


12-2017

Student Voice Initiative: Exploring Implementation Strategies

Blaine G. Alexander

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

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Student Voice Initiative: Exploring Implementation Strategies

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Adult and Lifelong Learning

by

Blaine G. Alexander
Harding University
Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education, 1987
Harding University
Master of Education in Educational Leadership, 1991

December 2017
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

Dr. Kit Kacirek
Committee Chair

Dr. Kenda Grover
Committee Member

Dr. Theres Stiefer
Committee Member

Abstract

Student voice is the process of allowing students to work collaboratively with adults to produce a learning culture that is conducive for optimum growth in every student. In a traditional setting, the adults make the decisions and the students are passive observers in the learning process. Data has shown that this traditional culture is not advantageous to student learning for all students. Research has shown that students are seven times more academically motivated when they have the opportunity to have a voice in their personal learning process (Quaglia, 2016).

This case study centered on the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative. The focus of this study was to determine what factors, elements, or components need to be in place for student voice to flourish as well as how student voice creates a positive impact in school culture. The coding revealed the emergence of nine themes: 1) leadership support, 2) time for implementation, 3) buy-in from teachers, 4) teacher training, 5) school procedural impact, 6) student / teacher relationships, 7) student leadership, 8) student-teacher collaboration, and 9) student learning.

Acknowledgements

Family, friends and colleagues supported me over the past four years when I began this journey, and without their support, this degree would not have been possible.

Most of all, I want to acknowledge and thank my wife, Christie. She sacrificed quality time, family vacations, movie nights, and endured days of being alone while I worked on this degree. I would like to thank her for always sacrificing with a smile and an encouraging word. She spent years walking around the clutter in my office, so now I will have the time to clean it up myself. Christie is my number one cheerleader and supporter when I would question why I was going through this process. Without her support and encouragement, this dissertation would not have been possible.

I want to acknowledge and thank my very first teachers in life, my parents, Wallace and Dolores Alexander. My parents taught me that who you are is more important than what you do. They taught me the importance of education, but they also taught me that people are more important than the number of letters behind your name. When this task became daunting, my upbringing reminded me that my life is more than the sum of its parts. They have always encouraged me to set my goals high, and achieving this degree has been one of my greatest life goals. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for your continual encouragement.

Thank you to my two older brothers, Brian and Brent (and their families), who have always been role models and examples to me. Their encouragement and support has not gone unnoticed.

To my son, Carson, thank you for always asking me, “when are you going to be finished with that degree?” This seemingly lighthearted question always motivated me to finish the work I started to make him proud.

Thank you to my dissertation committee, which is comprised of three wonderful and intelligent women whom I am also fortunate to call my friends. Thank you, Dr. Kit Kacirek for your continual support, guidance and encouragement. After our initial meeting when I was debating which program to begin, and after meeting you, I knew in my heart that this program would prepare me for my professional future. You spent so much time showing interest in my progress, but those conversations always followed conversations about my life outside of schoolwork. I will always consider you a role model and friend. Dr. Kenda Grover, I do not know where to begin. During my first semester, I decided that I may not continue to pursue this degree, and your encouraging words to me in a phone call are why I am writing this page today. I did not know you well at the time, but because of your belief in me, I have always admired and considered you a friend. Dr. Theres Stiefer, thank you for making learning so relevant. You were always encouraging when we had questions about the dissertation, and you would always tell us, “You can do it.” Thank you to all three of you for making learning the focus and not “jumping through hoops” that you created. I have learned so much from all of you, and I look forward to a celebratory dinner in the near future.

To Lindsey Dunstedter, my editor, thank you for the many hours you dedicated to review my work. Your suggestions for improvement made me a better writer, and I thank you. I appreciate you for showing interest in my study by asking informative questions about student voice.

To Amber Bass, my technology savvy friend, thank you for the support and the many hours of help when I had technology questions. Any time I needed help or had a question, you were never hesitant to make time for me. I appreciate you.

I want to thank the other students in my Adult and Lifelong Learning (ADLL) cohort who become my family. Over the years, we worked collaboratively to support each other and made a pact that all of us would complete this process. Thank you for your encouragement and friendship.

To the participants of this study, I thank you for giving up so much of your time in order to meet with me. Our meeting times would inevitably coincide with a busy school day, but you always made time for me. This study is the work you do every day; I was just fortunate enough to be the one to write about it.

Without the school administrators in Mississippi County, Arkansas, the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative would not be possible. In year one, a grant covered the cost for the initiative, but in year two, the school districts had to provide funding for the training. The superintendents and principals in Mississippi County agreed to fund this project because they were witnessing the positive affects occurring in their schools. Thank you to all of the school administrators in Mississippi County for your encouragement to the students, the adult leaders, and your support of the program.

I want to send a special acknowledgement to Mrs. Sherry Bennett, the Director of the Technical Center at Arkansas Northeastern College who had the vision to bring the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative to Mississippi County, Arkansas. Without your vision, this study would not have been possible. Thank you for caring so much about the schools in northeast Arkansas.

Most of all, I thank God for giving me the time, the health, and the ability to pursue a dream of mine. I pray that my life will always reflect you in all that I do.

Dedication

This dissertation process has been the most challenging, yet most rewarding educational process of my life. I was instructed to choose a topic for which I had passion, and the topic of “student voice” fits the criteria.

This dissertation is dedicated to the adults and students who attended the monthly training of the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative where this case study was conducted. The time spent with these wonderful educators and students each month, and the enthusiasm, perseverance, and passion they developed for student voice encouraged me to grow. Many of our meetings occur after they have been in school for eight hours, yet they always showed up ready to learn more about how they can improve and influence change in their schools. Their commitment is inspiring.

I am excited about observing the positive differences these adults and students are going to make in the schools in Mississippi County. I strongly believe the public schools in Mississippi County, Arkansas will soon become the models for student voice in Arkansas, and it will be due to the dedication and commitment of these educators and students. The positive difference made in your public schools will have an effect for generations. To these educators and students, this study is dedicated to you.

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Chapter One

Introduction

According to Klem and Connell (2004, p. 262), “by high school as many as 40% to 60% of students become chronically disengaged from school – urban, suburban, and rural – not counting those students who have already dropped out.” The National Center for Educational Statistics reports one in five high school students drop out of school before the twelfth grade with school climate being one of the chief factors (Jia, Konold, & Cornell, 2015). Public schools are not meeting the needs of 20% of students at a level in which these students make the choice to give up on their formal education. Academic achievement and school attendance are the two major variables causing students to drop out of school (Christie, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007). These two factors can be positively influenced by creating a learning culture that is student focused. Attendance – or cutting class – is the first step to dropping out of school (Fallis & Opotow, 2003). The authors suggest that schools discontinue punitive approaches to student issues and begin taking students' concerns seriously and working collaboratively with students. Each of these factors reported in the research is a piece of the learning environment provided to students in public schools.

During the 2015-16 school year, the Quaglia Institute of Student Voice and Aspirations conducted a student satisfaction survey to 60,342 students in grades 3-12 in fourteen states. The same survey was conducted to teachers in the same states with 4,021 teachers responding. The researchers found that only 38% of the students mentioned that their classes prepare them for everyday life, while only 49% of the students reported that they enjoy being at school. One in five teachers (19%) shared that they do not enjoy working at their school. Forty-three percent (43%) of the students did not find school to be inspiring, and surprisingly, over one-third of the

teachers (36%) mentioned that the learning environment in their school was exciting, dynamic, and creative (Quaglia, 2016).

Cultural differences can complicate the educational process. Twenty percent (20%) of students in public schools are children of immigrants and 10.3% of students in public schools are English Language Learners where English is not spoken in the home (O'Brien, 2011). A school with a minority population is five times more likely to have a weak promoting power than a school with a majority white population, and 46% of Black students and 39% of Hispanic students attend a school where graduation is not the norm (Christie, et.al, 2007). These data reflect that many public schools are not personalizing learning or differentiating the learning to meet the needs of all students. Building a relationship with students and engaging them in conversation and the work will create a foundation for student progress. Brown (2014), states, "Selling resilience to children of any socio-economic level cannot be taken lightly. Engaging students in conversations about their interests, and connecting these conversations to school work will make a difference" (p. 31).

Strategies to Improve Public Schools (School Reform)

An organizational culture is "not a problem that needs to be solved, but a framework that a group of people can use to solve problems" (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 6). "What youth cannot do on their own is create the climate and conditions that will permit them to take participatory roles in a society on a wide-spread scale. This is the challenge and the task of the adult world," (Cervone & Cushman, 2002, p. 83). Conditions for creating student success include high expectations in academics and conduct for all students, meaningful curriculum, engagement between teachers and students, personalized student learning and positive student-teacher relationships (Klem & Connell, 2004).

This study addresses the implementation of student voice in public schools which is based on strong student-teacher relationships and student engagement. Building a culture where these components are prevalent will create schools where the objective is to educate every student within a collaborative culture.

Student-Teacher Relationships

Teachers interact with students on a daily basis, and next to parents or guardians, have the greatest opportunity to build a supporting relationship with them. Much research confirms a student's perspective on the strength of the student-teacher relationship has a direct impact on achievement motivation and academic performance (Madill, Gest, Scott, & Rodkin, 2014). Dewitt (2015) cites the research by John Hattie, a researcher and trainer for *Visual Learning*. In 2011, Hattie conducted the largest meta-analysis ever completed in education, and his conclusion shares eight areas that matter the most in improving student learning. He ranked 138 factors that are related to learning outcomes from very positive factors to very negative factors. He concluded that an effect size of .40 was the "average" effect size and anything above this would be a positive effect. From his conclusion, a positive student-teacher relationship has an effect size of .72, meaning that this factor has a massive effect on student learning (DeWitt, 2015).

A classroom reflecting strong and positive relationships is a "place where students and teachers care about and support each other, where individual needs are satisfied within a group setting, and where members feel a sense of belonging and identification with the group" (Ellerbrock, Abbas, DiCicco, Denmon, Sabella, & Hart, 2015). According to Cooper and Mines (2014) positive student-teacher relationships are the foundation for academic outcomes. The authors go on to describe such positive relationships as the "glue that binds teachers and students together and makes life in classrooms meaningful" (p. 267). Wilkins (2014) notes positive and

supporting relationships between students and teachers is associated with student motivation, academic achievement, high rates of attendance, and attitudes toward school.

Addressing the concept of student voice, the relationship between teachers and students is critical in the development of a learning culture where student voice and teacher-student collaboration are present (Mitra, Serriere, & Stoicovy, 2012). More research about student-teacher relationships in the context of student voice is shared in chapter two of this study.

Student Engagement

To begin the process of creating a culture based on student voice, not only is a strong and positive relationship between student and teacher vital, but the next step is creating conversation and engagement strategies among students and teachers. Students who experience student-teacher interactions within a culture of teacher support and low conflict experience gains in achievement (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008).

Klem and Connell (2004) define student “engagement” by measuring two types of student engagement. Ongoing engagement refers to student behaviors, emotions, and thought processes through the day. Behavioral engagement includes work ethic, time, tendency to stay on task and initiative when given a task. Engaged learners go beyond the given task and explore new strategies. Jackson and Zmuda (2014) describe engaged learners as those who take risks, asks many questions, think “outside the box”, and share their thoughts unprompted. Corso, Bundick, Quaglia, and Haywood (2013) define student engagement by breaking it into three parts. *Engaged in thought* is the psychological investment in the learning and the desire to master the academic material. *Engaged in feeling* refers to emotions and how the student feels about relationships, belonging and connectedness and is usually accompanied with confidence in academic abilities. *Engaged in action* refers to those behaviors focusing on learning and

academic tasks. Engaged in action is evident by behaviors such as obeying rules, turning in work and being on time.

The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2004) reports that the more students are engaged in their school work, the more likely they will perform well academically, obtain higher scores on standardized tests, be less likely to dropout, are more likely to attend college and have a greater sense of well-being (Corso et.al, 2013). The literature contends students have the opportunity to provide input because they will feel more respected, have greater control of the pace of learning and teaching, and will have a more positive attitude about learning (Scanlon, 2012).

Student Voice

Traditionally, student views and opinions are discounted as having less legitimacy than the views of adults, but as attitudes toward students and young people change, different views have arisen associated with these changes (Manefield et al.). “Student voice” discussion is increasing in the school reform literature as a potential for improving student outcomes and school restructuring to involve student input (Mitra, 2004). As student voice becomes defined, the meaning does not merely suggest that students have the opportunity to communicate ideas and opinions, but also have the power to influence change (West, 2004). Fletcher (2005) describes student voice as “validating and authorizing students to represent their own ideas, opinions, knowledge and experiences throughout education in order to improve our schools” (p. 5). Students become active participants in their education, including making decisions about what and how they learn and how their learning is assessed. Often described as “student-teacher partnerships,” student voice is defined by Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014, p. 6) as a “collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to

contribute equally, although not in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis.” Mitra (2009) defines these student-teacher partnerships as “relationships in which both youth and adults have the potential to contribute to decision making processes, to learn from one another, and to promote change.” Mitra (2009, p. 409) suggests that “providing youth the opportunity to participate in school decision making that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers, and increasing student voice in schools offers a way to re-engage students in the school community.” Such meaningful partnerships have four essential qualities: 1) trust and respect, 2) shared power, 3) shared risks, and 4) shared learning. These qualities will allow a student-adult partnership to cultivate and increase the possibility for collaboration (Cook-Sather et al, 2014). Although student voice is defined multiple ways, for the purpose of this study, student voice will be defined as “students having a legitimate perspective, presence and active role in the education process.” (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Statement of the Issue

The dynamics of public schools traditionally reflect the model in which adult educators create, design and lead the educational journey for the students in the school. Adults make the majority of decisions based on what is determined paramount through the adult perspective. Educators have struggled with strategies to improve schools, so decisions have been made to increase accountability, raise standards, and assess students more often. Smyth (2006) believes there is little doubt from research that emphasis on accountability, standards, measurement, and high stakes testing made great strides in improving public schools.

Teacher behavior influences students’ perceptions of their interactions with teachers (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Established teacher behaviors that must be present for student

success is the ability to listen to students and allow students to help shape their own educational journey. One of the greatest barriers to student voice is the willingness of adults to listen to things they do not want to hear and even more difficult for adults to learn from voices they do not want to hear from (Cook-Sather, 2006). The first step to increasing student voice is “being heard” – teachers taking the time to listen to students (Mitra & Gross, 2009). “Research seeking student perspective on educational change efforts indicates that giving students a voice in reform conversations reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate without this partnership” (p. 523).

Blad (2015) reports students who are involved in conversations about their educational journey are more likely to be academically successful. Dr. Russ Quaglia, of the Quaglia Institute of Student Aspirations (QISA), conducted the national My Voice survey to 56,877 students in grades 6-12. The survey questions addressed the 8 conditions that make a difference in schools: 1) belonging, 2) heroes, 3) sense of accomplishment, 4) fun and excitement, 5) curiosity and creativity, 6) spirit of adventure, 7) leadership and responsibility and 8) confidence to take action (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). The authors found only 46% of the students feel they have a voice in making decisions about their learning, and only 52% of the students feel teachers are willing to listen to students (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). Students who are given a voice are seven times more likely to be academically motivated than students who are not given a voice (Quaglia, 2016).

There is significant research on student motivation, student engagement and collaborative relationships, yet limited information has been published about the impact on adult learners who participate in student voice initiatives and the factors that must be in place for student voice to become the norm in a school culture. This case study will focus on the factors that were

instrumental in generating these conversations and implementing student voice strategies at the school sites and how student voice initiatives influence change within a school setting.

Student engagement (students actively participating in the learning process) and student voice (students sharing how they learn better) is elusive in the vast majority of traditional and bureaucratic school cultures (Klem, et al). During the 2015-16 school year, the National Center for Student Aspirations (NCSA) surveyed more than 50,000 students and concluded 90% of students feel like teachers are concerned about their academic growth, but only 40% believe their teachers care about their personal and social problems (Quaglia, 2000). The perception that teachers seem to care more about the students' academic growth reflects the national trend of educational reform, which stresses standards, assessment, and accountability (Quaglia, 2000).

Problem Statement

Educators have struggled with strategies to improve schools, so decisions have been made to increase accountability, raise standards, and assess students more often. Smyth (2006) believes there is little doubt from research that emphasis on accountability, standards, measurement, and high stakes testing made great strides in improving public schools.

It is well documented that teacher behavior influences students' perceptions of their interactions with teachers (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Established teacher behaviors that must be present for student success is the ability to listen to students and allow students to help shape their own educational journey. One of the greatest barriers to student voice is the willingness of adults to listen to things they do not want to hear and even more difficult for adults to learn from voices they do not want to hear from (Cook-Sather, 2006).

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Purpose of the Study

While there is literature that discusses the benefits of student voice initiatives in public schools, few studies have investigated the strategies that support the implementation and institutionalization of those initiatives. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that stimulate institutionalization of student voice within three diverse school districts. More specifically, this case study will examine three diverse school districts in Mississippi County, Arkansas where student voice initiatives have been implemented. For the purpose of this research, student voice will be defined as “students having a legitimate perspective, presence, and active role in the education process.” (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Research Question

This case study is designed to understand the following: What stimulates the institutionalization of student voice within a school setting?

