the same for everyone... All of that is quite hard for teachers because it takes more time initially in terms of the way that they structure the learning so that it is something that students are able to do. (Lynette, primary principal))

This school principal articulated her desired future for students through a deterritorialisation of established practices within the schools. This deterritorialisation interrupts the practice norms and breaks with established boundaries that legitimate power relations.

Peer feedback territories

Jill describes how teachers 'give next steps' as a judicial authority and peers serve as advisors or tutors. While there is power sharing in the example below, there is still primacy attributed to teacher decision making and authority. The peer territory is scaffolded through questioning processes that the children become familiar with. Jill also mentioned that the younger children are provided with a questioning scaffold to aid their process.

[There is] a buddy system that we use quite widely within reading, maths and spelling, to peer support one another and help them, before the teacher conferences with them and gives next steps. So they follow a process of questions that they might ask their buddy to give more ideas for writing, to help them with spelling, to just assist one and other really... So, they may take on the role of a tutor with their buddy, and then they reverse it the other way. (Jill, primary principal))

This quotation highlights that although students are contributors and participants in this peer feedback territory, the teacher is responsible for clarifying or 'giving' next steps.

Schooling framework territories

AfL processes and their associated artefacts frame the relational flows in classrooms. Formal and informal assessment tools mark schooling and classroom territories. Trina describes cumulative pathways in which an assessment framework maps a schooling territory.

I think we do quite a bit of surveying them before we start teaching a topic -what do they already know about it? We do things like using

exit cards so when they leave the class [they respond to] 'what have you got out of today's lesson?' We use portfolios or reflective journals where they reflect on how they are progressing in their learning. Those would be some of the things that come to mind... We try to help them so that they're learning through the use of learning logs and learning journals, so that they can take some time to reflect on how they're learning and perhaps self-assessing... They're quite used to working with templates and scaffolding. (Trina, secondary principal))

Trina's examples suggest that students are provided with pathways. Processes (like systematic reflection and scaffolding) support students to understand their own learning experiences and determine how they will improve.

Policy defined territories

In the New Zealand context, there are Literacy Learning Progressions which provide an outline of a cumulative set of specific literacy knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are identified to support students to unlock the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2010). These Literacy Learning Progressions link with the New Zealand National Standards that map progression in both Literacy and Numeracy and are mandated in all schools. The National Standards

include using the broad levels of New Zealand's national curriculum to determine the standard of achievement that needs to be reached at the end of each year in reading, writing and mathematics and teachers [are] making 'Overall Teacher Judgements' against these levels based on a range of assessment tools and their own observations rather than using any particular national test. (Thrupp, 2013, p. 213)

While the New Zealand National Standards framework may be seen as a useful resource to aid teacher and student actions in assessment practice, they map a terrain of schooling governmentality and accountability. It is apparent that the progressions and other tools used to determine student achievement in respect to these prescribed levels mark assessment territories in schools. This framework acts upon the relational flows in schools and in turn is appropriated and modified. Helen describes how The NZ Literacy Learning Progressions are adapted by teachers in the school to provide specific guidelines for students at different stages. These progressions tie into the National Standards that the teachers are required to report against and for which the school is accountable.

For the literacy, for the writing, we are putting all of the criteria [NZ Literacy Progressions] for the four main years and the individual

years when they are between stages. We are putting those in 'kids-speak' on the computer. So the children know that for each piece of work that they are doing they need to do peer assessment or self-assessment or teacher assessment, one of those three, against those criteria that we put together and which are the National Standard Literacy Criteria. It's a work in progress... (Helen, primary principal)

These artefacts that are adaptations of national literacy resources mould the relations between student, peers and teachers. Helen acknowledges that students are accountable to the criteria.

They are a bit more accountable. They know where they are. They are very honest. They are extremely honest even when they're doing peer assessment. They give the other student some comments about what they need to work on next. They can see what they need to work on next. They know what their next goal is. So I think it's a lot better for the students. They know exactly where they are and what they have got to aim for by the end of the year. (Helen, primary principal)

The principals describe how policy, documented through steering documents, creates territorial parameters through choreographing teacher practice and influencing student enactments of AfL in classrooms.

Student data defined territories

The data define territories that underpin the relational flow between teacher and student and between the student and their family. The processes of moderation are passed over to the students – this opportunity and capacity to administer the territory indicates assessment capability.

