**Student Voice in Adult and Further Education:**

**A Charter for Listening, Speaking, Responding**

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Upend the rain stick and what happens next
Is a music that you never would have known
To listen for. In a cactus stalk

Downpour, sluice-rush, spillage and backwash
Come flowing through. You stand there like a pipe
Being played by water, you shake it again lightly

And diminuendo runs through all its scales
Like a gutter stopping trickling. And now here comes
A sprinkle of drops out of the freshened leaves,

Then subtle little wets off grass and daisies;
Then glitter-drizzle, almost breaths of air.
Upend the stick again. What happens next

Is undiminished for having happened once,
Twice, ten, a thousand times before.
Who cares if all the music that transpires

Is the fall of grit or dry seeds through a cactus?
You are like a rich man entering heaven
Through the ear of a raindrop. Listen now again.

— Seamus Heaney, from [The Spirit Level](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0374525110/ref%3Das_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0374525110&linkCode=as2&tag=tweetpoetr-20&linkId=SXR7LHUOSTG36UZI)

On two other totally unrelated projects I have come across the work of Laura Lundy who works at Queens University Belfast. These ideas were utilized in a recent consultation process in the Greek learning City project in Larissa, Greece.

Her work includes childrens’ voices based on implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is interesting to think through the implications of a rights based approach to hearing and listing to the voices of children and in adult education we can ‘steal’ two aspects of this approach:

1. the idea of a rights based approach to listening to student voice.
2. The interesting possibility of adapting this approach from working with children to working with adults.

I have borrowed heavily from Lundy’s work for this moment as it seems to have useful ways of looking at a Charter for Adult Voice or at least a framework for moving forward.

Leah has also mined these ideas in her recent paper for the Expert Panel advising AONTAS on its project with SOLAS that is listening to student voice in Ireland’s Adult and Further Education sector.

**What elements (these or others) should become part of a Charter for Student Voice – which is the task of this workshop?.....Try this suggestion as a framework.** Though these are borrowed headings they are a good set of concepts on which to begin to flesh out a charter.

**SPACE** Safe, inclusive, space to form and express opinions and needs

 Where are the safe spaces? How are they created, supported?

 Adult educators do it all the time!

**VOICE** Expression. Speaking as individuals and in groups.

 What forms of expression are encouraged….speaking, writing, drawing, painting,

 movement, etc.

**AUDIENCE** Who is Listening? What process communicates views?

 Do they have authority to carry the message forward?

 Does the listener make decisions?

**INFLUENCE** Acted on and the response must be resourced and funded.

 Were the views considered properly by those in power to reply?

 Are there procedures in place to ensure the views have been taken seriously?

 Is feedback given to show the way the views have been taken into

 account and give reasons for the decision that are made and show

 how views have been taken into account.

**POWER SHARING** These ideas when implemented and thought through amount to a reconstruction of the relationship between the learner and the provider (whether the local Education and Training Board or SOLAS).

Again I am reminded of Heaney’s poem on ‘Mint’ that grows in the garden neglected:

Let the smells of mint go heady and defenceless
Like inmates liberated in that yard.
Like the disregarded ones we turned against
Because we'd failed them by our disregard.