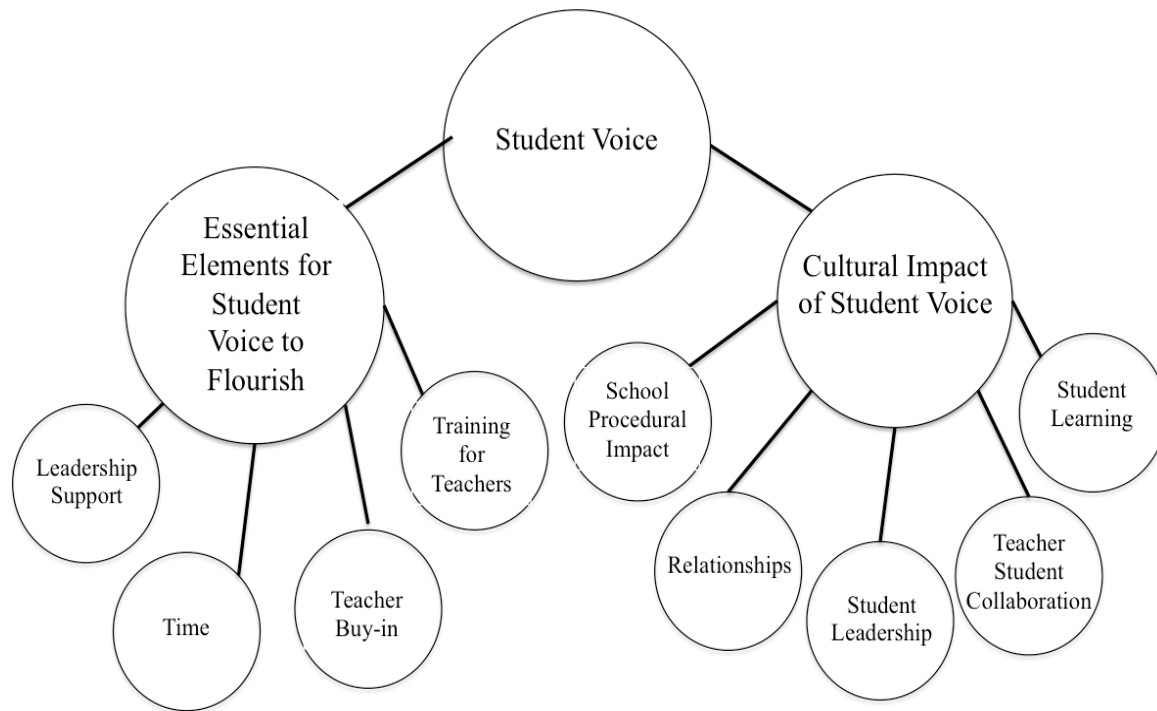
Sub Questions

Because school culture is pivotal to the implementation of student voice, the following sub questions are integral to the study.

How does school culture influence student voice implementation?

How does student voice change school culture?

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework shows the relationship between the student voice and the essential elements that must be present to institutionalize student voice and the cultural impacts that student voice produce. Explanation and elaboration of the elements in the conceptual framework will be found in chapter two.

Background of the Study

During the 2010 – 2011 school year, the researcher was serving as a performance coach at a local high school in northeast Arkansas. The school administrators asked if the researcher

would accompany them in conducting a “culture audit” to gather perceptual data about student learning, adult behaviors, student behaviors, and several other components that collectively create a school culture. While visiting classrooms, the researcher observed the following: the teachers seemed to be controlling the classroom environment by lecturing, making the decisions, and reprimanding students who tried to provide input on the subject matter. Some students appeared to be asleep, some were listening to music, and many students were slumped in their desk. Although the researcher observed some pockets of student-teacher collaboration throughout the school, it was rare for the researcher to observe any appearance of student input, student engagement or excitement for learning. (The researcher made these observations in one afternoon so no generalizations are being made, and these assumptions are being made based on one afternoon of observations).

After school, the researcher attended a faculty meeting where the agenda called for all of the adults – teachers and administrators – to divide into groups to analyze student performance data that included formative and summative assessments. The role of the researcher was a process observer: to observe the process and participants, make notes of observations and then report data to the principal. The performance data indicated a high percentage of the students were performing below proficiency, and the researcher observed and listened to the adults as they struggled to brainstorm solutions to improve student learning. The data indicated the school had a 33.9% achievement gap in literacy between Caucasian students and African-American students, which was unacceptable to the teachers and administrators due to the intentional focus on closing the achievement gap. The teachers and administrators focused on all of the strategies that had not worked, thus creating an atmosphere that the researcher interpreted as hopelessness.

Although the researcher's role was as a process observer, the experience was the catalyst for this study and the question: Had anyone in the room taken the time to ask the students about their perception of the learning culture and allow the students to give input about improvement strategies?

Knowing that the teachers and administrators strived to make instructional decisions based on data, the teachers and administrators began collecting perceptual data from students about strategies for school improvement. Serving as a performance coach (leadership consultant) to the school district, the researcher was actively involved in this process. A collaborative process of developing a plan to bring in students and allow them to analyze their own student data in order for the students to experience the process and make a determination about what the data indicate. Students quickly observed the achievement gap in literacy, and many of the students began to discuss collaborative strategies for improvement because the status quo was unacceptable to the students as well as the adults. Conversations began between students, teachers, and administrators about strategies for improving school culture and student learning. Because of the conversations, a group of nine African-American male students approached the administration and informed the principal they would assume the responsibility of making the student body more accountable for their own education and encourage all students to become more serious about learning.

The Gentlemen of Knowledge

The "Gentlemen of Knowledge" was created because the young men had a desire to change the learning culture from within. Due to the leadership of The Gentlemen of Knowledge, and the creation of student-teacher focus groups, "student voice" became a practice in this northeast Arkansas high school. As a result of the student-teacher-administration collaboration,

a considerable amount student suggestions were implemented. Students no longer felt as if education was “done to them”; they now felt like a valuable piece of the process. When the student data was released in spring of 2011, the achievement gap had closed by 17%, and the students, teachers, and administrators at this high school credit the implementation of student voice (Brawner, 2011).

Student Voice Training

In spring of 2015, a grant from Southern Bancorp and Arkansas Northeastern College was awarded to Mississippi County, Arkansas and was earmarked for improving education and student learning throughout the county. One committee member recalled the story of one local high school and how the implementation of student voice positively affected the learning culture while improving student learning, which was reflected in student assessment data. In spring 2015, members of the Arkansas Leadership Academy facilitated the initial student voice training seminar, the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative, in Blytheville, Arkansas with the objective of increasing student voice countywide. Since April 2015, a monthly training seminar has been facilitated by the researcher and attended by eight (8) teams in Mississippi County: Armored High School; Blytheville High School; Blytheville Middle School; Gosnell High School; Manila High School; Osceola High School; Rivercrest High School; and Arkansas Northeast College Technical Center. A school administrator from each school worked collaboratively with students and teachers to choose a team of teachers and students who would bring back the work each month. Each team consists of two adult sponsors and three to five students representing the school. The monthly student voice training is currently in its third year of existence.

Each team creates a strategic plan with action steps to transfer the theoretical components of student voice from the training site to the school site for implementation. Each team produced a “gap analysis” structure to determine the current reality of student voice on each campus, the vision of student voice for each campus, and the strategies that would move the initiative from current reality to the vision. Each month, the team from each school evaluates the plan and the progress toward the ideal state of student voice, which was created at the initial meeting. This process is a communication tool and program review to ensure consistent progress throughout the training.

Figure 1.2 Gap Analysis / Strategic Plan

Current Reality	Strategies	Vision/ Ideal State
What is your current reality of implementation of student voice?	What strategies or actions will move current reality to your ideal state?	What is your vision for student voice in your building?

Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative

In 2014-15, Southern Bancorp Foundation in Mississippi County, Arkansas created a strategic plan as a part of a community betterment project, Delta Bridges. The project was comprised of community leaders and stakeholders who were interested in assessing the county’s status, creating a vision for the future of the county and developing an action plan to achieve those dreams. The Delta Bridges project, led by a steering committee of ten individuals, was comprised of co-chairs from five sub-committees, including the Education Committee. This committee was given the task of leading this initiative.

The Education Committee was co-chaired by industry leaders and community leaders in Mississippi County. The co-chairs led monthly meetings with the ultimate goal of identifying,

developing, and implementing education strategies to improve student success. Invitations for gap analysis focus group meetings were sent to educators, employers, agencies, parents and community members. The sessions were open conversations about what education opportunities should provide, what success looks like and what was needed in order to achieve results.

The committee discussed the success of the student voice initiative at the local high school. The researcher was asked to present to the Delta Bridge Education Committee about the Arkansas Leadership Academy's role in the student voice initiative, the creation of the Gentlemen of Knowledge and other student voice training. This presentation led to the committee's interest in replicating some elements of the student voice project for all Mississippi County schools. Recognizing the difficulty in funding and implementing six separate programs with consistency and fidelity, the committee asked Arkansas Northeastern College to consider leading the development of a regional student voice project.

Arkansas Northeastern College agreed to approach the school districts' superintendents to determine participation interest. All county superintendents were interested in the project and agreed to collaborate with the college to develop a regional student voice initiative for the 2015-16 school year, if external funding could be secured. Consequently, the college developed a proposed structure for the project and asked the Arkansas Leadership Academy to collaborate in development and facilitation of the yearlong activity. The Delta Bridge Education Committee accepted the project proposal, recommended it to Southern Bancorp Foundation for grant funding, and received a \$15,000 award for the project. Arkansas Northeastern College agreed to contribute an additional \$30,000 to provide a total budget of \$45,000.

With funding secured, districts selected participants for student voice representation. Each district team included two educators who had regular interaction with students and three

students from different segments of student population in rising grades 7-12. The school personnel and students became members of a standing Northeast Arkansas Regional Advisory Committee that would meet monthly. The educators and students would collaborate to improve student learning and would work to design and implement student voice initiatives within each district.

Arkansas Leadership Academy (ALA)

In fall 2014, the Arkansas Leadership Academy was approached by educators in Mississippi County, Arkansas about developing a curriculum to introduce the student voice initiative to all districts in the county. Founded in 1991, the Arkansas Leadership Academy is a nationally recognized legislative funded organization based at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. Through leadership training, institutes and programs, the Arkansas Leadership Academy strives to build capacity of organizational leaders through a systemic and collaborative process. The Arkansas Leadership Academy focuses on school improvement through the development of strong leaders in the system and recognizes students as a vital component of a thriving school system.

The Arkansas Leadership Academy work incorporates the latest research regarding effective leadership practices and school improvement strategies. From the research, five foundational strands and twenty-two skills were developed from which all of the work is constructed. These strands and skills are the following:

Performance Strand 1: Setting Clear and Compelling Direction

Performance Strand 2: Shaping Culture for Learning

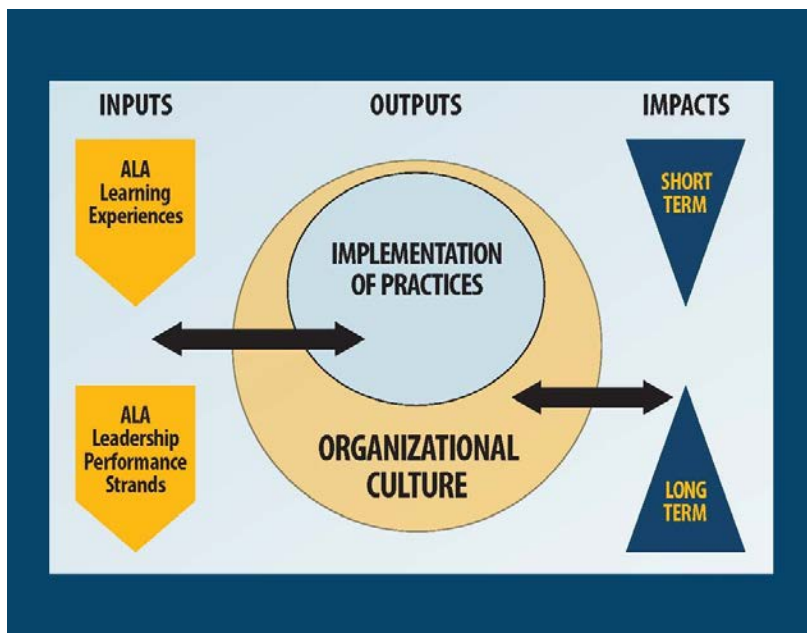
Performance Strand 3: Leading and Managing Change

Performance Strand 4: Transforming Teaching and Learning

Performance Strand 5: Managing Accountability Systems

The Arkansas Leadership Academy's Theory of Change reinforces the importance of surrounding implementation of practices with organizational culture. Creating an organizational culture founded on collaboration, mutual trust, respect, and positive communication between teachers and students increase the effectiveness of the strategies and best practices, which are in place.

Figure 1.3 Arkansas Leadership Academy Theory of Change

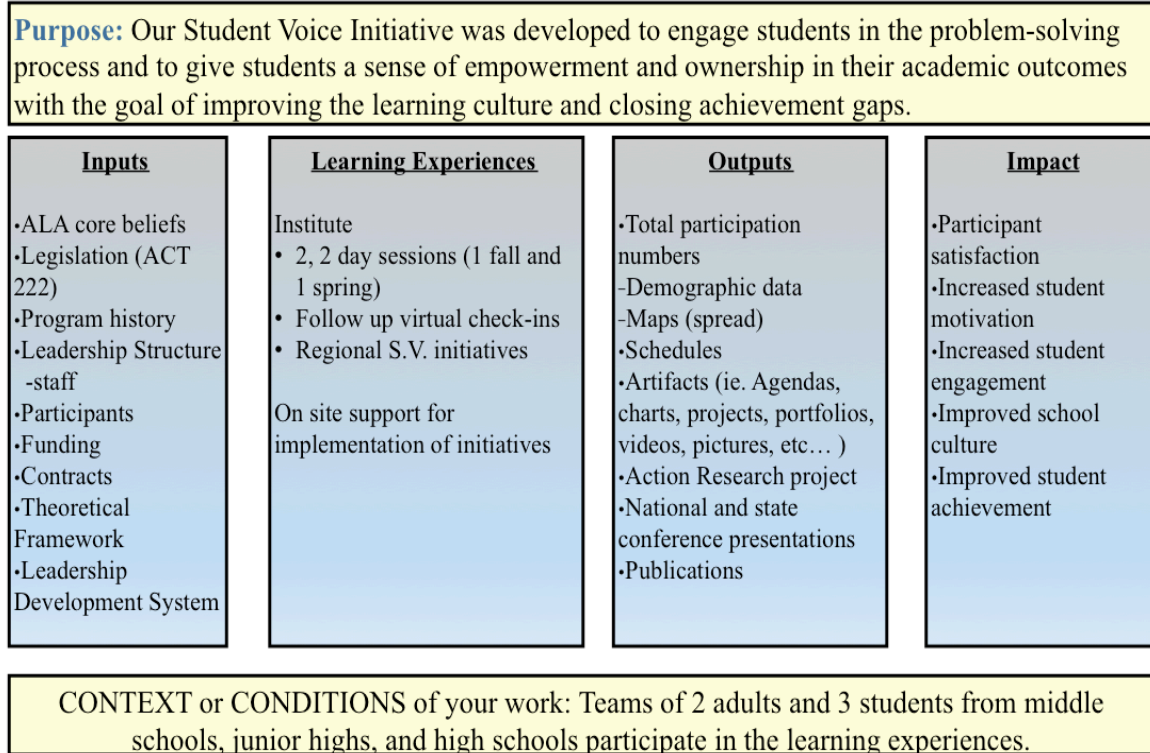


The Student Voice Logic Model explains the process through which the intended impacts are achieved. Through this process – the inputs, learning experiences, and outputs – the impact on a school or district should accomplish the following:

- Increase participant satisfaction
- Increase student motivation
- Increase student engagement
- Improve school culture
- Improve student achievement

Figure 1.4 Student Voice Logic Model

Student Voice Logic Model



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The impact column of the Student Voice Logic Model corresponds with the research on the outcomes of student voice implementation. Through student voice training, the Arkansas

Leadership Academy strives to increase student motivation, increase student engagement, improve school culture and ultimately improve student achievement in all schools.

Research Approach

As the facilitator of the monthly student voice trainings in Mississippi County, the researcher asks the question, “Why is student voice flourishing in some schools and not in other schools when each school receives the same training? When a researcher has a “why” or “how” question about a phenomenon, qualitative research methods will guide the researcher (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research occurs when the researcher identifies a topic or question, collects information from multiple sources, and accepts the task as one of discovering answers that emerge from information that surfaces from the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). During this study, the researcher will collect perceptual data from participants describing how student voice has been implemented – or not implemented – at the school site. Results of the data collection will provide answers to the research question, thus describing qualitative research.

Of the five approaches that Creswell describes, this study would be identified as a single instrumental case study because the focus of the researcher is to better understand a specific project, program, or activity involving more than one person (Creswell, 2013). Case studies involve an intensive description and analysis of a bounded social phenomenon, and the researcher explores the phenomenon over time through multiple data collection methods (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The researcher is interested in exploring the factors that must be in place for student voice to become institutionalized in the school setting. The researcher defines this study as instrumental because, although the researcher is studying one case, the data can be used to student voice in other settings. The researcher will use the results to apply to student voice implementation in general (Stake, 1995). One difference is case study research and other

types of research is that a compelling case study can raise awareness, provide insight, or suggest solutions to a given situation. If an idea is unique or abstract, data from a case study can tell a detailed story when mere statistics cannot (Yin, 2014).

The Northeast Arkansas Student Voice Initiative is a training bounded in one place and progressive in nature, meaning that the training is ongoing. The participants meet monthly for training and each month's learning builds on the previous month's learning. In order to gather data from various school cultures, the participants in this case study will be the adult coaches and building level principals from three diverse school districts participating in the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative.

Extensive data collection will consist of interviews, document collection, observations, and the collection of physical and digital artifacts. A sample of 10 adult participants statistically representing the whole population of adult coaches will be interviewed for this study based on attendance and engagement data. Principals from participating schools will be interviewed to gather administrative perspective of student voice initiatives at the school site. The researcher will conduct face-to-face interviews with the participants throughout the duration of the student voice seminars. Each interview will begin with demographic questions in order to determine the diversity of the sample population and gather data according to number of years in the teaching profession and subject matter.

Researcher perspectives

The researcher in this case study has served in the field of education since 1987. Five of those years were served as a classroom teacher, seventeen years as a school administrator, and eight years as a facilitator and performance coach for a leadership development organization. The researcher began to study student voice and its impact in 2010 when he was instrumental in

the process of implementing student voice at a high school in which he served as a leadership coach (consultant) to the school leaders. Since that time, the researcher has studied the concept of student voice and learning partnerships, has facilitated multiple professional development opportunities for students and teachers across the state, and has conducted presentations at state and national conferences on the topic of student voice. Besides creating the learning experiences and facilitating the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative seminars, the researcher has developed, and facilitated, a four-day training institute focused on student voice that is in its third year of operation.

The researcher is the facilitator of the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative, which is where the sample population of this case study participates. Through this study, the researcher plans to gather data to better understand and communicate the implementation factors of the student voice process in order to replicate these strategies statewide and nationally.

Assumptions

Research assumptions are statements the researcher believes to be true as the research begins (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), but through the research process, these premises may be shown to be true or may be proven unjustified. At the conclusion of the research, the following assumptions will be reviewed:

1. Student voice is an integral component of student motivation, engagement, and student learning.
2. Building relationships among teachers and students must be a foundational piece of the student voice process.
3. Strong instructional leadership is an imperative component to the implementation process.
4. For student voice to be most effective, adults must be willing to listen to students.