Now I talked a little bit about the [Literacy] Learning Progressions that we use in New Zealand. The children are able to look at their data with their teacher. They are able to discuss their data. They are able to share that knowledge with their parents and with their families. And they're able to determine, with some guidance if they need it, where their next learning steps are, what they need to do, how they can get there... We do use a range of tools... We use e-asttle, the PATs, a whole raft of the New Zealand Maths tools. But also, it's all about what children are doing in the classroom and so we do a lot of moderation in the school, across the school to make sure that things are being consistent and the students do this as well. So, they look at the models as well. (Dana, primary principal)

The data in Dana's example are used by teachers and students to map where students are in their learning and report progress to parents. In providing a key focus, the data influences relations between teachers and between students and teachers. While there is a focus on assessment capability, it

could also be debated that data has the potential to regulate the relationships to such a degree that learner agency may be diminished.

Student voice determined territory

Assessment practice has been linked with voice as a capacity to articulate learning and achievement (Charteris & Smardon, 2015). Student voice is a tool employed to mark efficiencies in the territories. Suzanne describes how the territoriality constructed by student voice creates flows across the schooling assemblage- spanning children, school principal, board of trustees, families and teachers. This consultation provides cultural perspectives on the school from the community. The student comments inform teaching and suggest principal accountability to the students.

I consult with my year eights [who are] about to leave, my families who are Chinese and my recent immigrants and I ask them about what's working well for them in their rooms, how do they best learn and what tips do they have for their teachers? I share that information with the staff and I share it with all the trustees. So, students here know that we take that kind of consultation quite seriously and that there's a feedforward. We use that information to plan future teaching and learning experiences. It takes a bit of time, but it's absolutely fascinating what they have to share... They hold me to that actually. (Suzanne, primary principal)

Grant also holds himself to account through student voice. Student voice infiltrates the relational space of leadership as well as teaching territories.

Every kid in the school should be able to articulate their learning journey, where they've come from and where they're going to and we use goal-cards a lot with it, where the children can look and see where they're at. It's a big package really of what we expect from the kids. But that's been one of my own personal inquiry goals this year as I felt that the children had slipped off for a little bit, being able to talk about their learning. I was proved quite wrong because in the assessment for learning [professional development] contract, they interviewed a large number of kids about how they perceive their learning and asked them those questions, you know, where had you come from, where are you going to, how do you know you've got there, how do you know your next steps in learning? (Grant, primary principal)

In the conceptions of voice articulated above by Suzanne and Grant, students influence teacher territories, yet they are not co-producing the territories by directly influencing curricula.

Student co-determined territories

Eliza describes how curriculum is negotiated with students and how student territories interlink with teacher territories when teachers construct curricula

based on students' aspirational goals. In this way students determine what they are to learn in non-tokenistic ways. Curriculum and assessment territories can be negotiated through democratic institutional practices that draw from student voices.

Our school curriculum is negotiated with the kids. From their feedback around 'what was powerful learning?', and 'What is it that emerging adolescents need to learn?' ... The kids run their own class meetings and bring all that back and that's collated and then what we do is, we look at what we know about [Harmony Intermediate] kids from our data, what we know about emerging adolescents- you know those patterns around their needs. And then we use that to co-construct the school wide curriculum for the year -which is kind of usually like a big concept mapped out. But then every term within that [the staff] go back in teams to this 'Is what we thought the big concept was?' 'But what is it that our kids need to learn?' So, it's being planned in more depth to meet the kids' needs. (Eliza, intermediate principal)

Although there are policy defining documents that construct curriculum territories as mentioned previously, students can have influence by determining what and when they are learning. Student participation, for instance where group work arrangements are literally re-configured, can change the socio-spatial dynamics of a territory Mark describes how students define their own learning territories by opting into groups and determining the direction of their learning.

We have individual learning journeys for reading, writing, and math and they follow the learning progressions that the Ministry has and other people have put out. The children are able to see what their next step is and they can attend a tutorial or go to a structural group for that, then practice that particular thing. ... Their grouping can change because there is a group that's got a common interest or there might be a tutorial where -- someone says, 'Oh I'd love to know what square roots are?' and instead of saying 'We don't do square roots at this level', we'll run a tutorial for them so they can then understand the concept and then they may then take it a stage further. (Mark, primary principal)

The creation of schooling spaces, where students co-determine territories are vastly different to those where voice work is used a tool to mark efficiencies and perpetuate "power asymmetries" (Mayes et al., 2017, p. 31) in schooling territories. Although the practices of these territories are embedded in wider neoliberal structures, there are possibilities for 'deterritorialised curricula' and student agency, with space for decision-making that is uncoupled from an explicit managerial adult agenda.

