Student Voice in the Mobile Phone Environment: A Grounded Theory Approach

Wajeeh Daher, Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education, Baqa, Israel

ABSTRACT

Student voice is recently attracting educational researchers’ attention for its influence on various aspects of student lives and futures, as well as social life in general. Mobile technologies are proliferating in social and practical life. This article studies student voice in carrying out outdoor activities with mobile phones. Thirty middle school students participated in outdoor activities related to real life phenomena with the mobile phone. The research results indicate that the teacher’s decisions and intentions to utilize the mobile technologies in the learning of mathematics outdoors set the stage for student voice in the mobile context. Furthermore, teacher support, the availability of the mobile phone and the outdoor activities facilitated student voice through enabling various students’ actions and interactions: Freedom, autonomy, equality, participation, collaboration, decision making, sharing of ideas and taking the responsibility of the teacher. The consequences of students’ learning in the outdoor mobile context included affective as well as social consequences.

KEYWORDS

Grounded Theory, Middle School, Mobile Phone, Student Voice

INTRODUCTION

Manefield, Collins, Moore, Mahar and Warne (2007) say that historically, the term ‘student voice’ ranges from a basic level to more sophisticated levels. At the basic level, the term refers to sharing opinions about solutions to problems through student councils or focus groups associated with school strategic planning. At a more sophisticated level, the term refers to sharing of ‘voice’ by collaborating with adults to improve educational outcomes, for example to improve teaching, curriculum and teacher-student relationships. Moreover, Education Alliance (2004) says that student voice implies a level of involvement, investment and engagement in school and learning. This is done through self-expression, feedback, opinion, choice, self-determination, representation, and empowerment (ibid). Some of the previous descriptions and categories are also expressed by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), where student voice is considered a broad term that describes students’ activities related to their expression, performance, and creativity. The term ‘student voice’ also refers to pedagogies in which students have the opportunity to influence decisions that shape their lives and those of their peers either in or outside of school settings (Mitra, 2009; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Influencing decisions was mentioned by Schneider (1996), to give students voice in the classroom. Schneider (ibid) also suggested, as ways to give students voice, taking the responsibility of the teacher, reflecting on mistakes, giving students opportunities to make choices and reflecting on outcomes.

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Student voice is also connected to participatory teaching (Grion, 2014) and to democracy in the school and the classroom (Fielding, 2012), where this democracy is represented in different forms of partnerships and interactions between the teacher and the students. These forms of interactions could be: Students as data source, students as active respondents, students as co-enquirers, students as knowledge creators; students as joint authors, and shared commitment to/responsibility for the common good.

Talking about student voice in learning mathematics in the classroom, researchers referred to students sharing their solution strategies, students providing assistance to other students, students building on other students’ thinking and students actively listening (Cao, Guo, Ding & Mok, 2013). Gallos Cronberg and Emanuelsson (2013) noted that the student’s voice could be mediated by access to mathematical activities. The present research attempts to study student voice in outdoor mathematical activities, when carrying out activities assisted by a mobile phone.

MOBILE LEARNING

UNESCO (2013) argues that mobile devices are most appropriate for learning and teaching due to students’ and teachers’ use of the mobile technologies in different contexts for various teaching and learning purposes. Tatar, Roschelle, Vahey and Penuel (2003) say that mobile learning promises access to applications that support learning anywhere, anytime, and that this type of learning supports both adults at the workplace and students in classroom learning. Attewell (2005) describes the affordances of mobile learning: engaging learners, encouraging independent and collaborative learning, enabling learners to remain more focused, promoting self-confidence, helping overcome resistance using ICT in learning and helping to improve literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover, Wang, Shen, Novak and Pan (2009) found that university students, as a result of using a mobile learning system, changed from passive to engaged learners who are behaviourally, intellectually, and emotionally involved in their learning. Furthermore, Hwang and Chang (2015) found that location-aware mobile learning with a competition strategy significantly improved the students’ learning identity, learning interest, and learning attitudes.

Regarding student voice in mobile learning, researchers suggest this learning to empower students (e.g., Liu, Navarrete, Maradiegue & Wivagg, 2014; Kim, Rueckert, Kim & Seo, 2013). Kim et al. (2013) point out that the use of mobile technologies in learning supports content through social communication, and thus this use empowers students’ participation in collaborative learning environments. This support will be ensured if teachers design effective mobile learning environments that engage students in personalized learning experiences with mobile technologies (ibid). Researchers also suggest mobile learning for helping special needs students, as well as helping improve learning products (e.g., Devecchi, Mintz, & March, 2009). Devecchi, Mintz and March (2009) argue that consulting children at the earlier stages of software development contributes not only to the children themselves but to software development too.

As for studying students’ voice in a technological environment in general, some attempts are being made recently (e.g., Grion & Manca, 2015). Moreover, DeWitt (2015) says that using technology, in the context of student voice, means the collaborative work of students and teachers, where students design their own learning, amplifying their voices in innovative ways.
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Mobile Apps in Open Educational Resources
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