Significance of the Study

The literature indicates only 46% of students in public schools feel their voice is heard within the context of their learning experiences (Quaglia & Corson, 2014). When students feel they are engaged in conversation with teachers about their educational journey, they are more likely to be successful academically (Blad, 2015). By identifying factors that support the execution of student voice strategies in school districts across Mississippi County, those factors can be introduced and replicated in school districts across the state and nation.

When student voice increases, academic motivation increases (Quaglia, 2016). Students who feel they have a voice in the learning process are four times more likely to feel self-worth, eight times more likely to be engaged in class, nine times more likely to feel that they have a purpose, and seven times more likely to be academically motivated (Quaglia, 2016).

Chapter summary

The Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative started in April 2015. The objective of the initiative was to instruct students and adult coaches from each school district in Mississippi County, Arkansas about the concept of student voice. Six diverse school districts (seven school campuses) and one college technical center sent participants to the training facilitated by the researcher, who is employed by the Arkansas Leadership Academy. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will focus on three schools with diverse populations.

Cook-Sather (2006) defines student voice as students having a legitimate perspective, presence, and active role in the education process. The goal of the monthly seminars is to provide tools and strategies for the implementation of student voice strategies at each school site. This small group of students and adult coaches serve as the pebble which is thrown into the pond to initiate the ripples of student voice school-wide. This study will examine the factors that

support the implementation of student voice as perceived by adult coaches in the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The literature review for this study was based on the conceptual framework determined by the researcher and is used to guide the data analysis, interpretation and synthesis of the research. The review will be ongoing and continually updated. The literature review will analyze and synthesize a comprehensive selection of appropriate bodies of literature related to the topic and will build a logical framework for the research. The literature review will justify the study by hypothesizing gaps in the literature and will demonstrate how the study will contribute to existing knowledge (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

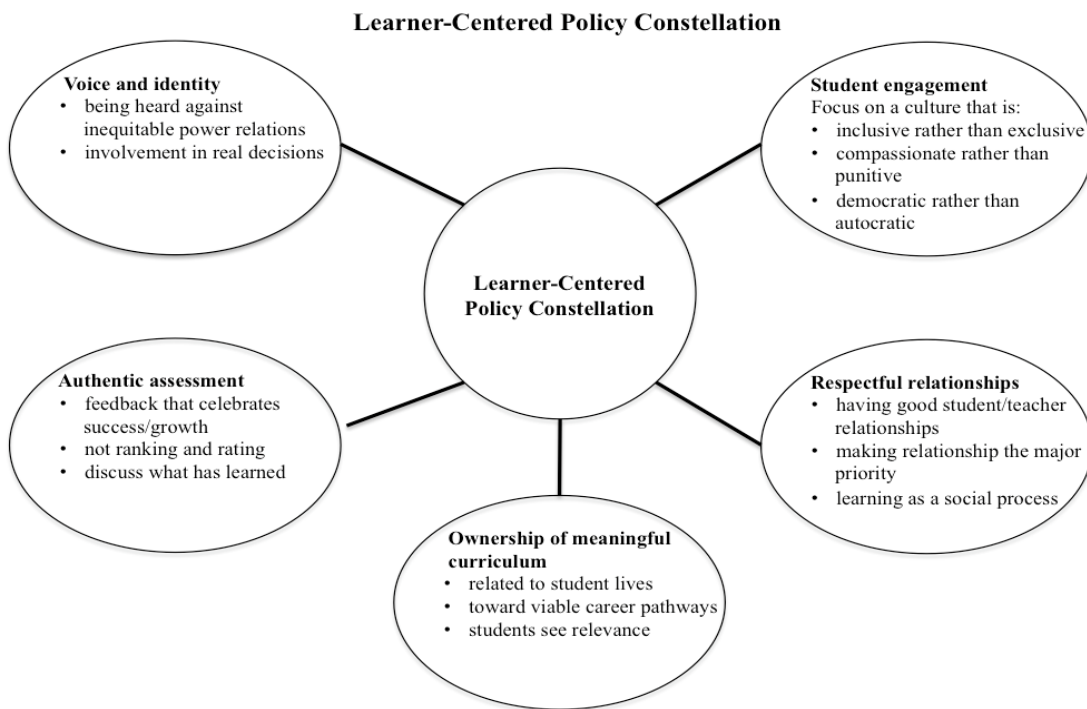
Historical Perspective

State and national leaders have been instrumental in leading school reformation processes. In 1957, Russians launched the Sputnik satellite into space causing national leaders to fear that high school and college students were not as prepared in the area of technology as other countries, so financial resources were earmarked in the United States for math and science curriculum. In 1983, a report called “*A Nation at Risk*,” shared a similar concern that students in the United States were not being prepared to respond to adulthood challenges. Presidents Bush and Clinton spent significant time during their administrations developing a reformation process of assessments and accountability, which focused on high stakes testing in grades 3-8, and ultimately culminated into “No Child Left Behind.” President Obama’s “Common Core Standards” replaced “No Child Left Behind” in order for all states to adopt common – and rigorous – standards nationwide. None of the school reform attempts made long-lasting improvements in student achievement. Noddings (2005) suggests that these punitive policies are

based on “threats, punishments, and pernicious comparisons” and will never yield the results we aim to achieve.

The educational reforms emphasized student outcomes without much giving much attention to the learning process. If the process of teaching and learning improves, student outcomes will improve. Student voice is a concept that is embedded into the process of learning, which should be more student centered and less autocracy. Noddings (2005) introduced the “Learner-Centered Policy Constellation” which demonstrates a new policy format.

Figure 2.1 Learner-Centered Policy Constellation



Adapted from Smyth, J. (2006)

“While much public policy focuses upon the skills young people will need to enter and survive in the labor market, less emphasis is accorded to the significance of encouraging them to find the voice and practices of cooperative agency indispensable to flourishing within a democratic civil society” (Ranson, 2000, p. 263). The student voice initiative is an instrument to encourage and develop the skills that students need to prepare for a democratic society.

Students are seven times more likely to be academically motivated when they feel they have a voice in the learning process (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). From these research data, time must be spent collaborating with students and allowing students to provide feedback and input throughout the educational process. Historically, school reform efforts and resources have been directed toward curriculum, assessment, and accountability measures. The human factor has been the missing piece. Noddings (2015) states that unfunded mandates (No Child Left Behind) and unattainable expectations (100% of all students proficient in literacy and math) are undesirable mandates due to threats, punishments and comparisons and had a corrupting influence on schools. Instead of outward mandates, schools should put efforts at school improvement in the collaborative hands of the students and teachers and allow students to share their experiences and what they think will make a positive difference in their learning, their progress and their achievement (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). “While much public policy focuses upon the skills young people will need to enter and survive in the labor market, less emphasis is accorded to the significance of encouraging them to find their voice” (Ranson, 2000 p. 263).

It was not until the early 1990’s that a certain number of educators realized the voices of students had been missing from conversations about educational reform. Kozol (1991, p.5) asserted “The voices of children have been missing from the whole discussion” about educational reform. Cook-Sather (2006, p. 3) cites Levin (1994) arguing, “the most promising reform strategies involved treating students as capable persons, capitalizing on their knowledge and interests, and involving them in determining goals and learning methods.” In his book, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Michael Fullen asks the question, “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?” (1991, p. 170). Danaher (1994) sums up the need for student input by saying that educators should abstain from treating student

voices as “cries in the wilderness” and schools would be much more successful if adults requested student voices.

“Interest in student voice has re-emerged because of a call among progressive educators to review the structures, practices, and values that dominate schooling and which contrast sharply with how young people live today” (Bahou, 2011, p. 3). We often “do school” to students, but Bahou (2011) says that we should view our students as “expert witnesses” in the field of learning and allow them the opportunity to actively shape their educational journey as citizens. A foundational concept of student voice is to encourage schools to move to more of a “student-centered” approach and to move away from traditional practices where the teacher is the focus. Schools were created for students, not the adults, so the focus of education initially was on the needs of the students. A student-centered approach involves the student in the learning process as shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Learner Centered Versus Traditional Teaching

Learner-Centered Approach	←————→	Traditional Approach
Instruction is student-centered	←————→	Instruction is curriculum- centered
Students are self-directed in learning	←————→	Learning is teacher-directed
Democratic practices define expectations	←————→	Authoritative or adult driven expectations drive practices
Instruction is process-oriented	←————→	Instruction is content-oriented
Constructing meaning is emphasized	←————→	Covering material is emphasized
Relationships are a focus	←————→	Subject matter is the focus
Cooperation and team-building practices exist	←————→	Competition or individual practices exist
Thinking is accentuated	←————→	Memorization is accentuated
Active learning is pervasive	←————→	Passive learning is pervasive
Modeling or questioning is the norm	←————→	Telling or lecturing students is the norm
Inquiry-based approaches prevail	←————→	Knowledge-based approaches prevail

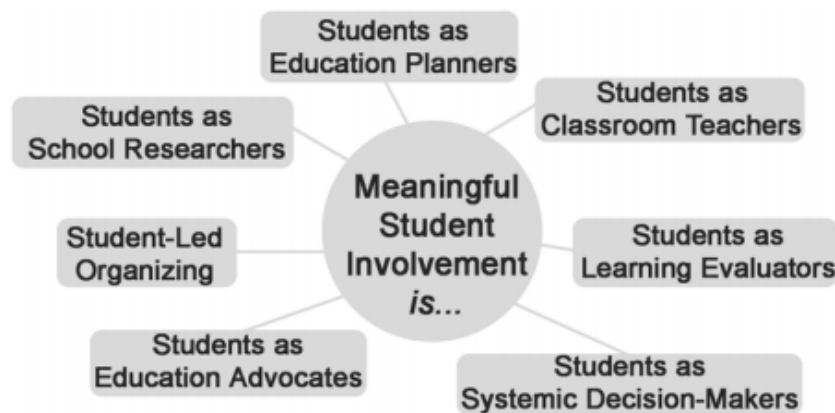
Source: O’Connell and Vandas (2015) Adapted from *Partnering with Students: Building Ownership of Learning*.

Defining Student Voice

Student voice developed as a term that incorporated a broad range of initiatives that involve students in the learning process. Student voice became prevalent due to the emergence of progressive adult educators who studied the traditional structures, practices, and values in schools and realize that these components are not the same structures owned by student learners today (Ruddock, 2007). Student protests, student strikes, student marches and student riots sent a message to the system that their voices would be heard. However, this type of behavior is beyond the definition of student voice used in this research. For the purpose of this study, student voice is not about a “changing of the guard” and allowing the students to be in charge, but for the students to become empowered by their voices within the structure of expectations. Klem and Connell (2004) call this “autonomy support” – when the students have an opportunity to make decisions about their educational journey but require a sense of structure to make those decisions. True student voice is represented when the adults are actively engaged in purposeful dialogue with students about the education process within organizational norms. Rudduck and Flutter (2000, p. 75) state that “to manage school improvement, we need to look at schools from the pupils’ perspective, and that means tuning in to their experiences and views and creating a new order of experience for them as active participants.” Giving the students opportunities to define themselves as “learners” will allow them to actively contribute to the conversation – with teachers – about their educational journey (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Baroutsis, McGregor, and Mills (2016, p. 125) define this as “pedagogic voice:” describing young people’s active engagement, participation and voice in the areas of teaching, learning and curriculum.

In the model Students as Partners in School Change, Fletcher (2005) describes how “meaningful student involvement promotes academic achievement, supportive learning environments, and lifelong civic engagement.” This model offers suggestions to school districts when leadership and teachers ask questions about legitimate means to involve students. When students and teachers engage in collaborative efforts in designing curriculum, implementing instructional strategies, and having conversations about the students’ learning, the students become allies, partners and companions in the process.

Figure 2.3 Students as Partners in School Change



Source: Fletcher, A. (2005). *Meaningful Student Involvement*

Although student voice has been defined in multiple ways, for the purpose of this study, student voice will be defined as “students having a legitimate perspective, presence, and active role in the education process.” (Cook-Sather, 2006). According to Mitra and Serriere (2012), student voice can be as simple as students sharing their problems and issues with school personnel or as extensive as giving students leadership roles in school change efforts.

Cook-Sather (2006) mentions the concept of student voice is based on three principles. First, young people have a unique perspective on learning, teaching and schooling. In the traditional setting, the perspective on the learning process is a result of the experiences and

knowledge of the adults. The teacher instructs with methods and tools with which the teacher is comfortable or through the learning mode through which the teacher learns best. Each student is unique and brings a diverse perspective on methods, strategies and techniques through which learning is achieved. According to the author, the second principle on which student voice is based is that student insights warrant not only attention, but also the response of adults. Asking students for input is beneficial, but acting on those responses is more significant to students. When adults engage student input through conversation, surveys, or other forms of data collection, and do not act on any of the suggestions, the message communicated by the adults is that student opinion does not matter, which is often worse than initially not asking. The third principle on which student voice is based is that students should be afforded the opportunity to actively shape their education. The educational journey for each student should be personalized and shaped according to the specific needs of each student. Through student voice, students are allowed to give input about their learning experiences and their specific needs.

When students aspire to be successful, three guiding principles must be in place (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). First, students must feel like they have self-worth. Students have a unique perspective on learning, and adults must be willing to listen to their input. When students are part of the learning process, they feel valued in the learning community. Lev Vygotsky (1978) states adult thinking emerges from a “sociocultural mind.” Vygotsky goes on to mention the more a student is exposed to adult thinking, the more the student’s thoughts are influenced by that adult, and when a student is not provided input, his or her thinking about teaching and learning may reflect that of the teacher, which restricts the emergence of self-worth (Vygotsky, 1978).

The second principle that Quaglia and Corso consider essential to student success is engagement. Students become less engaged in the learning process as they progress from elementary, to middle to high school (Klem & Connell, 2004). Klem and Connell assert that student engagement is a strong predictor of student achievement and student behavior regardless of the student's socioeconomic status (Klem & Connell, 2004). Engagement is not only valuing input from students, but also giving the students a voice in the direction of their learning process. Schools that have adopted a teacher-student collaborative culture are asking students to sit-in on teacher interviews during the hiring process, working collaboratively with teachers to create engaging lessons, and allowing students to offer suggestions to school boards and school administrators. The researcher interviewed a female senior high school student, and the student divulged to the researcher that she had never been asked about what she needed as a learner through her educational journey. Talking to students – engaging them in the process – is a foundational piece to developing a collaborative learning culture. Students who believe their voices are heard feel a greater attachment to their school (Perry, 2015). A 2015 PDK/Gallup Poll ranked “how engaged students are with their classwork” at the top of the list for school and student success (Blad, 2015).

The third essential component to student success, according to Quaglia and Corso (2014), is purpose. Adults must help the students understand their purpose, not only in school, but in life. Having such dialogue models the student voice concept and is vital in learning communities. According to Quaglia (2016), students are nine times more likely to feel they have a purpose in school when adults give them a voice in the learning process.

The term “personalized learning” has emerged as a strategy in public schools to involve the student in the decision making process about their specific learning path. Student voice falls

under the umbrella of personalized learning as a key component. Kallick and Zmuda (2017) created a model to communicate the four attributes of personalized learning. When all four of these attributes are part of a learning culture, students become partners with the adults in the learning process. The first attribute is voice (Kallick et al. 2017), which allows students to be involved and engaged in the “what” and the “how” of the learning process. The second attribute is co-creation, which means that the adults have allowed the students to work alongside them to develop a challenge, a problem, or idea and collaboratively develop a plan for a solution. The third attribute of personalized learning, according to Kallick and Zmuda, is social construction. During this process, students build ideas through relationships with others and theorize solutions for common learning goals. The final attribute is self-discovery, which is when the students come to an understanding that they are learners; they have the ability to collaborate with teachers about their learning process.

According to Mitra (2004), student voice has developed across the educational landscape, but according to the author, the emphasis of student voice has changed into a more positive connotation. Historically, there were concerns regarding empowering students, who could then create a barrier between themselves and educators. The focus has changed from rights and empowerment to the idea that student outcomes will improve and school reform will be more successful if students actively participate in shaping their educational journey. In order to prevent any negative connotation, Bolstad (2011) suggests the term “student voice” be replaced with the term “youth-adult partnerships” in order to clarify that the process is a partnership. Partnership does not always mean equality or that students are on an equal level as the teachers. It does mean that all perspectives and contributions made by each partner is equally valued and respected, and all participants have an equivalent opportunity to contribute (Cook-Sather et al

2014). A common understanding of how student voice, or youth-adult partnerships, is defined will encourage more collaborative and rich dialogue (Bolstad, 2011).

Cook-Sather (2006) suggests that student voice is more than an affective initiative: it produces a culture where positive student outcomes are revealed. Cook-Sather mentions the first positive outcome of student voice is the “insistence on altering dominant power imbalances between adults and young people” (p. 8). This major cultural modification begins with the shift in thinking by adults to allow students to provide input on their educational journey. The second positive outcome mentioned by Cook-Sather is student voice “acknowledges and argues for students’ rights as active participants – as citizens – in school and beyond it” (p. 9). The decisions made on behalf of student learning are often decided solely by teachers, but the decisions are affecting the future of the students – the citizens – of the school. Cook-Sather cites Pollard, Thiessen, and Filer (1997) in their chapters on student voice, claiming, “Children are citizens who arguably have as much right to consideration as any other individual (p. 2). The third positive aspect of student voice, according to Cook-Sather, is that students feel “respected and engaged in the classroom” (p. 9). Engagement in the classroom begins with mutual respect and communication. When describing his urban high school culture where students and teachers are collaborating about student learning, senior Maurice Baxter explains, “You can’t have good communication without respect. If I don’t respect you, we can’t communicate (Cook-Sather, p 9). The concluding positive aspect of student voice mentioned by Cook-Sather is that “if students speak, adults must listen” (p.10). “Listening to students and building teaching themes that are relevant to and that emerge from students own lives can be transformative both personally and politically” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p.10).

Mitra (2004) explains that active participation of students often comes in the form of focus groups, surveys and students working alongside teachers to develop and implement strategies for school improvement. Students have a unique perspective and possess knowledge that teachers often do not possess (Mitra, 2004). One way of developing active involvement and engagement is to respect the views of young people and to provide them with real opportunities to exercise them (Baroutsis, McGregor, & Mills, 2016). Andrews (2010) believes that encouraging and enabling young people to participate actively in their schooling is fundamental to the development of a student voice.