The outline of spatial practices above illustrates ways that student territories, teacher territories, principal territories and policy territories are enacted and co-constituted through assessment for learning practices. In particular, we highlight the point that students play a diminished role in many of these territories, with their decision making and participation framed by the way that these relational spaces are constituted. We now expand on these territories further in the following discussion.

Examining territories

The territories that we have framed here all suggest varying degrees of student participation. In schools, data defined territories underpin relational flows between student and student, teacher and student and between the student and their family. The examples of policy and student data defined territories above, provide very linear and structured pathways for progression. However, we view that there is a risk that AfL can become formulaic when territorialised through an over reliance on tools (e.g. templates and exit cards) as regulatory artefacts. We suggest that there can be a reliance on teacher and policy maker designed trajectories and dependence on the linearity of guiding documents which has been characterised as a dichotomy between the “spirit” and “letter” of AfL (See Marshall & Drummond, 2006, p. 137) Marshall and Drummond (2006) describe the adaptive and creative adoption of formative assessment practice as the “spirit” of assessment for learning that evades “a simple application of rigid technique” (p. 137). They describe how lessons that are rule bound and static (Booth, Hill & Dixon, 2014) adhere strictly to the procedures, as those that adhere to the “letter” of AfL (p. 137) and are likely to lose the underlying spirit it is intended to embody. This focus on spirit implies a focus on the overarching goal of learner agency.

Student ‘choice’ appears to be emancipatory on the surface, yet rather than fostering agency, it is still teacher-defined territory and as such can be argued to fail to capture the spirit of AfL. Teachers’ and students’ use of tools and assessment artefacts can become technicist, with the resources provided for schools defining narrow pathways for practice. As a result, AfL becomes a process of affirming territorial power. We suggest that the influence of tools, frameworks, and progressions map pathways but they do not necessarily afford divergent assessment practice, nor enable student participation.

As highlighted through the analysis, schooling territories demonstrate a range of characteristics: teacher imagined and defined; constructions of both schooling and policy frameworks; and determined through achievement and voice data. Although there is much written about learner agency (Charteris, 2015) and the importance of student participation in learning relationships (Mayes, 2015; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2015), most of the AfL

territories identified by the school principals are predominantly framed by principal and teacher interpretations of learning pathways that are tightly guided by frameworks and policies. This finding reinforces how teachers and schools can be significantly restricted in their capability to enact “transformative voice initiatives, as they themselves are subject to increasing coercive forces that require regular displays of ‘quality’” (Pearce & Wood, 2016). Kemmis (2006) also makes a point about the tenuous positioning of practitioners who enact policy edicts.

Increasingly, states regulate the conduct of schooling through regimes of curriculum, assessment and pedagogical prescription that limit the reach and the grasp of the educational practice of educational professionals, making them the instruments of legislators and administrators. (p. 462)

Assessment procedures and processes are founded in skills that arguably address the needs of a neoliberal society that seeks to produce 21st century life-long learners. These are individuals who can learn, unlearn and relearn as required to serve as a convenient and fluid labour pool. It is helpful in this milieu to consider territoriality and in particular the social and/or psychological functions that it serves (Delaney, 2009). As Delaney (2009) points out, territoriality can be seen as a mechanism used to control resources maintain “efficiency”, “stability” and “security”, yet it can also channel attention to “the controllers” who “impose their will on others” (p. 198). The analysis of territoriality above assists us to identify the ways that structures are set in place to influence education outcomes of ‘consequential stakeholders’ (Groundwater-Smith, 2017). This examination of territories, speaks back to the invisibility of neoliberal reform discourse with its focus primarily on ‘functionality’ and the interests of the ‘controllers’ (Delaney, 2009). Assessment territories are created and sustained through the sayings, doings and relatings of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014). It is also through territoriality associated with assessment that ‘power asymmetries’ (Mayes et al., 2017) are created and sustained.

Therefore we note that there is scope for the increased involvement in what Nelson (2014) terms ‘governance partnerships’ but whether this is possible across all various school contexts is tenuous. Our data above suggests that the structures of territories provide arenas for learner agency, yet this agency can be constrained while it is simultaneously ‘imagined into being’ by principals. It is therefore relevant to consider the different sorts of assessment processes possible within co-produced schooling territories.

Student positioning and assessment capability

Conceptions of student voice **in the research data above** are mostly linked with ‘data driven’ practices that target teacher development and school improvement. Although Bella and Lynette talk about their aspirational desire

to give voice to students so they are not ‘done to’, Suzanne and Grant position students as informants for practitioner learning. We do not suggest that ‘informant’ is the only approach to student voice in the schools we contacted. However, this is a dominant feature in the school principals’ comments regarding the role of students in AfL practices.

