Find Your Teacher Voice
Teaching can be lonely, but it doesn’t have to be.

Teachers are not meant to work and learn in isolation, but rather in collaboration with other professionals and peers. When teachers think about and practice ways to clearly express teacher voice—their educational values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, expertise, and cultural backgrounds—they are better able to work in synergy with other leaders, peers, and families (and themselves!).

“In education, teacher voice refers to the values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, expertise, and cultural backgrounds of the teachers working in a school, which extends to teacher unions, professional organizations, and other entities that advocate for teachers” (The Glossary of Education Reform 2013).

In most programs, teacher voice is not only welcomed, but it is also critical to the program’s success. Teachers use teacher voice to work in partnership with other colleagues in their everyday practice and as they participate in leadership opportunities in their school or program. For example, teachers use teacher voice to provide peer mentoring, make curriculum and instruction decisions, and contribute to program-wide activities, such as creating and offering family engagement opportunities.

Articulate teacher voice: Reflect, take note, and tell us!

The ability to articulate core educational teaching values and practices helps teachers to identify and clearly convey what it is they do and why. This requires a close look at one’s professional identity. For example, everything you do as an educator reflects your professional identity and what you value—your curriculum, activities, environments, communication strategies, schedules, and how you guide children’s behavior.

To articulate teacher voice, teachers can explore their pedagogical practice, or the ways in which they think about teaching and the practices and ideas they bring to teaching. Pedagogy, often called the art of teaching, is the teaching methods, approaches, instructions, and philosophies teachers use to teach and to help children learn.

“The term pedagogy refers to the holistic nature of early childhood educators’ professional practice (especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships), curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning” (Australian Department of Education and Training 2009).

Both teacher voice and pedagogy help educators to focus, formulate, and share ideas for professional involvement, growth, and improvement.
Explore your teacher voice—think about and answer the following:

- What are the specific things I value in my teaching practices?
- What influences my thinking and actions as a teacher, and can I articulate that for others?
- What are core practices that support my work as an educator?
- What am I passionate about and excited to share with others?
- What am I curious about?
- What is challenging for me?
- What skills, dispositions, and capabilities need refined or improved?
- What professional tools and resources do I value?
- In what ways can I build my pedagogical practice (ways of teaching and thinking about teaching)?

Commit to collaboration—Multiple voices make a team!

Teacher-voice is supported when there is a committed, collaborative spirit. “When trust is established and good relationships are formed, professional learning programs are often filled with excitement and idea sharing” (Lieberman et al. 2018).

Committed collaborations help to create space, time, and structure for teamwork and the sharing of conversations and ideas. Educators, programs, and schools benefit from taking steps to create environments that are ‘psychologically safe’ for creativity, experimentation, and risk-taking (Edmondson 2016). Edmondson goes on to say:

“Much has been written about the importance of creating team environments in which it’s ‘safe’ to volunteer crazy ideas, admit errors, and openly disagree without fear of ridicule or punishment. To create a climate that invites people to speak up, leaders commonly model the desired behaviors—being curious, acknowledging uncertainty, highlighting their own fallibility.”

Safe environments support discussions that may be challenging, such as conversations around differing points of view or uncertainties. Address differences, challenges, new ideas, and uncertainties by discussing them in a respectful manner, such as using judgment-free, active listening. Commit to listen and learn from the other person’s point of view and to reflect on and question any assumptions you may have.
Teacher voice is part of a larger purpose that includes the school/program, community, students, families, and other professional peers. The inclusion of multiple voices makes up the culture of the program. “A fundamental requirement of any profession is that the people working within it view themselves as professionals and share a professional identity that includes commonly held values and ways of thinking about their work and the world” (Mead 2018).

How do you share teacher voice?
We can’t wait to hear! Share your teacher voice ideas, values, and opinions! What are you most passionate about and energized to share with others? Email betterkidcare@psu.edu with “Teacher Voice” in the subject line.

References