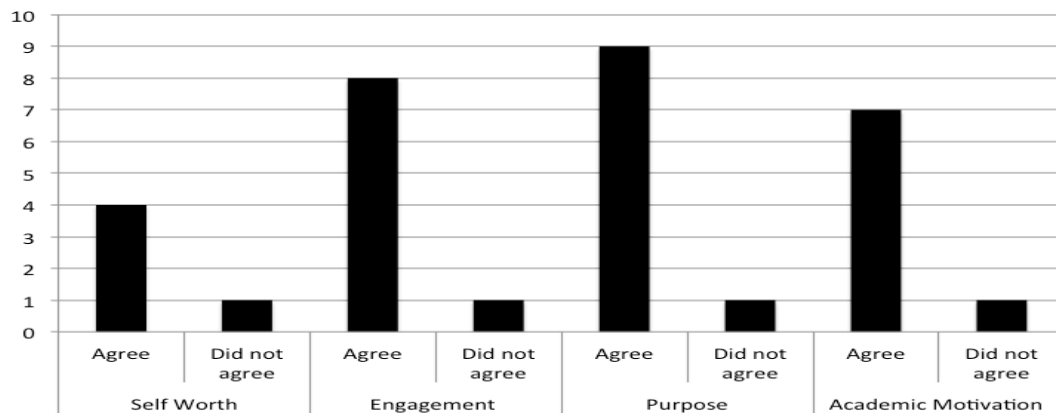
Student voice is not a concept that only emphasizes the affective side of schools just for the purpose of building relationships and ensuring that students and teachers are “getting along.” Providing students a voice in the learning process, and building student-adult partnerships creates a culture of learning. O’Connell and Vandas (2015) state that listening to students in meaningful partnerships with adults is the key to learner-centered teaching, empowering youth, and changing many systemic inequities and failures.

Student voice begins with adults valuing student input into the learning process. Adults must be willing to find the time to listen to students. According to Quaglia and Corso (2014, p. 2), only 46% of students surveyed feel they have a voice in decision making at their school, and just 52% of students believe adults are willing to listen and learn from students. Quaglia and Corso mention 94% of students believe they can be successful and 67% see themselves as leaders, but less than half of the students (45%) say adults see them as a valuable member of the school community.

Much research confirms that student motivation and student achievement are connected (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The authors contend that giving students an opportunity for choice

and collaboration are strategies for increasing academic achievement. Young people are more likely to be motivated and engaged when they feel like they have a voice in the learning process. Research links higher levels of engagement in school with improved performance. Researchers found that student engagement is a strong predictor of student achievement and behavior in school, regardless of socioeconomic status (Klem & Connell, 2004). During the 2015-2016 school year, Dr. Russell Quaglia interviewed over 60,000 students in grades five through twelve. According to Quaglia (2016), students who believe they have a voice are seven times more likely to be academically motivated; nine times more likely to feel that they have a purpose; eight times more likely to be engaged; and four times more likely to feel self-worth.

Figure 2.4 Likelihood that Student Voice will lead to Self Worth, Student Engagement, Purpose, and Academic Motivation



Source: School Voice Report, by Russell Quaglia, 2016.

Anderson (2016) mentions motivation and engagement as benefits of student voice, but the author also shares that student voice will combat student apathy, allow students to connect with their strengths and interests, increase social and emotional learning, and give them autonomy, power, and control over their work. Anderson (2016) goes on to say, in addition to these important motives, student voice also allows students to accomplish the following:

- Engage in deeper and richer learning
- Display more on-task behavior
- Increase social and emotional learning
- Create a collaborative learning environment

Student voice leads to increased engagement and an opportunity to build social and emotional skills in students. Student voice also projects a healthier school climate by building mutual trust and respect among students and teachers (Blad, 2016). Fielding and Bragg (2003) promote a culture where students and teachers work alongside each other and partner as “change agents.” As “producers of knowledge,” (Fielding and Bragg, 2003), the students work through a process to create cultural change so they are shaping their educational experience. The authors describe five benefits of producing a culture of partnership between students and teachers:

- Developing a positive sense of self and agency
- Developing inquiring minds and learning new skills
- Developing social competencies and new relationships
- Reflecting on their own learning
- Creating an opportunity to be active and creative in their learning

Besides increasing academic achievement and creating a more collaborative learning environment, schools with active student participation show a much lower rate of student truancy compared to schools without student voice and participation (Klein, 2003). Bahou (2011) states that the qualitative impact of consulting with students enhanced and improved student motivation, attendance, positive attitudes toward learning, and attitudes toward teachers. Listening to students – as simple as it may sound – is central to learner-centered teaching, to empowering youth, and to changing many systemic inequities and failures (O’Connell &

Vandas, 2015, p. 11). Mitra (2004, p. 662) describes student voice as providing students with “agency.” In a youth development context, Mitra defines “agency” as “the ability to exert influence and power in a given situation, which allows students to grow in confidence, a sense of self-worth, and the belief that one can contribute to a certain situation” – their educational journey in this context. Mitra suggests that student voice also, 1) increases the student’s ability to articulate opinions to others, 2) constructs new identities as change makers, and 3) develops a greater sense of leadership.

The Pyramid of Student Voice, developed by Mitra and Gross (2009) describes the various levels of student voice. The bottom level of student voice begins with “being heard.” Fletcher (2005) also mentions that “listening to students” is the first step of involving students in the learning process. Adults must be willing to listen to students and validate them as part of the school community. Students possess a unique knowledge and perspective about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate without such partnerships with students (Mitra & Gross, 2009).

Figure 2.5 Pyramid of Student Voice



Source: Mitra & Gross (2009)

After listening to students, Mitra and Gross assert the next level is “collaborating with adults.” At this level, the listening continues but the adults and students begin to work together to collect data on solving problems and implementing solutions. At the top of the pyramid, the authors list “building capacity for leadership.” By allowing the students to be involved in school decision-making, students will develop ownership of the process and the solutions.

Student voice is a concept that is gaining national momentum. When school leaders in Reno, Nevada were seeking answers to their exceptionally high dropout rate, they realized that they must go to the source and ask the students. These conversations were the foundational pieces for more student-teacher partnerships, which created a healthier school culture and built trust and respect among students and teachers (Blad, 2016). In Philadelphia, a humanities teacher shared how he involves students in the learning process by allowing students to generate questions and facilitate learning, allowing students to self-evaluate their work, integrating presentations into projects, and allowing students to share their work aloud (Block, 2014). In the Union R-XI School District in Missouri, students are responsible for providing professional development for the teachers (Tarte, 2015). The principal at Woodside High School in California regularly randomly selects a group of students to address school issues and problems that affect students (Perry, 2015). At Harwood Union High School in Moretown, Vermont, students are intensely engaged with teachers as they collaboratively shape the culture of the school by working on daily schedules, discussing styles of teaching and learning, designing report cards, hiring teachers, and revamping honors classes and special education classes (Gewertz, 2016).

Relationships

The initial step to creating a culture of teacher-student partnerships and student voice is building a positive, caring relationship between teachers and students. Caring is the bedrock for all successful education (Noddings, 2005). A relationship where teachers care for students and students care for teachers is the foundation for beginning conversations about teaching and learning. The degree to which these relationships are likely to be conducive to a student's engagement is determined by the student's perception that the teacher is supportive, invested, caring, fair and respectful (Bundick, Quaglia, Corso, & Haywood, 2014).

Traditional roles shift when building trusting and reciprocal relationships. As educators carefully listen and observe, they are providing responsive guidance rather than engaging in teaching without listening. In these relationships, educator / student learning and efficacy grow. ("Student Voice Transforming Relationships", 2013).

The research suggests that student outcomes are directly affected by the relationship between the teacher and the student (McFarland et al, 2016). Researchers who have employed longitudinal studies have found that students who experience teacher-student interactions characterized by high levels of warmth and support or low levels of conflict gain more in achievement (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, Loyd, 2008).

As this research describes teacher-student relationships, the researcher does not describe this relationship as only a "feel good" or "I like you" feeling, but as a relationship defined in terms of support, encouragement, respect and action (Ellerbrock et al, 2015). When students were asked what qualities existed in teachers with whom students had a positive relationship, 80% of the students mentioned the teachers respect them and listen to them (Hayes et al, 1994,). Vieluf, Hochweber, Klieme, and Kunter (2015, p.4) suggest that a positive student-teacher

relationship is “characterized by emotional closeness, warmth, caring, support, acceptance, respect, fairness, and low levels of conflict and dependency.” Davis (2003, p. 212) succinctly sums up the relationship between student and teacher:

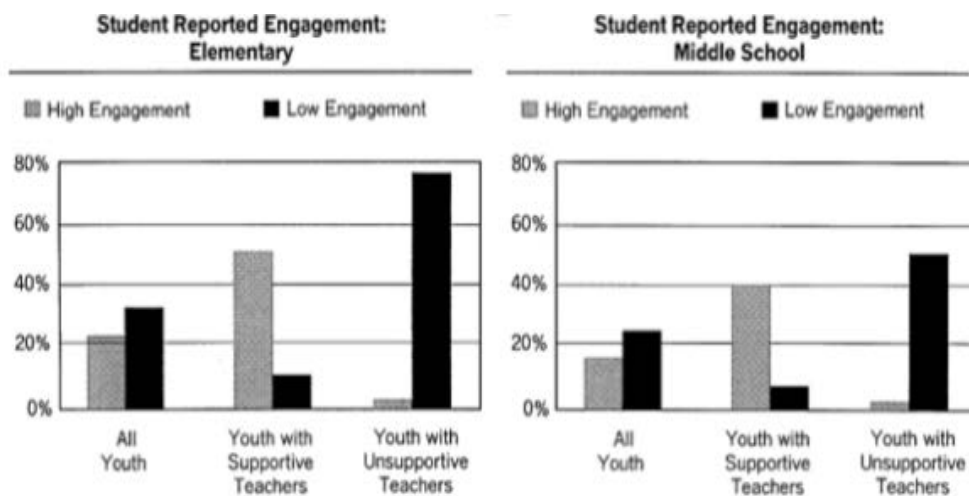
Viewing adult-child relationships as embedded within the context of effective teaching and learning dispels the notion that teachers can simply motivate students by being “nice” to them. In contrast, findings from motivation theory suggest students not only appreciate the structure and support that the teacher relationships can provide, but also the ability of teachers to help them feel successful in educational pursuits.

For student voice to flourish, such student-teacher relationships must exist within the school culture. The International Center for Leadership in Education studied some of the most successful high schools in the country – many of them with high poverty, mobility, and diversity – and concluded that a positive student-teacher relationship is a key reason for high performance. If relationships between students and teachers are not positive, students will not respond to high expectations (McNulty & Quaglia, 2007). Multilevel analyses indicate students who perceived more closeness in the relationship with their teacher reported a stronger endorsement of mastery goals (Thijs & Fleischmann, 2015). Wilkins (2014) states that positive relationships between teachers and students are linked to students’ increased motivation, academic achievement, high rates of attendance, and positive attitudes toward school. Teacher-student relationships matter because they are associated with a broad variety of student outcomes, including academic achievement, affect, behavior and student motivation (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, King, Hsu, McIntyre, & Rogers, 2016). John Hattie, researcher and professor of education at the University of Melbourne, conducted the largest meta-analysis ever done in the field of education to determine what factors are most correlated with student learning. In Hattie’s research, an effect size of .40 or better provided a year’s worth of growth for a year’s input. From the research, Hattie concluded that student-teacher relationships had an effect size of .72, showing that the

relationship between student and teacher has a major impact on learning (DeWitt, 2015). Skinner and Belmont (1993) cite Brophy's (1986) psychological research about teacher behaviors that promote strong relationships and student motivation. According to this research, behaviors such as enthusiasm, guidance, modeling, sincere praise, confidence building, relevance, and communication (voice) promotes student motivation and student learning.

Klem and Connell (2004) share longitudinal data collected by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education that measured the engagement level of 1,846 elementary students and 2,430 secondary students with supportive teachers (positive relationship with students) and unsupportive teachers (limited relationships with students). The below results show how engagement and relationships matter in student success.

Figure 2.6 Student Reported Engagement



Source: Klem, A. M. & Connell, J. P. (2004)

Relationships with teachers and teacher care are central means by which students develop emotional connections to classrooms and teachers. Teacher care is defined as the teacher's concern for students' well-being. Caring teacher-student relationships are vital for student outcomes and are considered the "glue" that binds teachers and students together, which makes life in classrooms meaningful (Cooper & Miness, 2014, p. 264). A strong teacher-student

relationship is the pivotal foundation for implementing a culture of student voice and teacher-student partnerships.

School Culture

Student voice is not a program – it is part of the embedded school culture. Developing a school culture where teachers and students create a positive working relationship must be in place before student voice can be taken to scale. Davis (2012, p. 7) defines culture as “the totality of ideas, beliefs, values, activities, and knowledge of a group or individuals who share historic, geographical, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic, or social traditions, and who transmit, reinforce and modify those traditions.” In a school setting, culture is described as “a powerful web of rituals and traditions, norms, and values that affect every corner of school life. School culture influences what people pay attention to, how they identify with the school, how hard they work, and the degree to which they achieve their goals” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 10). Gruenert and Whitaker (2015, p. 6) define school culture as “a social indoctrination of unwritten rules that people learn as they try to fit in a particular group.” School culture is the foundation for organizational beliefs and how “things are done” within the organization. Fat (2015) suggests the creation of the components that comprise school culture should be developed by and belong to the teachers, pupils and school thus creating a collaborative learning culture.

Implementing student voice is what Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) describe as a “second order change.” It is an organizational cultural change. The authors describe a first order change as one that can be solved quickly and through traditional methods, such as a schedule change, bus routes and duty schedule. A second order of change goes much deeper. It changes the traditional practices, which have proven to be unsuccessful, and changes the culture of the organization. A second order change “involves the dramatic departures from the expected, both

in defining a given problem and finding a solution” (Marzano, et al, p. 66). To lead the second order change, a leader must possess, 1) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, 2) be an optimizer, 3) have intellectual stimulation, 4) be a change agent, 5) be able to monitor and evaluate the change, 6) be flexible, and 7) have a strong sense of ideals and beliefs (Marzano, et al.).

Muhammad (2009) describes first and second order changes as technical changes versus cultural changes. Technical changes are “changes to the tools or mechanisms professionals use to do their job effectively” (p. 15). Examples of a technical change include changes in structure, policies, curriculum resources and scheduling. A cultural change goes much deeper and is more difficult to achieve. Muhammad describes culture change as “dealing with the thoughts and beliefs of others” (p. 16). For student voice to become part of the culture, the traditional beliefs some adults possess regarding the need for limited student involvement must change to the belief in a more collaborative organizational culture.

Adult Involvement

For student voice to become a part of the learning culture, the adults must be supportive. With many traditional teachers, this new initiative is met with resistance. When a student is positioned as a consultant or partner rather than a subordinate and disciple, often feelings of fear, distrust and other negative feelings can inform the adult’s perception (Cook-Sather, 2014, p. 189). “Because the subject in this case is teaching and learning, and teacher and student roles within those processes, this form of student-faculty partnership as a threshold concept requires a rethinking and changing of roles. When faculty members embrace such rethinking and change, a completely new world of understanding and practice opens up to them (Cook-Sather, 2014).

The first step is helping adults understand the “why” of collaborating with students. Falasca (2011, p.584) describes an adult learner as “relevancy-oriented with a desire to learn something new.” Falasca shares that involving adults in the planning process of a new initiative is a first step in removing any barrier to a cultural change like student voice. The relationship between the teachers and the school leader is a significant component for enabling student voice (Mitra, Serriere, and Stoicovy, 2012). The process through which school leadership implements student voice has a major impact on how well the initiative is accepted by teachers. According to Mitra, Serriere, and Stoicovy (2014), the leader must, 1) provide a clear vision for student voice and how it fits into the school culture, 2) allow opt-in strategies for teachers when possible, and 3) recognize that implementation from teachers will vary depending on individual contexts, beliefs, and experiences.

In the Cycle of Meaningful Student Involvement, Fletcher (2005) mentions that “listening to students” is the first step of involving students in the learning process. Adults must be open to opportunities to listen to students’ ideas, opinions, knowledge and experiences.

1. **Listen** – Students share ideas based on opinions and knowledge.
2. **Validate** – Adults see the students as purposeful and significant partners who can hold themselves and the school accountable in the learning process.
3. **Authorize** – Students are utilized in the school improvement process by sharing ideas and contributing to the plan.

Figure 2.7 Cycle of Meaningful Student Involvement



Figure 2.7 Cycle of Meaningful Student Involvement (Cont.)

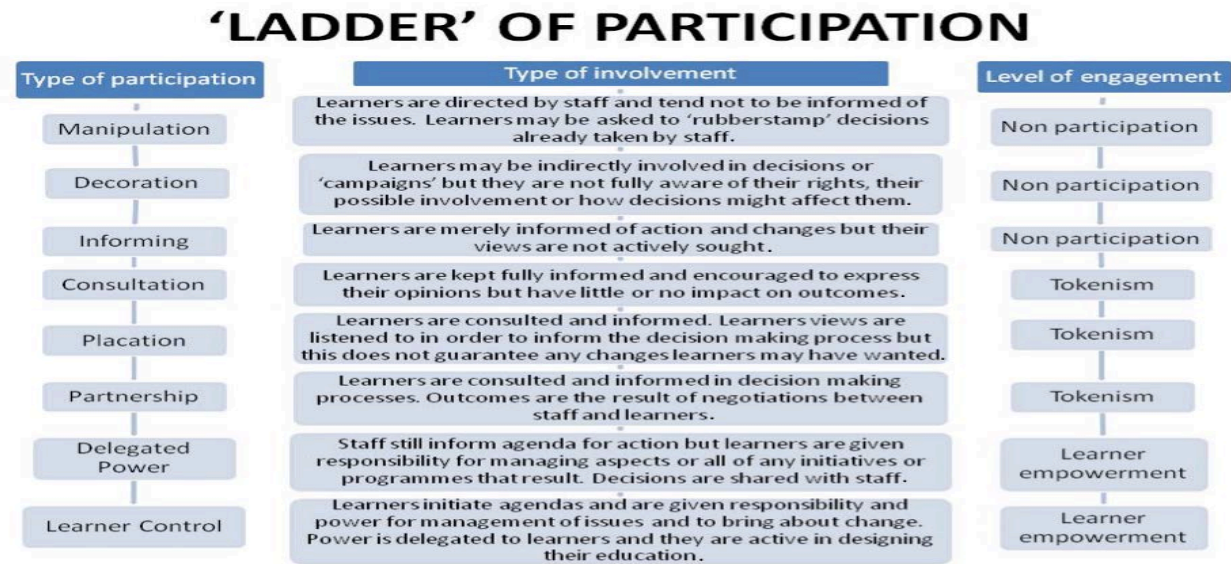
4. **Mobilize** – Students and teachers collaborate and take action on the plan developed by both groups.
5. **Reflect** – Students and teachers examine what they have learned in the process, including benefits and challenges.