Attention to possibilities for negotiating curricula, as described by Eliza and Mark, are integral to student co-determined processes. When students co-determine territory, they demonstrate complex forms of assessment capability. They articulate and negotiate classroom and cultural knowledges with one another to initiate the development and practices of assessment (Willis, Adie & Klenowski, 2013). We posit that a co-determined process encapsulates the ‘spirit’ of AfL (Marshall & Drummond, 2016) with its focus on learner agency.

When teachers follow the letter and focus exclusively on ‘closing the gap’, the co-produced aspect of assessment can be lost. The power and decision making capacity resides predominantly with the teacher, much as the power relation described by the principal Ben. In this instance, AfL can become a variation on continuous summative assessment. Torrance (2007) frames a critique that “transparency promotes instrumentalism” (p. 290). By tightly mapping curriculum pathways, we suggest that the ‘spirit of AfL’ (Marshall & Drummond, 2006) that celebrates and promotes learner agency as a form of student participation for innovation and ‘pedagogische’ can be reduced to learning as linear compliance. Thus the participation aspect of AfL, where students influence planning and curricula, as demonstrated in Eliza’s example above, can be interpreted as empowerment through goal setting and knowing how to identify and close gaps in learning. When seen in this light however, assessment can be enacted in ways that do not build learner capability and/or agency.

Agency and assessment for learning are key elements of future focused literature (Benade, 2015). We offer the following questions as foci for potential future investigations.

- How can policies, frameworks and progressions structure innovative territories?
- What are the relational dynamics of spaces where students co-determine assessment for learning?
- How can ‘voice’ enable students’ creative opportunities for participation that transcend instrumentalist forms of informant work?
- How can ‘voice’ enable creative opportunities for students to ask a range of pedagogical questions? (For instance ‘How do I know I am learning?’ ‘How do you (teachers) know I am learning?’ and ‘What do I need to do to improve my learning?’)

Implications and further research

Territoriality looks different from different theoretical or disciplinary perspectives (Delaney, 2009). As illustrated through our analysis of data, territories take a range of forms beyond the spatial and concrete. The physical territories where assessment practices take place vary greatly across schools (eg, the capturing of voice in a corridor or office or within student initiated groupings for peer work in a new generation learning environment (Imms, Cleveland & Fisher, 2016)), and thus materiality can influence the nature of the relations. Not only would territories look different if we had approached teachers, students or parents, but it would look different to us as researchers if we were immersed in the material spaces of the schools themselves, rather than talking with the school principals.

Investigations of territories as socio-material entanglements, where assessment practices are embodied, could prove a fruitful direction for further school based research. The links between student participation in assessment and different spatial layouts in classrooms could be further investigated. This focus could span variations from single cell rooms through to adaptive rebuilds and new purpose built designs. Through investigating discourses of territory and agency in principal interviews we emphasise that schooling spaces are not discourse-neutral. They serve to engender specific hierarchies and subject positions that can be hegemonic in nature.

The research has implications for teacher educators, programs of teacher education, pre-service teachers, school principals and teachers. Teacher education programs could be reviewed to consider how they support teacher candidates to thinking territorially. The questions above could be used by pre-service teachers on practicum to consider enactments of policies in schools and ways that students are variously positioned through the structures of different territories. For practitioners at all career stages, attending to territories could make visible unproblematised conceptions of student empowerment in assessment relationships. It could enable close investigation of the politics of power, voice and the notion of democratic citizenship in school settings. Careful consideration needs to be given to the positioning of students within AfL territories, as practices that appear to be participatory and undertaken *with* them, may in actuality be done *for* them or worse *without* them or *to* them.

Conclusion

It is well established that the global territory of assessment is bound up in discourses of national competition. International comparisons leverage the interests of advanced capitalism with countries comparing results in the form of global league tables. These comparisons have policy effects on nation states with responses like the commensurate testing initiatives filtering down into schools and affecting the nature of the day to day work of teachers and

students complementary national modes of testing (Hardy, 2015; Lingard, Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013). As Biesta (2015) points out, global assessment regimes “feed into a whole tradition that sees education through the metaphor of production and control” (Biesta, 2015, p. 356). This control metaphor seeps into the day-to-day practices of schools and can be seen in the territories that are constructed within schooling spaces. Particular consideration has been given to descriptions of the role of students in AfL practices in schooling contexts. With the emergence of digital spaces, and the reshaping of schooling and territories associated with the international drive to rethink the relational space of schools, it is timely to examine how AfL serves to both inform and construct territorial practices. We prompt that through an analysis of assessment territories, new generative and non-tokenistic forms of learner agency may be visioned.

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