Source: Fletcher, A. (2005) Adapted from *Meaningful Student Involvement: Guide to Students as Partners in School Change*.

Often, educators describe “student voice” as students participating in student council, homecoming committees, prom committees, or other extracurricular student involvement opportunities. Although the educators are involving students in school decisions, there concerns with this description of student voice. First, this type of involvement does not reflect the true definition of student voice, and the one we are using for the sake of this research. Student voice is defined as “students having a legitimate perspective, presence, and active role in the education process.” (Cook-Sather, 2006). The key component of this definition is “in the education process.” Implementing student committees to decide the theme of homecoming is not true student voice as defined. Secondly, such student committees are frequently comprised of the same students – those students whom the teachers and administrators have deemed student leaders. The “voice” is limited to those students without much involvement – if any – from the remaining student body. Student voice is about allowing all students to have an active role in their educational process. Thirdly, student voice is not a club, organization, or a committee. **Student voice is a culture.** There are no “members” and no exclusive process. Student voice is a second order change that is taken to scale to involve a collaborative relationship between students and educators.

The Ladder of Student Involvement (Fletcher, 1994) describes various levels of student involvement in the learning process, and it allows students and educators to measure the current reality of student voice and student involvement in their school.

Figure 2.8 ‘Ladder’ of Student Participation



Adapted by A. Fletcher from R. Hard (1994). *Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*.

The literature review of this study was ongoing and research was updated as needed. The conceptual framework developed from the literature review was used to guide the methods, the data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and synthesis phases of the research process.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The qualitative approach used in this research is an instrumental case study since the results can be applied to various settings. Qualitative research is person-centered, and as Keegan (2009) describes, the researcher's goal was to get "inside the head" of the participants to determine what components are vital for student voice to flourish in a school culture. Qualitative research occurs when the researcher identifies a topic or question, collects information from multiple sources, and accepts the task as one of discovering answers that emerge from information that surfaces from the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). The authors proceed to describe a case study by three main characteristics. First, a case study focuses on an individual representation of a group, an organization, or a particular phenomenon such as a program, particular event, situation, or activity. This case study focused on the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative, which convenes once a month for student voice training. Secondly, according to Hancock and Algozzine, the phenomenon being studied is in its natural context, bound by space and time. The phenomenon of this case study was the monthly student voice training in Mississippi County, Arkansas which is held each monthly in Burdette, Arkansas. No other settings or context was used. The third component of a case study is the research is richly descriptive and grounded in deep and multiple sources of information. During this case study, the researcher gathered artifacts such as written documents, participant work on chart paper, gap analysis documents, strategic plans, next steps documents, photographs, videos and participant interviews.

Research design and overview

Of the five traditions that Creswell (2013) describes, this study would be identified as a single instrumental case study because the researcher will be focusing on a specific project, program, or activity involving more than one person. The Northeast Arkansas Student Voice Initiative is a training bounded in one place and is progressive in nature. Hancock and Algozzine (2011) define an instrumental case study as one “in which the researcher wants to better understand a theoretical explanation that underpins a particular issue.” The results of this research facilitated a better understanding of the issue of student voice and the factors that stimulated the implementation process in diverse school settings.

Purposeful maximum sampling is the process of determining the sample population. Creswell (2013) recommends purposeful maximum sampling when the researcher wishes to show multiple perspectives on the problem, process or event. There are twenty adult leadership coaches participating in the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative. Fifteen of the participants were female (70%) and five of the participants were male (30%). Eighteen of the participants were Caucasian (90%) and one was African-American (10%).

The participants in this study consisted of a diverse sample of five adult coaches and five school principals who were chosen based on attendance and engagement during the training seminars. The ten participants were in attendance at every session and were active participants in the process. These ten participants represented three diverse school districts in Mississippi County, Arkansas. The level of teaching experience of these ten participants ranged from two years to thirty-three years, and content areas included English, social studies, E.A.S.T. (Environmental and Spatial Technologies) facilitator, history, marketing, career and technical and administrators. The ten participants represented the population demographics of the adult

coaches – seven females and three males. Nine of the ten participants were Caucasian, and one participant was African-American.

An audit trail was kept for sources of data. To provide anonymity, audit trail notations were assigned to each participant of the three participating school districts. Each participant was assigned a number (i.e. P1 – Participant 1) and these numbers were used when referencing specific participants in the study.

Table 3.1
Participant Demographics Matrix

Participant	School	Gender	Ethnicity	Content Area	Years
1	Blytheville	F	White	Social Studies	4
2	Blytheville	M	White	Principal	33
3	Armored	F	White	Principal	27
4	ANC	F	White	Asst. Director	3
5	Armored	F	White	E.A.S.T.	11
6	Blytheville	M	White	Principal	23
7	Osceola High	F	White	Principal	21
8	Blytheville	F	Black	Counselor	11
9	Armored	F	White	Marketing	2
10	Osceola High	M	White	Science	6

Extensive data collection consisted of interviews, document collection, observations, and the collection of physical and digital artifacts such as chart paper, strategic plans, gap analysis plans, next step assignments, photographs and videos.

Semi-structured interviews

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants throughout the spring semester of 2017. The researcher provided a waiver to each participant explaining the process and the protocol if a participant had a question. Each interview began with demographic

questions in order to determine the diversity of the sample population. The researcher read the interview questions aloud to each participant, and the interviews were recorded. The interviews were conducted at the participant's school site. The length of the interviews varied by participant, but participants were allowed an hour per interview.

The intended objective of this case study was to gather perceptions from the participants to determine the factors that stimulate the institutionalization of student voice strategies in a school setting. Each interview question supported the research question and sub-questions; questions were open-ended which allowed the participant to elaborate on the question as much as he or she would like. To answer these questions in detail, the participant must have a working knowledge of the student voice initiative. The questions did not lead the participant to answer positively or negatively but allowed them to answer with an open and honest reply. The interview questions are:

1. When you think about the beginning of our student voice training, describe your experience. What has been the most positive and powerful impact on you? Your students? Your administration?
2. How does your school look different today since student voice has been implemented?
3. As a result of the impact that you and the students have made, what do you see today that gives you hope for the future?
4. What needed to be in place for alignment of principles, purpose and practices for student voice to flourish?
5. Describe the behaviors and skills that emerged and flourished as a result of student voice.
6. What would the students say about student voice?

Observations

The researcher currently serves as the facilitator of the monthly student voice seminars, which has expedited access and trust from the participants. As in any case study, observations are an important component of research. Observations help the researcher obtain a deeper understanding of the case. Qualitative, or interpretive data, have meaning that can be directly observed by the researcher (Stake, 1995). Observations are more meaningful when conducted in the setting that will maximize the usefulness of the data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). While observations are subjective in nature, the researcher will insure that no legal or ethical protections are violated.

The researcher documented observations from the monthly seminars, behavior and dialogue between adults and students, and any observations from the interviews that were pertinent to this case study. The researcher made observations on the school sites to observe the level of student voice implementation and compared the observation data with the perceptual data from the participants.

Artifacts

More sources of evidence gave the study more validity and reliability (Yin, 2014). Throughout the monthly student voice training sessions, multiple artifacts were created by the participants and collected by the researcher. Artifacts collected with participant permission consists of strategic plan documents, gap analysis documents, meeting agendas, next steps documents, chart paper from group work, photographs, videos and audio-visual materials created by the participants. The purpose of artifact collection is to evaluate the progress of each team according to the strategic plans and gap analysis process and to give the researcher another set of data to tell the story.

Data analysis

The researcher used the holistic analysis approach in order to inform the reader of the context of the study and to provide a description of the case study as a whole. Creswell (2012, p. 47) describes a holistic approach as an analysis approach when the researcher “reports multiple perspectives, identifies the many factors in a situation, and generally sketches the larger picture that emerges.”

A significant amount of time was spent describing the context of the study in order for the data to be clear to the reader. The study took place in Mississippi County, Arkansas and the participants of the study have participated in the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative, which has met once per month since fall 2015.

The researcher used the protocol “Four Stages of Qualitative Analysis (Bryman, 2008) as a reference. Bryman’s four stages of qualitative analysis include the following:

Stage 1:

- Read the text as a whole and make notes at the end
- Look for what the text is about
- Major themes
- Unusual issues or events
- Group cases into types or categories reflecting the research question

Stage 2:

- Read the text again and mark it by underlining, circling or highlighting
- Mark marginal notes and annotations
- Label for codes
- Highlight key words
- Note any analytic ideas suggested

Stage 3:

- Systematically mark the text
- Indicate what chunks of text are about – themes
- Review the codes
- Eliminate repetition and similar codes
- Consider groupings

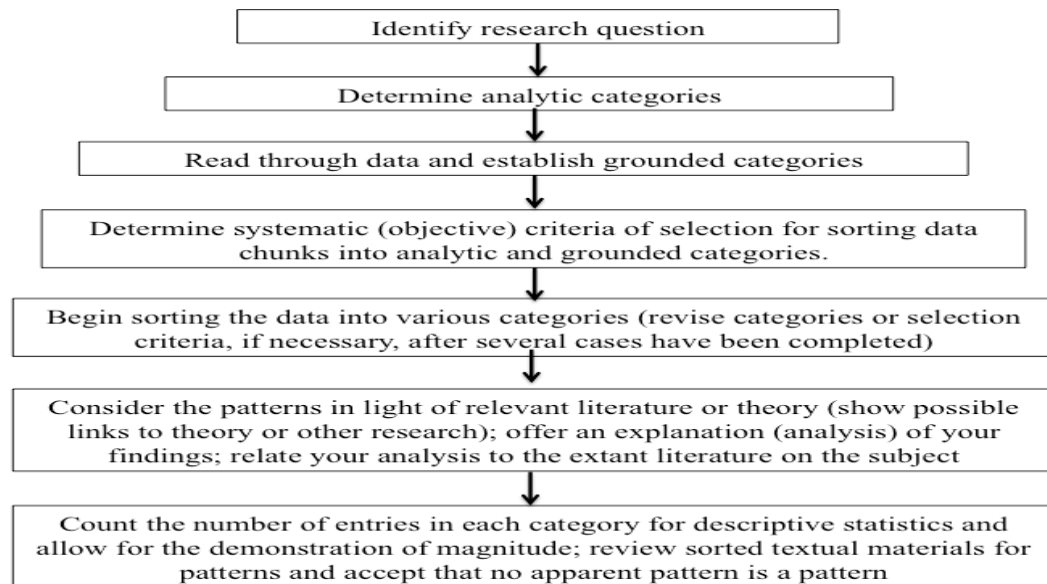
Stage 4:

- Understand that coding is only part of analysis
- Add your interpretation
- Identify significance for respondents
- Determine interconnections between codes
- Connect codes to research question and research literature

The researcher coded – or categorized the information – into more specific themes under the larger themes of “essential elements” and “cultural changes.” The researcher began to organize and sort the data into various categories using direct quotes from the participants. Themes began to develop in the context of the research questions. From the interviews, the predominant themes surfacing in the context of “essential elements for the institutionalization of student voice in schools” were 1) leadership support, 2) time for implementation, 3) buy-in from teachers, and 4) more student voice training for all teachers. In the context of “school culture,” the prevalent themes were 1) school procedural impact, 2) relationships, 3) student leadership, 4) student and teacher collaboration, and 5) student learning.

Hancock and Algozzine (2011) share a model of qualitative analysis on which the researcher based his analysis process.

Figure 3.1 Model of qualitative analysis



Source: Hancock, D.R., & Algozzine, B. (2011). *Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers*.

Organizing the data

The researcher's first step in data analysis was to review all of the data in order for each piece of data to make sense. The researcher organized the data in such a format that the data told a story in a seamless process. Part of the research process was to filter the information that was relevant from the information that was not relevant to the study. This step is vital as the process moves from analyzing various pieces of data, to making sense of the whole, to better identifying emerging themes.

Classifying the data into codes or themes

The second step of this process was to determine what themes were prevalent from the data collected. After the data was grouped into major themes, information from the interviews, observations, and collection of artifacts were labeled under each appropriate theme. After the coding process, the researcher analyzed the data in depth to determine if adding, deleting or

modifying any of the created codes was necessary. Visuals were used to show patterns or connections between two or more categories.

Interpreting the data

During this step, the researcher summarized the findings from the data. After the data were categorized into codes, the researcher determined the meaning of the data. Any visual images, such as tables or charts, were interpreted to communicate meaning. Findings were analyzed and synthesized, and any findings connected to experience or literature was listed.

The objective of this case study is to gather data about the factors that supported the institutionalization of the student voice initiative in three diverse school districts in Mississippi County, Arkansas. By identifying these factors, such strategies can be replicated in other schools and districts across the state and the nation.

The case study attempted to answer the following research question:

1. What stimulates the institutionalization of student voice within school settings?

The sub-questions of this study include the following:

1. How does school culture influence student voice implementation?
2. How does student voice change school culture?

The emphasis of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of the methodology used in this research. The researcher describes the site of the study and the demographics of the research participants, along with the research design, the data collection methods, and the data analysis and synthesis process.

Trustworthiness of the Data

The researcher insured that the results of the case study are accurate data and not the biases of the researcher. The researcher used the following methods to ensure trustworthiness: audit trail, peer debriefing and member check.

Audit Trail

The researcher made notes and kept accurate records of the process throughout the study. Each month at the student voice training session, observations were recorded, photographs were taken and notes from conversations were documented. The researcher noted how decisions and conclusions are derived from this audit trail.

Peer Debriefing

The researcher utilized peer debriefing during the data analysis stage to obtain input from impartial examiners. The peer debriefing process was conducted with peers familiar with the student voice concept as well as peers unfamiliar with the concept in order to view the data from multiple lenses. After the peer analysis, feedback was given to the researcher to ensure trustworthiness, accuracy and validity.

Member Check

The researcher used the member check process to ensure validity of interview data. At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher checked with each participant to confirm that the views, wording, and context had properly been captured. Participants had the opportunity to give more detail or clarify any information that may have been unclear to the researcher during the data analysis process.

Summary

This case study is defined as an instrumental case study. An instrumental case study seeks to understand a specific problem or issue (Creswell, 2013), and in this case, factors that increase student voice implementation at the school site. Stake (1995, p. 3) delves deeper in his definition by describing an instrumental study as one that focuses on a research question or problem, but is also “instrumental” in determining other aspects of the problem. Through the study about student voice, the goal is to gather data about implementation of strategies, and also to gather information about other significant concepts of student voice that may surface through the research. Yin (2014) states that research methods are used for three purposes – exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory – and one case study may use all three purposes. Throughout the process of this case study, the researcher explored the factors through which student voice strategies were implemented at the school site, described those factors, and by using data, explained why these factors were instrumental in the transfer of learning process.

The research participants in this instrumental case study were ten adult coaches participating in the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative. Patton (2001) states that in qualitative research the selection of the participants is purposeful (as cited in Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104). One type of purposeful sampling is maximum variation. Creswell (2013) describes maximum variation sampling as a sampling technique where the researcher determines the criteria of the research participants in advance to maximize the differences. Those characteristics chosen by the researcher were based on attendance and engagement data: the ten research participants have shown regular attendance and engagement in the monthly student voice seminars. The rationale for the selection of these participants is because each month the learning builds on previous learning, and those participants who attended each month

possess a deeper understanding of the process and a stronger grasp of the student voice concept. This is evident through the observations and conversations that the researcher has had with the selected participants. This rationale increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect different perspectives, which is ideal in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

The ten research participants represented three school sites and included diversity in gender, content area, grade level, years of experience and ethnicity. The level of teaching experience ranged from two years to thirty-three years, and content areas included English, social studies, E.A.S.T. (Environmental and Spatial Technologies) facilitator, history, marketing, career and technical and administrators. The demographics of the research participants represented the demographics of the entire participant list. The selected participants consisted of seven female (70%) and three male (30%) participants. Nine of the participants were Caucasian (90%) and one of the participants was African-American (10%), which reflected the ethnic diversity of the entire participant group.

Overview of information needed

Contextual information

The research participants are educators in public schools in Mississippi County, Arkansas. Mississippi County is the most northeastern county in the state of Arkansas, sharing a boundary with Missouri to the north with the Mississippi River (for which the county is named) separating it from Tennessee to the east. Most of the residents in Mississippi County are farmers and produce such crops as soybeans, rice, corn, and especially cotton, which has contributed greatly to the economy of the area and the state. Eight steel-related industries have located in the county in recent years, making it the largest steel-producing county in the nation. These and other industries have chosen Mississippi County because of the easy access to the interstate and

river travel. According to the United States Census Bureau, the average income per family in Mississippi County was \$35,663 in 2014.

Figure 3.2 Mississippi County



(Information retrieved from <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=791>)

Demographic information

Most of the county is rural, and the poverty level varies by community. The financial resources in the Mississippi County school districts are not abundant. All but one school district in the county has a poverty level of 50% or higher. The three school districts in this study have poverty levels of 100% (Blytheville), 100% (Osceola) and 44% (Armored).

Table 3.2

School District Demographics

School District	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Limited English	% Poverty
Armored	81.8	7.3	6.4	0	44
Blytheville	17.3	79.0	2.9	2	100
Gosnell	67.2	22.2	7.0	1	69
Manila	93.7	0.2	5.2	1	63
Osceola	16.8	79.0	1.7	0	100
Rivercrest	63.6	29.6	5.7	2	76

Retrieved from: <http://www.mcagov.com/>

<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=935>

Participating schools:

There were seven schools and one junior college technical center in Mississippi County participating in the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative; however, this study focused on three of the school districts with racially and socio-economically diverse populations.

The school districts participating in this study include the following:

- Armored High School
- Blytheville Middle / High School
- Osceola High School

Armored School District

Table 3.3

Demographic Data – Armored School District

Category	Number / Percent
Enrollment	424
Average Class Size	12 students
Average Years Teaching Exp.	11 years
Per Pupil Spending – District	\$10,479
Per Pupil Spending – State	\$9,642
School Choice Transfers	0
Limited English Proficiency	0
Low Income Percentage	44%
Special Education Percentage	9%

Blytheville School District

Table 3.4

Demographic Data – Blytheville School District

Category	Number / Percent
Enrollment	2,348
Average Class Size	14 students
Average Years Teaching Exp.	9 years
Per Pupil Spending – District	\$11,491
Per Pupil Spending – State	\$9,642
School Choice Transfers	0
Limited English Proficiency	2
Low Income Percentage	100%
Special Education Percentage	13%

Osceola School District

Table 3.5

Demographic Data – Osceola School District

Category	Number / Percent
Enrollment	1,300
Average Class Size	15 students
Average Years Teaching Exp.	12 years
Per Pupil Spending – District	\$11,236
Per Pupil Spending – State	\$9,642
School Choice Transfers	0
Limited English Proficiency	0
Low Income Percentage	100%
Special Education Percentage	10%

Demographic information retrieved from the website of the Arkansas Department of Education (<http://www.arkansased.gov/>)

Table 3.6

Contextual, Demographical and Theoretical Information:

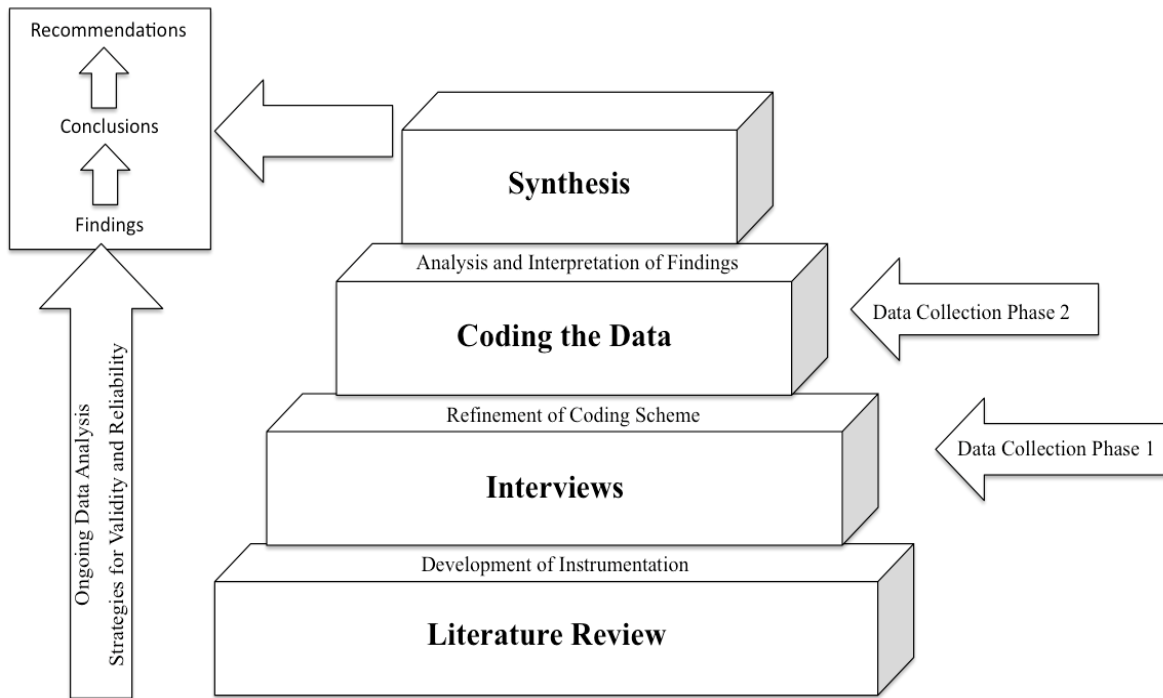
Type of Information	What the Researcher Requires	Method
Contextual	The Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative began in April 2015. The objective of this initiative was to instruct students and adult coaches from each school district in Mississippi County, Arkansas about the concept of student voice. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will focus on three school districts with diverse populations.	Grant Information Observation Ark. Dept. of Ed. School Districts

Table 3.6 (Cont.)

Type of Information	What the Researcher Requires	Method
Demographical	The participants in this study consist of a diverse sample of five adult coaches and five school principals who were chosen based on attendance and engagement during the training seminars. These ten participants represent three diverse school districts in Mississippi County, Arkansas. The level of teaching experience of these ten participants represent the population demographics of the adult coaches – seven females and three males. Nine of the ten participants are Caucasian and one participant is African-American.	Surveys Sign-in Sheets Observation Interviews Knowledge
Theoretical	The researcher’s objective is to determine what factors are essential in the institutionalization of student voice in a school setting?	Interviews Observations
Research Question 1: What stimulates the institutionalization of student voice within a school setting?		
How does school culture influence student voice implementation?	Student voice is a second-order cultural change, so the researcher will determine the impact on school culture when student voice was implemented in these three diverse school districts. A second-order cultural change goes deeper than a technical change and challenges the traditional beliefs of educators.	
How does student voice change school culture?		

Research Design

Figure 3.2 Flowchart of Research Design



Source: Bloomberg, L.D. and Volpe, M. (2012). Adapted from *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End*.

Chapter summary

The intended objective of this case study was to gather perceptions from the participants to determine the factors that stimulate the institutionalization of student voice strategies in a school setting. Each interview question supported the research question and sub-questions; questions were open-ended which allowed the participant to elaborate on the question as much as he or she would like. To answer these questions in detail, the participant must have a working knowledge of the student voice initiative. The results of this research facilitated a better understanding of the issue of student voice and the factors that stimulated the implementation process in diverse school settings.

Purposeful maximum sampling was the process of determining the sample population based on attendance and participation level at the monthly student voice training. The

participants in this study consisted of a diverse sample of five adult coaches and five school principals who were chosen representing three diverse school districts in Mississippi County, Arkansas. The level of teaching experience of these ten participants ranged from two years to thirty-three years, and content areas included English, social studies, E.A.S.T. (Environmental and Spatial Technologies) facilitator, history, marketing, career and technical and administrators. The ten participants represented the population demographics of the adult coaches – seven females and three males. Nine of the ten participants were Caucasian, and one participant was African-American.

Chapter Four

Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that stimulate institutionalization of student voice within three diverse school districts. Student voice is generally defined as “students having a legitimate perspective, presence and active role in the education process.” (Cook-Sather, 2006). As school districts transition from the traditional school setting, where teachers are the sole decision-makers, to a more collaborative setting, where students and teachers become partners in the learning process, this study determines what essential factors must be present for student voice to flourish. According to the research on student voice, students who feel they have input in the educational process are more engaged in the classroom, have a purpose for coming to school and are more academically motivated. School leaders and classroom teachers must address this cultural change in order to improve student learning.

This case study focused on three diverse school districts in Mississippi County, Arkansas, which are currently participating in the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative. Diverse school districts were selected to determine if the factors needed for student voice implementation varied among school districts with dissimilar socio-economic populations.

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from ten in-depth interviews with educators – teacher leaders and administrators – attending the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative. By understanding what factors are essential for developing student voice within a school culture, school leaders will be able to use the data to replicate these factors

to strengthen student voice in schools across the country. The research questions on which the interviews were based are the following:

1. What stimulates the institutionalization of student voice within the school setting?

Sub questions:

1. How does school culture influence student voice implementation?
2. How does student voice change school culture?

The researcher developed a list of semi-structured questions to allow the participants to give detail, share stories, and provide examples. These questions are predetermined, but by using semi-structured questions, the researcher is able to ask follow-up questions of the participants in order to probe more deeply into the topic:

1. When you think about the beginning of our student voice training, what has been the most positive and powerful impact?
2. How does your school look different today since student voice has been implemented?
3. As a result of the impact you and your students have made, what do you see today that gives you hope for the future?
4. What needed to be in place for alignment of principles, purpose and practices for student voice to flourish?
5. Describe the behaviors and skills that emerged and flourished as a result of student voice in your school.
6. What would the students say about student voice?

Transcribing the Interviews

Each participant was interviewed individually. Hancock and Algozzine (2011), suggest that group interviews allow for each participant to gain new perspectives, but in this case, the

researcher's objective was to gather perspectives and experience personal to each participant. Each participant was interviewed in their school setting, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. The researcher chose the school setting in order to increase the comfort level of each participant and increase the likelihood of attaining high-quality information (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). A noticeable common "pre-interview" theme was the positive and encouraging attitudes perceived by the researcher. Participants were anxious to share their perspective on the implementation of student voice at their school site. Each participant scheduled and prioritized the interviews to confirm the significance of the study. The researcher appreciated the attitudes and the cooperation of each participant. Many of the participants expressed interest in reading the findings of this qualitative case study upon its completion.

The researcher transcribed each interview word-for-word in order to collect holistic information from each participant. The researcher noted body language, facial expressions, frustrations, humor and other personal observations. *Detailed description* means that the researcher described what was seen in the context of the setting, the person, place or event (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). The researcher transcribed the interview verbatim to provide accurate raw data. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher, then the researcher used the member check method by sharing the transcribed data with participants to ensure that the information transcribed was accurate and valid. The research questions were the point of reference for data collection. As the researcher read the transcription from each interview, the information was filtered through essential elements of student voice and cultural changes in the school setting. The researcher highlighted the text and made notes in the margin to organize the information explicitly addressing the research questions.

The chart below represents statements in the interviews that support the research question and the sub questions. The first table addresses the first research question and the themes that surfaced from the interviews. The second table addresses the two sub questions and the themes that surfaced during the interviews pertaining to these questions. The left column is the statement from the participant while the second column refers to the participant who made the statement during the interview (P1 – Participant 1, P2- Participant 2, etc.). The audit trail refers to the line(s) of the transcribed interview where the statement was made (L54-55 refers to lines 54 and 55 in the transcription of that participant’s interview).

Research Question 1: What stimulates the institutionalization of student voice within school settings?

Table 4.1 Interview Supporting Data – Essential Elements

Leadership Support	Participant	Audit Trail
One of the things I want to do is be more active.	P2	L54-55
My personal goal is to become more involved.	P2	L58-59
For student voice to be embedded, there must be administrative support.	P3	L97-98
Consistency is important for sustainability.	P4	L150-151
Our principal sits in on our meetings.	P5	L145-147
One obstacle you may face is lack of teacher and administrator investment.	P5	L155-156
Involving administration must be a priority.	P5	L191-192
The first thing that needs to be in place is the support of the administration.	P6	L27-28

Table 4.1 (Cont.)

Leadership Support	Participant	Audit Trail
Administration can be a support or a barrier, depending on the person.	P6	L28-29
I feel that administrative support needs to be in place first.	P8	L51-52
The key to success is to make sure that leadership is on board first because they drive change.	P9	L73-75
If leadership is not on board, you will not make a difference.	P9	L79-80
You must have leadership who can drive, steer, and value the process.	P9	L82-83
Leadership support is the foundation.	P9	L83
Time	Participant	Audit Trail
We have set time on our calendars so we know these meetings are important.	P3	L84-85
Our biggest challenge for implementation has been finding time to get together to plan.	P5	L16-17
We still meet once a week but we need to meet more often for this initiative to be sustainable.	P5	L20-21
I thought we were going to do this quickly, but soon realized that changing a culture takes time.	P5	L48-50
I think we have realized that it is going to take some time before we see significant changes.	P5	L70-71
When talking about cultural change, it is going to take time and sometimes we get impatient.	P5	L71-73

Table 4.1 (Cont.)

Time	Participant	Audit Trail
We are not going to change culture overnight.	P5	L73-74
It is going to take some time.	P5	L111-112
To put things in action, we need more time together to talk.	P5	L123-124
It is not enough to meet once a month, so we need to find the time to meet more often.	P5	L125-126
We are going to do better next year because we have decided to get into a routine.	P5	L141-142
Meeting more than once a month has been a key factor.	P5	L144-145
Setting time aside to meet is essential.	P5	L185-187
We must set a precedent that student voice is important and a priority.	P5	L188-189
You have to build time in the schedule so students will have time to meet.	P7	L85-87
Part of our problem of getting things off the ground was finding time for the follow-through.	P7	L113-114
We need to have time to put structures in place.	P7	L126
Buy-in From Teachers	Participant	Audit Trail
My goal is to expand our numbers and get more teachers involved.	P2	L41-42
Teachers need to be better educated to understand that student voice is an important concept and will help with the success of our school.	P3	L98-100
It is important to have more teachers buy into the process.	P3	L128

4.1 (Cont.)

Buy-in From Teachers	Participant	Audit Trail
I think student voice will affect the way I do my job for the rest of my life.	P4	L27-28
As a teacher, student voice prepares me in a different kind of way, a way I won't get in graduate school.	P4	L63-65
The biggest hindrance was that all teachers did not want to get involved.	P5	L165
Student voice has always been important, but we adults have not taken the time and opportunity to ask for their voices.	P6	L10-11
The second thing that needs to be in place is that the adults need to change from traditional practices to a more collaborative culture.	P6	L31-33
The first thing that needs to take place for student voice to flourish, is that adults must buy in.	P7	L69-70
All adults must be involved.	P7	L73
The foundation is that the adults have to buy into the system, believe in it, and put students first.	P7	L76-77
Not all of the teachers accepted this cultural change, but most are excited and are on board.	P8	L41-43
Some teachers are still a step away from buy-in because change is hard.	P8	L44-45
More Training for Teachers	Participant	Audit Trail
For student voice to become embedded in the culture we need more training for other teachers.	P1	L45-46

4.1 (Cont.)

More Training for Teachers	Participant	Audit Trail
Start the school year with a workshop for the whole faculty to show how to implement student voice in classrooms.	P1	L48-50
More training for all of the teachers.	P1	L51-52
There has to be training for everyone involved – teachers and students.	P5	L51-52
We are looking at ways to better educate the faculty and students.	P5	L126-127
We need to have all of the teachers and students go to the training the first week of school.	P5	L156-158
When teachers get training, it is like, “this is what we have been trying to do.”	P5	L160-161
The first thing to do is to train and educate everyone so we have a common understanding of student voice.	P5	L177-179
I think that through training and professional development on student voice, teachers will develop a better understanding.	P7	L81-83
At some point, every teacher needs to be trained to better understand the vision of student voice.	P8	L53-54

Research Sub Questions:

How does school culture influence student voice implementation?

How does student voice change school culture?

Table 4.2 Interview Supporting Data – Cultural Impact

School Procedural Impact	Participant	Audit Trail
Students are involved in developing classroom procedures	P1	L20-21
Students sit in on teacher interviews and give feedback about potential candidates.	P1	L25-26
Students give suggestions for school wide rules and procedures.	P1	L26-27
Until two years ago, we had nothing like this, and it is good for everyone involved.	P2	L77-79
I want to make more changes to meet student learning needs.	P3	L77-79
All of the initiatives we have put into place have been directly affected by my involvement in student voice.	P4	L23-25
The students have begun conversations about schedules and other things in their learning environment.	P5	L63-65
Students were instrumental in getting the hallways painted because they said the building looked like a jail.	P5	L77-79
Students painted murals and ceiling tiles in our school to make it more presentable.	P5	L80-81
Students have initiated hall and door decorating contests.	P5	L85-86
Students are sitting in on teacher interviews to give feedback on applicants.	P6	L14-15
The most positive and powerful impact of student voice training is the way it makes me truly understand the potential of self-agency in education.	P10	L7-9

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

Relationships	Participant	Audit Trail
Students' voices are being heard and they feel like they are more part of the school.	P1	L29-30
If we can better understand where students are coming from, we can better meet their needs.	P3	L14-15
Student voice produces a better work environment for everyone.	P3	L60
Students are getting much more comfortable talking to teachers.	P3	L61-62
There has to be give and take among everyone within the system.	P3	L103-104
These changes have made our students much happier at school.	P3	L112-113
Being an effective teacher starts with building relationships.	P4	L61-62
Student voice has given the tools to build relationships with students.	P4	L65-66
There is more respect between teachers and students.	P4	L89-90
We must realize the importance of building relationships with students instead of treating them as secondary citizens in the school.	P4	L112-113
Students would say that the classrooms feel different and they like being treated more like young adults.	P4	L196-197

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

Relationships	Participant	Audit Trail
Student voice has created a really nice bond between teachers and students. It has made us more aware to talk about success and failures. It adds value to us as a school community.	P4	L238-240
Students and administrators are having conversations about learning and their learning environment.	P5	L67-68
I don't see these things happening without the initial step of conversation between students and teachers.	P5	L91
Student voice has developed trust among students and teachers.	P5	L93
Positive student-teacher conversations have strengthened relationships and built trust.	P5	L104-105
Learning has become more individualized and this has stemmed from conversations between teachers and students.	P5	L115-116
The principal has been working on a new project to strengthen relationships with students.	P5	L128-129
Building relationships between students and administration is vital.	P5	L131-132
We keep focusing on improving relationships.	P5	L184-185
You are missing a key component if you don't lay the foundation of relationship building.	P5	L185-186
Teachers like coming to school now.	P6	L22

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

Relationships	Participant	Audit Trail
Students will often come to me to give suggestions for ways to better our school, and when we act on their suggestions, it shows that their voice is important.	P6	L16-19
Students respect the teachers and teachers respect the students. This a huge cultural difference in our building from the past.	P6	L22-24
Students have been a major part of the culture and climate improvement, and they feel comfortable talking to teachers, and even administrators, about ways to improve our school.	P6	L36-39
I was encouraged that students feel comfortable enough to come to me to have educational conversations.	P7	L42-44
Students are more comfortable with having conversations with the adults.	P7	L106-107
The teachers are becoming more accepting of the students and their opinions.	P8	L25
Today my students are more comfortable about sharing ideas and address issues with teachers.	P8	L33-34
In the past, my students seemed to be afraid to talk to teachers, but now they are more comfortable and see that their ideas and opinions are valued.	P8	L35-37
Students feel more comfortable expressing their opinions to the adults in our building.	P8	L68-69

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

Relationships	Participant	Audit Trail
I really enjoy communicating and building relationships with my students.	P9	L19-20
Having a process to improve teacher and student relationships is a critical factors.	P9	L32-33
Start by building relationships between teachers and students.	P9	L39-40
We have a mutual relationship where students are able to contribute and make things happen at our school due to student voice.	P9	L44-46
We are creating a team-building environment where students see teachers as “actual people” and not just their teacher.	P9	L67-68
Student Leadership	Participant	Audit Trail
There is more student involvement in school decision-making.	P1	L24
I have noticed more students showing leadership skills.	P1	L5
I did not expect those leadership skills to come out so quickly in students.	P1	L60-61
We now have a core group of student leaders.	P2	L16
The students have gone from being shy kids to really taking on a leadership role.	P2	L18-19
The students are not afraid to speak to other student groups and groups of adults. They have become very polished.	P2	L20-22

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

Student Leadership	Participant	Audit Trail
I am seeing more and more students take a leader role.	P2	L26-27
Our school is different today because we have a core group of student leaders and student voice has everything to do with that.	P2	L31-33
Students lead workshops and professional development.	P2	L33
Students step up and show leadership.	P2	L36
Leadership traits have emerged in many of the students and this alone has made school a better place for them.	P2	L64-65
The number of students participating has increased each month.	P2	L69-70
Students who normally do not speak up have come forward to be the voice for other students.	P2	L109-111
Students are asking how they can get more involved in the process and this is a very positive thing.	P3	L118-119
Student voice is developing student leaders in a classroom who in a traditional setting may not be considered student leaders.	P4	L104-106
We let members of our student voice leadership team lead campus tours with our visitors.	P4	L165-167
Students have stepped up and developed leadership skills when we did not expect them to, and this was a rewarding moment for me as an administrator.	P4	L188-190

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

Student Leadership	Participant	Audit Trail
Student voice has developed some strong leadership skills in our students. Jordan specifically came out of her shell as a shy, soft spoken student and she was given the chance to be a leader.	P4	L208-209
Student voice has caused students to want to see change in their school.	P5	L46-47
We are seeing positive changes that are not initiated by the adults.	P5	L103-104
One of our tenth grade students is very shy but since going to student voice training, she has led professional development with teachers and shared her experiences with the school board.	P5	L202-204
Student voice has given students the confidence to step up and become leaders.	P5	L208-209
Students have become more confident because of this initiative.	P5	L213-214
When these students are seeing that their voices are being heard, they feel like the star athlete on Friday night. When they see what they have suggested becomes implemented, it is like they have made the winning basket or the game winning touchdown.	P5	L214-218
I have seen confidence grow in my students.	P5	L222-223

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

Student Leadership	Participant	Audit Trail
Students are enjoying being part of something that makes a difference.	P5	L236-237
Students now understand that their voice is really important.	P6	L9-10
Students are now taking ownership of the school culture. They police themselves and give us feedback concerning their learning.	P6	L12-14
Students are showing more leadership among the student body.	P6	L39-40
The largest impact came from the number of Students who wanted to be part of the process.	P7	L12-13
We have had students who have been negative leaders in the past become positive leaders.	P7	L92-94
The students have been instrumental in changing the culture of our school since student voice training.	P8	L22-23
Students have developed collaboration skills.	P8	L69-70
So many students want to be part of this.	P8	L77-78
I see a greater confidence in many of our students.	P8	L65
Students are the most underutilized resources, and a little coaxing can pay huge dividends in leadership development.	P10	L9-10
A diverse group of student leaders will ensure that every student feels that they have a voice.	P10	L23-24

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

Student Leadership	Participant	Audit Trail
I saw a number of students stand up and be heard in a positive way.	P10	L27-28
Learning to be proactive with their vision instead of reactionary has led to a decrease in frustration and generally a more positive environment.	P10	L28-29
Teacher and Student Collaboration	Participant	Audit Trail
Students are making things known that otherwise we would not have known.	P1	L57
Teachers are actually working with students now instead of being tyrants.	P1	L68-69
Teachers and students have become learning partners	P1	L69-70
Now it is more of a partnership.	P1	L71-72
I want the students involved in developing the mission and vision so it will be more meaningful to them.	P3	L24-26
Students are working with the teachers on curriculum.	P3	L32-33
Students are now given a voice about what they are doing in the classroom.	P3	L35-36
There is much more student-teacher communication and collaboration.	P3	L57-58
Students and teachers are working together to do what is best for the students.	P3	L66-67
Our students say that student voice is a positive piece that has been added to the school.	P3	L121-122

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

Teacher and Student Collaboration	Participant	Audit Trail
Students feel that the classroom environment is much more open and collaborative.	P4	L222-223
Teachers are asking students, “What can we do differently? We now are having an advisory meeting every week.	P4	L228-229
We have to learn to have open conversations.	P5	L83-84
Students are now part of our culture committee.	P5	L173-174
It is a cultural shift now that students can contribute and they feel like they have a say in what is going on with teaching and learning.	P8	L71-72
We are collaboratively working together to make sure great things are going on in our school.	P9	L51-53
While some students show trepidation about doing anything in cooperation with teachers (general social anxiety about being seen as a goody two shoes), but they will quietly admit that they appreciate being asked their opinion.	P9	L68-70
	P10	L31-34
Student Learning	Participant	Audit Trail
Student voice affects student achievement and student engagement.	P1	L17-18
Student voice gives students the opportunity to actually participate in their learning and give them a voice in how they learn.	P1	L65-67
We are seeing how much education matters to students.	P1	L67-68
Students are developing stronger speaking skills.	P2	L62-63

4.2 (Cont.)

Student Learning	Participant	Audit Trail
I see student voice as the largest factor that will change our culture and move us out of academic distress.	P2	L79-81
Students are going to have these communication skills and collaboration skills even after they leave us.	P3	L36-38
Some teachers have called this a breath of fresh air because learning has become more student driven.	P5	L30-32
Student voice training has given me the tools to make my classroom mostly student driven.	P5	L37-39
We are seeing more student driven work this year.	P5	L90-91
The students love that they can take more ownership of their schoolwork.	P5	L93-95
I feel that this has motivated our student to take more ownership of their education.	P5	L97-98
Learning has become more student-centered, and that is a huge change from the past.	P5	L109-111
Students have been given more responsibility in the classroom and teachers are becoming more of a facilitator.	P6	L41-42
Student voice has taken conversations much deeper than we had originally thought. Students now realize that they can have a say in the educational process.	P7	L27-30
Students seem to be more in control of their own learning.	P10	L14-15

Table 4.3 Data Summary Matrix

Data Summary Table									
	Essential				Culture				
	Leadership Support	Time	Buy-in From Teachers	More Training for Teachers	School Procedural Impact	Relationships	Student Leadership	Teacher Student Collaboration	Student Learning
Participant 1				X	X	X	X	X	X
Participant 2	X		X		X		X		X
Participant 3	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Participant 4	X		X		X	X	X	X	
Participant 5	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Participant 6	X		X		X	X	X		X
Participant 7		X	X	X		X	X		X
Participant 8	X		X			X	X		
Participant 9	X					X		X	
Participant 10					X		X	X	X
	70%	30%	70%	30%	70%	80%	90%	60%	70%

Findings

1. The majority (70%) of the participants interviewed specified that the foundational component essential for student voice implementation is support by the building and district level leadership.
2. Teacher support and understanding is vital for the student voice initiative to be taken to scale. According to the data, 70% of the participants mentioned that teacher support is necessary, but the components of time (30%) and training (30%) must be a priority for teachers to achieve buy-in.
3. An overwhelming majority (90%) of the participants interviewed indicated, due to the implementation of student voice, the school culture has improved through the development of student leadership.
4. The majority of the participants mentioned that a positive relationship between students and teachers (80%) that creates more collaboration (60%) is essential, and an outcome of implementation.

5. The majority of the participants have seen evidence that the implementation of student voice has created a higher culture for student learning (70%).

Finding 1: *The majority (70%) of the participants interviewed specified that the foundational component essential for student voice implementation is support by the building and district level leadership.*

The primary focus of this study is to determine what components in a school culture must be in place in order for student voice to become institutionalized. Much of the research in chapter 2 supports the results of the data collection by showing that the student voice initiative begins with leadership support. Resources – time, people and money – are obligated to those pieces of an organization that leaders deem important. If school leadership is supportive of the student voice initiative, it will be considered a priority, and resources will support the initiative. This finding supports the research by Mitra, Serriere, and Stoicovy (2012, p. 104) stating that “the process through which school leadership implements student voice has a major impact on how well the initiative is accepted by teachers. The leader must, 1) provide a clear vision for student voice and how it fits into the school culture, 2) allow opt-in strategies for teachers when possible, and 3) recognize that implementation from teachers vary depending on individual contexts, beliefs, and experiences.”

Participants expressed this essential element through these sample comments:

- For student voice to be embedded in the culture, you have to have administrative support (P3, L97-98).
- One obstacle you may face is lack of teacher and administrator investment (P5, L155-156).
- Involving administration must be a priority (P5, L191-192)

- The first thing that needs to be in place is the support of the administration (P6, L27-28).
- Administration can be a support or a barrier depending on the person (L6, L28-29).
- I feel that what needs to be in place first is administrative support (P8, L51-52).
- The number one issue or key to success would be to make sure that your leadership is on board first because they are the drivers of change (P9, L73-75).
- If you don't have leadership on board you're not going to make a difference (P9, L79-80).
- Leadership support is the foundation (P9, L83).

Four of the participants are building level administrators (P2, P3, P6, and P7). Three of the four building level administrators stressed the importance of self-participation and support. Participant 2 emphasized that he might have been a barrier in the past, but his professional growth goal next year is to become more active and involved in the student voice initiative.

Finding 2: *Teacher support and understanding is vital for the student voice initiative to be taken to scale. According to the data, 70% of the participants mentioned that teacher support is necessary, but the components of time (30%) and training (30%) must be a priority for teachers to achieve buy-in.*

From the research, a key barrier to student voice is lack of teacher support. To create a culture where students and teachers work collaboratively, the teachers must first understand the initiative and support the components of student voice. The participants made this perfectly clear through the results of the interviews as 70% of the participants mentioned that teachers must have buy-in for the initiative to succeed. The researcher clustered the following three categories – teacher buy-in, time, and teacher training – because time and teacher training must exist before teachers will support the process. When teacher support was mentioned, the prelude to support was creating time for teacher understanding and time for implementation. During the

interviews, the participants shared evidence about teacher support, teacher training and time with these sample comments:

- My goal is to expand our student voice number and get more teachers involved (P2, L41-42).
- Teachers need to be better educated to understand that student voice is an important process and will help with the success of our school (P3, L98-100).
- I think student voice will affect the way I do my job for the rest of my life (P4, L27-28).
- The first thing that needs to take place for student voice to flourish is the adults have to buy-in to it (P7, L69-70).
- All adults must be involved (P7, L73).
- The foundation is that the adults have to buy-in to it and believe in the system and put students first (P7, L76-77).
- At some point, every teacher needs to be trained to better understand the vision of student voice (P8, L53-54).
- The first thing to do is to train and educate everyone so we know what we are talking about when we say "student voice" (P5, L177-179).
- I think that through training and professional development on student voice, teachers will get a better understanding (P7, L81-83).

Finding 3: *An overwhelming majority (90%) of the participants interviewed indicated that due to the implementation of student voice, the school culture has improved through the development of student leadership.*

A central objective in the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative has been to develop stronger student leaders, especially in those students who have the ability, but maybe

are hesitant due to personalities. A vast majority (90%) of the participants shared multiple stories of students who had developed as student leaders due to the monthly student voice training. Student voice training does not solely prepare students for their school experience, but also for life after school. With the leadership training in the student voice institute, students will be improved leaders and stronger and more effective communicators in society. Leadership is a life skill for the students, and the participants shared information about this vital piece of the puzzle through these sample comments:

- There is more student involvement in decision-making (P1, L24).
- They have gone from being shy and unassuming middle school kids to really taking on a leadership role (P2, L18-19).
- Students who normally do not speak up have come forward to be the voice for other kids, and they are encouraging other kids who were afraid to talk to teachers (P3, L109-111).
- Student voice is developing student leaders in the classroom who in a traditional setting may not be considered student leaders (P4, L104-106).
- One of our 10th grade students is very shy, but since going to student voice training, she has led professional development with teachers and has talked to our school board about her student voice experience (P5, L202-204).
- When these students see their voices are being heard, they feel like the star athlete on Friday night. When they see what they have recommended become implemented, it's as if they have made the winning basket or the game winning touchdown (P5, L214-218).
- Students are now taking ownership of the school culture. They police themselves and give us feedback concerning the fighting policy, dress code and testing rewards (P6, L12-14).

- We have had students who we knew were leaders in a negative way become leaders in a positive way (P7, L92-94).
- Learning to be proactive with their vision instead of reactionary has led to a decrease in frustration and a generally more positive environment (P10, L28-29).

Finding 4: *The majority of the participants mentioned that a positive relationship between students and teachers (80%) that creates more collaboration (60%) is essential and an outcome of implementation.*

A lengthy part of chapter 2 dealt with the importance of building strong collaborative relationships between students and teachers in order for student voice to flourish. Healthy student-teacher relationships can be an igniter of student voice, and it can be an outcome of student voice. Whether the positive student-teacher relationship was present before student voice was implemented (fertile ground) or strong student-teacher relationships were a result of student voice implementation, this piece is a foundational piece for implementation. All of the participants representing the three school districts mentioned the positive student-teacher relationships and a collaborative culture was not in place until student voice allowed them to grow these relationships. In these three cases, positive relationships and a collaborative culture were outcomes of the student voice initiative.

The section on “school procedural impact” also falls under this theme. When students are allowed to come to the table in order to provide input on school rules and procedures, a strong student-teacher relationship must be present. These components were shared in these sample quotations:

- Students' voice is being heard and they feel like they are more part of the school instead of just a participant (P1, L29-30).

- There is much more student/teacher communication and collaboration (P3, L57-58).
- Being an effective teacher starts with building relationships (P4, L61-62).
- We must realize the importance of building relationships with students instead of just treating them like a secondary citizen in the school (P4, L112-113).
- I don't see these things happening without the initial step of conversations between students and teachers (P5, L91).
- Students respect teachers and teachers respect the students. This is a huge difference in the culture and climate in our building from the past (P6, L22-24).
- Students are working with the teachers on our culture committee and on other committees in our school (P8, L71-72).
- We are creating a team-building environment where students see teachers as "actual people" and not just their teacher (P9, L67-68).
- While some students show trepidation about doing anything in cooperation with teachers (general social anxiety about being seen as a goody-two-shoes) even they will quietly admit that they appreciate being asked their opinion (P10, L31-34).

The last statement on this list is from a teacher in the most challenging culture of the three participating school districts. From most of the comments transcribed from the interviews, it is evident that students and teachers in most situations want to create a culture of collaboration and improve the learning environment through building relationships. However, this honest statement in reality is a reminder that some of the school cultures are still challenging and perceive positive student-teacher relationships as something to not be publicized in fear of peer harassment. The positive spin on this perspective is the section of the comment stating, "They

quietly appreciate being asked their opinion.” Even in the challenging situations, there can be progress.

Finding 5: *The majority of the participants have seen evidence that the implementation of student voice has created a higher culture for student learning (70%).*

From my experience as a student voice trainer, one major barrier is helping participants understand that student voice goes beyond creating an affective culture for students and teachers. Much of the research in chapter 2 focuses on the fact that student voice is correlated with student learning. Quaglia (2016) emphasizes his research stating students are seven times more academically motivated when they are given an opportunity to share their voice about their learning. When students are academically motivated, achievement improves. Participants shared these comments about student voice and student learning:

- Affects student achievement scores, learning in the classroom and student engagement (P1, L17-18).
- I see this as the largest factor that will change our culture and move us out of academic distress (P2, L79-81).
- Students are going to have those communication skills and collaboration skills that they need when they leave us to go to college (P3, L36-38).
- I feel like this has motivated students to take ownership of their education (P5, L97-98).
- Some teachers have said this is a breath of fresh air because learning has become more student driven (P5, L30-32).
- Students have been given more responsibility in the classroom and teachers are becoming more of a facilitator (P6, L41-42).
- Student voice has taken conversations much deeper than we had originally thought.

- Students thought maybe they could change some items on the cafeteria menu or create organizations and clubs, but now realize they have a say in the educational process (P7, L27-30).
- Students seem to be more in control of their own situation, which translates into improved performance in the classroom (P10, L14-15).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the five findings revealed in this case study. The five findings were generated from the two research questions posed earlier in the chapter:

1. What is essential for developing student voice within any school?
2. What role does culture play in institutionalizing student voice within schools?

Ten adult participants in the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative were interviewed in order to extract information related to the research questions. The ten participants are teachers and administrators who represent three diverse school districts in the northeast corner of Arkansas. Examples of direct quotations are included in this chapter in order for the reader to trust the accuracy of the five findings.

The two key findings centered on the impact of student voice on student leadership and the importance of gaining and maintaining support from the school leaders and the classroom teachers. According to the findings, support from school leaders and classroom teachers is the most essential factor for implementing student voice in the school culture, and student leadership is the greatest outcome when student voice is implemented. An interesting side note from these findings is that there is not a major theme addressing the importance of student support and involvement. The data indicate that leadership and teacher support is vital, but rarely did a participant discuss the importance of student involvement. This researcher's interpretation of

this observation – and from personal experience – is that students are anxiously waiting to become part of the collaborative culture and share their voice, so encouraging student support does not have to be addressed. Students are already invested; the challenge, and the two foundational pieces, are administration and teacher support.

Other essential elements for student voice implementation are finding time for teacher training (30%) and time to develop plans for implementation (30%). Other cultural improvements include stronger student-teacher relationships (80%), more collaborative work between students and teachers (60%), and students invited to the table to discuss school rules and procedures (70%).

All of the findings in this study are interrelated and systemic. If one component is not in place, the whole culture is affected. Student voice will not be taken to scale in a school culture unless every essential component of student voice is present.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore the factors that are essential in a school culture for student voice to flourish and grow. The participants from the study are classroom teachers and school administrators from three diverse school districts who attend a monthly student voice training called the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative. Student voice has taken a different path in each district, with each district experiencing successes and barriers during the implementation process. The findings of this study will allow the researcher and readers to determine what factors were in place in each setting that allowed the districts to achieve implementation success.

Conclusion 1: Leadership and teacher support are the keys for implementation.

The first major conclusion from this study is that support from school leadership and teachers must be in place for student voice to flourish. Without leadership support and teacher buy-in, student voice will never take root in a school culture. A conclusion from the findings is all participants understood the importance of leadership and teacher support, and this conclusion arose due to success or lack of success with such support. In those schools where student voice flourished, the participants observed the importance of leadership and teacher support, and where student voice was unsuccessful, the participants observed leadership and teachers as barriers.

Support for a new – and non-traditional – initiative, begins with understanding of the initiative. Adults need to understand the “why.” Gaining understanding is derived through professional development regarding the benefits of creating a collaborative culture between students and teachers. Without proper professional development and training, conclusions are

often drawn from inaccurate information or lack of understanding. In the Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative, each school district is represented by two adult leaders (teachers) and three students. These teachers and students meet each month to grow their understanding about student voice and to be introduced to tools and strategies to take back to the school site for implementation. Teams are asked to develop professional development for the students and teachers at the school site, and sometimes this is met with openness and sometimes it is difficult for the team to find the time for school site training.

From the findings, 70% of the participants mentioned leadership support and 70% mentioned teacher buy-in. These two vital pieces occur when the other two essential elements in the findings are addressed – time (30%) and training for teachers (30%). All of these elements are inclusive. Quaglia (2016) suggests that student voice must become a *priority* if schools want this initiative to take root in the school culture. For student voice to become a priority, finding time for whole group training and time for implementation of strategies should be non-negotiable. This begins with leadership.

Conclusion 2: Positive student-teacher relationships are foundational.

From the findings, 80% of the participants specifically mentioned the importance of creating strong student-teacher relationships, but everyone interviewed shared information that was relevant to positive relationships. The student voice concept is built on the foundation of relationships. Sometimes student voice flourishes because the school culture has previously been fertile with strong relationships, and often strong relationships are a result after student voice is implemented. Whichever the case, without positive teacher-student relationships, student voice will never be part of a school culture.

The findings also conclude that student-teacher collaboration (60%) and student involvement in school procedural issues (70) is prevalent when student voice flourishes. These two elements result from initially creating strong student-teacher relationships. Occasionally, stronger student-teacher relationships are “forced” through mandated collaboration opportunities, but from the researcher’s experience, relationships create collaboration. Until strong relationships are created, students will not be involved in educational decision-making or informed that their voice matters.

Although it did not surface in the findings, creating a formal action plan for student and teacher collaboration is vital for success. Determining how students will be involved in decision making with adults must have some guidelines. Teachers are still teachers, and they will have the final say, but creating formal and structured opportunities for student-teacher collaboration is key.

Conclusion 3: Student achievement is a result of student voice.

This conclusion is this researcher’s favorite conclusion to share. Often, it is communicated that student voice is all affective and does not correlate with student learning or student progress. Much of chapter 2 addresses the correlation between student voice and student learning, and this was evident in the findings from the participant interviews. Student voice is a cultural change. School culture is directly tied to student learning. As an education leader and leadership developer, the researcher has never observed a school at any level with a toxic culture that is also a high performing school. Students who are given a voice in the educational process are seven times more likely to be academically motivated and eight times more likely to be engaged in the classroom (Quaglia, 2016). Academically motivated and engaged students are higher achievers.

From the findings, 70% of the participants shared examples of how student learning has increased in their school since the implementation of student voice strategies. This conclusion has a connection to the first conclusion because administrators often become supportive when the research on student voice and student achievement is presented. When administrators and teachers realize that creating a collaborative culture with students also increases student learning, the school culture begins to change.

Conclusion 4: Student voice develops leadership in students.

The development of student leadership was mentioned the most number of times (90%) when participants were asked about cultural outcomes. One key objective of the student voice concept was to create positive student leaders who take an active role in their education and no longer sit on the sideline as passive participants in the learning process. Leadership skills transcend the school setting and prepare the students to be leaders in their communities, families, churches and civic organizations. Many of the participants shared stories of specific students who had been negative leaders or very shy, and due to the student voice training, have become positive student leaders in the school. By giving students a chance to share their learning needs, voice concerns, share improvement suggestions, or collaborate with teachers and administrators about procedural issues, students will develop the key tools to grow their leadership skills.

Conclusion 5: Providing time for implementation strategies is essential.

From the findings, only 30% of the participants specifically mentioned time as an essential element, but time is the common thread that must be pulled through every single component mentioned in the findings. There must be time for training administrators and teachers. There must be time for developing positive relationships. There must be time carved out for students and teachers to collaborate and develop improvement plans together. There

must be time for teachers to formally talk to students about learning needs. Again resources – and time is a big one – are allocated to initiatives that leadership deems important. When student voice becomes endorsed and solidified through the research as a necessary component of education, allocating time for implementation will occur. It is the responsibility of school leaders to make student voice a priority.

Recommendations

The researcher is making the following recommendations based on the research questions, findings of the participant interviews, data analysis, and the conclusions from the findings. The researcher will share recommendations for the following constituents: 1) school leaders, 2) public school teachers, 3) students, and 4) state educational leaders and policy makers.

Recommendations for school leaders

1. Research student voice to gain a better understanding of the initiative in order to begin conversations at the school level. Without leadership support, this initiative will not move forward. Read as much as possible on the topic to develop an overall understanding of the concept.
2. Research the correlation between student voice and student achievement and share data with the school stakeholders.
3. Create time in the school schedule to implement student voice strategies. Make student voice a priority.
4. Provide professional development on the student voice initiative for all teachers and stakeholders in the school district.

5. Become an advocate for students and their voice. Allow students to actively shape their learning journey through voice.
6. Create opportunities for students and teachers to collaborate. Allow students to attend teacher professional development to strengthen relationships and build a collaborative culture.
7. Send teachers and students to student voice trainings and institutes. Attend with the team when possible.
8. Be realistic on the amount of time it takes to implement student voice to scale.

Recommendations for public school teachers

1. Research student voice and develop a better understanding of the concept. The concept does not give control and decision making to the students as some believe, but only brings their voice to the table. Develop an understanding that student voice is best for all involved, including teachers.
2. Be open minded to change and do not be caught up in traditional practices that may not be effective. Ask students their opinions and act on them accordingly.
3. Become teacher leaders in the development of professional development on student voice. Often, teachers look to peers as role models and leaders in the building.
4. Be open to building stronger working relationships with students. Find opportunities to collaborate with students about their learning and school improvement issues.
5. Attend local student voice workshops, trainings, or institutes to gain a better understanding of the concept and the role that teachers play in the process.

Recommendations for students

1. Research the student voice concept and develop an understanding of the role of students.

2. Be part of the solution. When making improvement suggestions, be part of the solution and implementation of plans.
3. Find opportunities to share learning needs with teachers.
4. Be a positive advocate for student voice. Share positive experiences with others.
5. Ask to attend any student voice training offered locally.

Recommendations for state education leaders and policy makers

1. Research the student voice concept and develop a better understanding of how student voice has changed cultures and improved student learning across the country.
2. Fund student voice trainings so school districts do not have to budget for this important training.
3. Formalize a student voice department at the state level with a person to oversee the department. Make student voice a vital piece of the educational process.
4. Realize that standards, assessments and accountability are necessary, but without a fertile collaborative culture, these components will not improve schools alone. Student voice and strengthening student-teacher relationships is the missing piece of the puzzle.

Recommendations for further research

The researcher recommends that further studies be conducted to broaden the knowledge of student voice and its impact on public schools across the country. With a much larger database, researchers will be able to share essential elements needed for student voice to flourish and the impact that student voice has on a school culture.

The researcher recommends the following for consideration:

1. Due to the limitations of this study, a much larger study should be conducted in order to gather state or national data on the impact of student voice. A larger study would increase the validity of the findings.
2. A similar study as this case study, but from the perspective of the students should be conducted. Data from the adult perspective and the student perspective should be analyzed and compared for future studies.

Researcher Reflections

In 2008, a national consultant and friend mentioned to the researcher that the next “big concept” in education was going to be student voice. She stated that no one in the state was addressing this important concept, and the researcher was challenged to lead the way. She knew the researcher’s passion for this topic because of the researcher’s personal testimony regarding the power of student voice to improve the learning culture in some schools in the state.

If this study provides the much needed data on the topic of student voice in our state, it will be well worth the effort. The students in public schools deserve the best education possible and allowing them to be part of the process creates a stronger learning culture. The researcher challenges all educational leaders to consider surrounding student voice with policy and formalizing a streamlined process for all schools.

Malcolm X said “Education is our passport to the future. For tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.” Preparing our students for the future is not allowing them to be passive observers, but allowing them to become active participants in their own educational journey.

From the researcher's experience, student voice must be defined and explained to educators to create and increase support. Not only must educators be taught what student voice is, but also what student voice is not. Student voice does not change the roles in schools; teachers are still teachers and students are still students. Teachers still have the decision making responsibilities, but student input provides another layer of data and information to make appropriate decisions. Student voice is not student protest. Student voice represents the antithesis of protests by creating collaborative cultures between students and teachers instead of dividing cultures.

Schools that reflect a strong student voice culture often provides professional growth opportunities for both teachers and students. Students plan lessons and assessment opportunities with teachers. Students share their learning styles and are allowed to use their learning styles in the learning and assessing process. Students not only bring suggestions for school improvement and change, but are also part of the action plan for improvement and change.

Student voice is not a club, organization, or in any way exclusive to any group of students. It is not a "feel good" initiative where all stakeholders in the schools are getting along with each other, and it is not the latest reformation "fad" that will be short-lived. Student voice is a second-order cultural change correlated with student motivation, self-worth, student purpose and student achievement.

In order to resolve the negative issues in public schools, the organizational culture must change to focus on the needs of the students, build strong personal relationships between students and teachers and strengthen conversations and engagement between both groups. This means doing away with ineffective school "norms" that may have been traditional to many educators. An emphasis on standards, assessments and accountability has removed the personal

component of teaching and learning, and schools must create cultures where relationships are strong and student-teacher collaboration is the norm. Public schools must return to focusing on the whole child.

The goal of student voice is to increase collaboration and change the learning culture. The culture will be one of collaboration, trust, and mutual respect between teachers and students. Currently, this is not the norm. During a student voice training in Northeast Arkansas in the spring of 2015, a young woman approached the researcher during a break with tears in her eyes and said she was a junior in high school preparing for her last year, and this was the first time anyone had ever asked her input about her own learning. She went on to say that if these conversations had begun in elementary school, she felt she would have been a much better student with a different attitude about school. John, a senior in high school, walked up to the researcher, shook his hand, and left a note on his way out of the training that said the following:

Before **student voice** I didn't have very good relationships with my teachers. I found it hard to ask questions because I was afraid of being embarrassed for asking such simple things. I had so many thoughts I wanted to share with my teachers, but I could not, and I found that to be suffocating. When I joined the team that attended the Student Voice training, I learned that building relationships with my teachers opens up many doors. I felt more comfortable asking questions, which led to my grades improving. Student Voice is a window through which teachers can look and see more than just students, they can see **people**.

John Wamble, Blytheville High School, 2016

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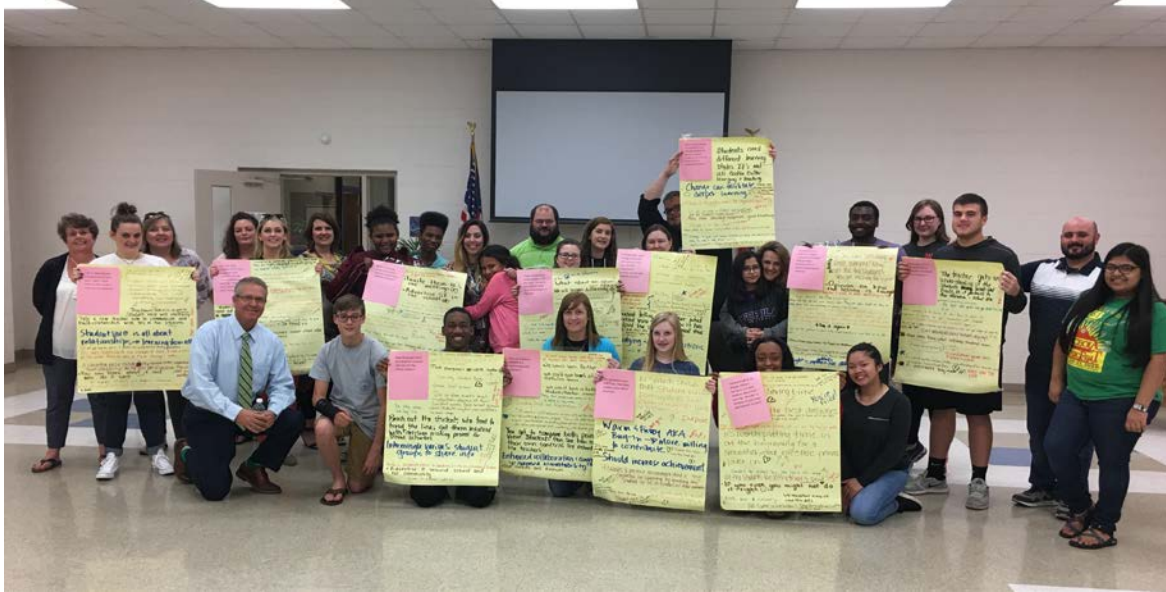
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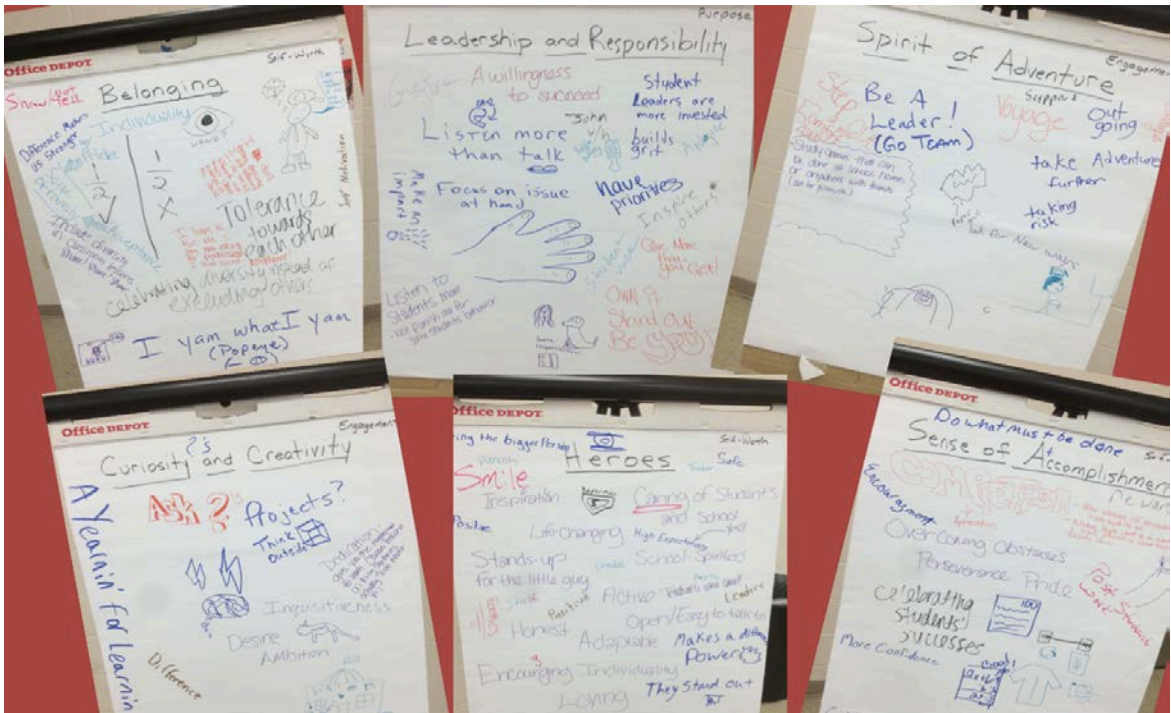
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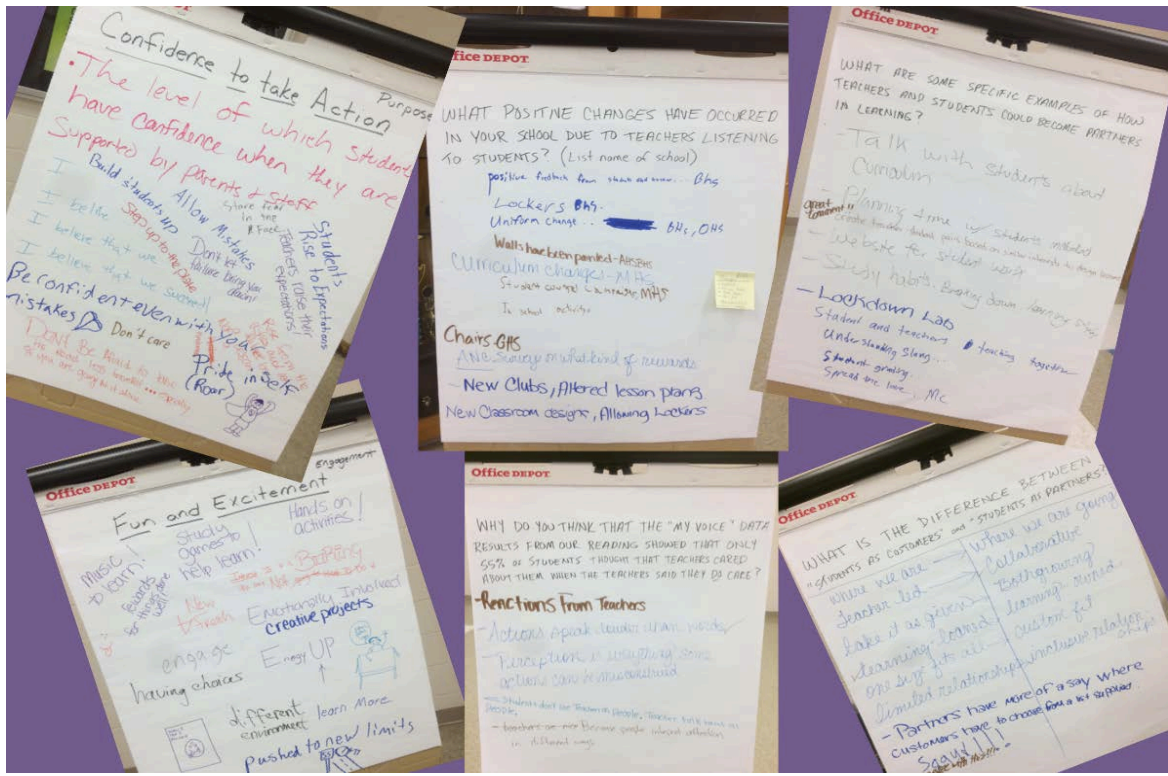
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Appendix

Northeast Arkansas Regional Student Voice Initiative – Photos







Student Voice
needs to be a way
of being....

It is NOT an annual event,
a class period once a
week, or something that is
"cute to do."

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UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

June 16, 2017

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

MEMORANDUM

TO: Blaine Alexander
Kit Kacirek

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: PROJECT MODIFICATION

IRB Protocol #: 15-10-182

Title: *Student Voice Initiative: Exploring Implementation Strategies*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 06/16/2017
Expiration Date: 11/04/2017

Your request to modify the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. **This protocol is closed to enrollment.** If you wish to make any further modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more participants, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

Please note that this approval does not extend the Approved Project Period. Should you wish to extend your project beyond the current expiration date, you must submit a request for continuation using the UAF IRB form "Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects." The request should be sent to the IRB Coordinator, 109 MLKG Building.

For protocols requiring FULL IRB review, please submit your request at least one month prior to the current expiration date. (High-risk protocols may require even more time for approval.) For protocols requiring an EXPEDITED or EXEMPT review, submit your request at least two weeks prior to the current expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation *on or prior to* the currently approved expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark