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Student Voice to Improve Instruction: Leading Transformation of a School System

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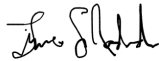
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership



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Date July 11, 2018

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Student Voice to Improve Instruction: Leading Transformation of a School System

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Suzanne K. Barker

July 2018

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, David. Throughout this process, he has been my cheerleader, my shoulder to cry on, my cook, my laundryman, my alarm clock, my editor, my thesaurus, my rock, my one and only, and my love. I am blessed to journey through life with him by my side and I am confident that I would not have been able to do this leg of the journey without him.

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During the course of my research, I came across the idea of a trampoline community—a soft place to land that propels you forward. I was blessed to have a tremendous trampoline community. I am fortunate to work in a tremendous school district with numerous educators that daily challenge me to be better. There are many whom I would like to name by name, but for the sake of protecting the identity of those included in my research, I will not. However, I am thankful for the administrators who believed in me and took the time to grow me as a leader, for a superintendent who trusted me to research within the district, for the administrators who served as mentors to me, to my co-workers who always encouraged me, brainstormed with me, analyzed with me, and believed in me. They know who they are and I am humbled by their support. They give me a soft, safe place to land and continue to propel me forward on this journey.

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As great as it was to hear “Congratulations, Dr. Barker,” it pales in comparison to someday hearing “Well done my good and faithful servant.” I am grateful to my heavenly Father that breathed life into me and has been a gentle loving Shepherd to me throughout my life. He gave me strength when I wanted to quit and loved me in spite of shortcomings throughout this process. My greatest goal as an educator is to bring Him glory in all that I do and that I may be His hands and feet on earth caring for His children.

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Abstract

For educators to improve instruction, they should listen to and learn from students, who are the central focus of education. While there is a growing body of research demonstrating the value of educators partnering with students to improve learning, there is little research on how to implement, diffuse, and sustain the use of student voice at the district level. There was a need for a model of district-wide implementation of student voice that educational leaders could model to implement a student voice initiative in their schools. The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide a historical narrative of the initial 3 years of the Student Voice Initiative in a major suburban Texas school district. The data collected included individual and focus group interviews with secondary educators, observations, and archival data collected over a 3-year period. The results of the study indicate that partnering with students to improve instruction has positive outcomes for both students, educators, and the culture of the learning organization. The analysis suggested that educators and students should have a knowledge base of the “why” and “how” of student voice, intentionally communicate the initiative, devote time to the initiative, and develop a culture supportive of student voice.

Keywords: student voice, student participation, spectrum of student voice, educational leadership, shared leadership, adult-youth partnership

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For educators to improve instruction, they should listen to and learn from the students, who are the central focus of education. Students who believe they have a voice in their education are seven times more likely to be academically motivated than students who do not feel they have a voice (Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016). Researchers use the term *student voice* in different ways, but the overarching use of the term describes how students give their input to what happens within their classrooms and the learning environment of their schools (Mitra, 2004; Quaglia & Corso, 2014).

Students make up more than 92% of the stakeholders in most public-school systems, and by the time they reach their senior year, they have spent more than 12,000 hours in the classroom. However, educators rarely give students meaningful involvement in helping teachers find ways to improve classroom instruction (Harper, 2003; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The students' voices are often absent from conversations about education that affect them the most: classroom learning, curriculum design, and school-wide decisions (Downey, 2014; Mitra, 2004; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015). Educators should consider students, those with first-hand experience with the learning environment, as stakeholders and partner with them to improve the learning process and learning environment (Cook-Sather, 2003; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007).

A growing body of research has demonstrated the valuable perspective on learning and instruction that students provide (Kane & Chimwayange, 2013; Mitra, 2009; Rudduck, Demetriou, & Pedder, 2003; Rudduck, 2006, 2007), gathering input to improve teacher instruction (Kane & Chimwayange, 2013; Rudduck, 2007; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012), and in engaging students as partners in learning (Kane & Chimwayange, 2013). These instances of

student input resulted in instruction and school improvement. However, few educators give students a voice in their education (Downey, 2014; Mitra & Serriere, 2012). In fact, some experts suggest that listening to student voice has been one of the most neglected aspects of educational research and an underutilized resource in education (Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015).

Recently, leadership at a Texas suburban school district (the District) identified student voice as a cost-effective resource with the potential to improve instruction. A District leader observed that she received regular surveys from businesses who realized the importance of feedback, eliciting feedback ranging from her experiences with an oil change to the effectiveness of her yoga session. Yet, students still spend the majority of their day sitting in classrooms where educators are not asking for student feedback to improve their practice. This observation was the launching pad for the District to examine the use of student voice as a resource to improve instruction that has since led to a District-wide diffusion of the innovative practice.

As the District's leadership began to consider how to implement student voice, they identified a lack of research on how to implement student voice practices at the district level. The Quaglia Institute (Quaglia & Corso, 2014), and SoundOut School Consulting are organizations that support the work of student voice and provide resources to educators. Although both organizations offer free resources available to support student voice in a school or classroom, their implementation support requires a significant financial commitment. Many schools in the District had been facing significant financial constraints, due to the public-school funding system in Texas. One appealing characteristic of student voice was that it utilized an untapped resource with little financial expenditures involved (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Facing the absence of a model to follow, the District's leadership decided to develop its own

system for implementing a district-wide student voice initiative (the Student Voice Initiative or Initiative).

Statement of the Problem

Although today's students can express their voice in many aspects of their lives, the traditional culture within many United States' schools has not changed to include the voice of students in the classroom or school-wide decision-making processes (Harper, 2003; Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Adults often treat adolescents as a marginalized group, lacking opportunities to have a voice in discussions and decisions that directly influence their lives (Bray & Moses, 2011; Conner & Slattery, 2014; McIntyre, 2000; Strack, Magil & McDonagh, 2004). When educators begin to include the voices of students in school decisions that directly impact their lives, it is beneficial for students and can serve as a tool to increase student agency, engagement, and achievement (Beaudoin, 2005; Conner & Slattery, 2014; Costello, Toles, Spielberger, & Wynn, 2001; Dorman & Adams, 2004; Mitra, 2004; Quaglia & Corso, 2014).

There has been research on the importance of student voice in the lives of students (Beaudoin, 2005; Freire, 1987; Young & Sazama, 2006) and the impact on practice and culture at the classroom and campus level (Flutter & Rudduck, 2006; Mitra, 2004, 2008; Rudduck, 2007; Young & Sazama, 2006); however, there is little research on how to implement, diffuse, and sustain the use of student voice at the district level and the role school leadership plays in this process (Jobs for the Future, 2012; Libby, Rosen, & Sedonaen, 2005; Matthews, 2010; Mitra, Serriere, & Stoicovy, 2012; Pautsch, 2010). There is a need for a model of district-wide implementation of student voice to improve instruction that educational leaders can follow.

Narratives from educators could benefit educational leaders seeking to design, implement, and sustain a student voice initiative.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and disseminate a student voice initiative in a Texas suburban school district. In this publication, I have provided a historical narrative of the initial 3 years of the initiative, highlighted successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and made suggestions that may provide support for those in similar contexts wishing to implement a student voice initiative. From the lessons the educators in the District learned in this Initiative, I hoped to provide a portrait that would be useful to other districts.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Q1. What is the meaning of student voice for educators in the school district?

Researchers define student voice differently throughout the literature. For leaders to replicate the model in other educational institutions, it is beneficial to know how the teachers implementing the Student Voice Initiative defined student voice.

Q2. What is the story of student voice participation for educators in the school district?

Hearing the stories of the educators will provide a richer description of the model. What sparked the initial interest in participating in the student voice project? What was the difficulty level of implementing student voice participation in the classroom?

Q3. How is the use of student voice affecting the classroom, campus, and district instruction?

Q4. What are possible next steps to improve the current model?

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that “people live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others” (p. xxvi). The stories of educators helped to educate others and ourselves on the practical implementation of student voice as a method to improve classroom instruction.

Definition of Key Terms

Student voice. Student voice is how students give their input to what happens within their classrooms and the learning environment of their schools (Mitra, 2004, Quaglia & Corso, 2014).

Secondary school. A secondary school is a school that services students in Grades 6 through 12.

Diffusion of innovation. A diffusion of innovation is the spread of an innovative practice throughout an organization (Rogers, 2003).

Marginalized students. Marginalized students are students who are systematically prevented from accessing opportunities and resources that are generally available to others (Iwasaki et al., 2014).

School district. A school district is a locally-governed entity organized to provide public education to primary and secondary students within a geographical area.

Stakeholders. In this research, the term *stakeholders* represents the students, teachers, and administrators. Although community members could be stakeholders in schools, they are not included as one for the purpose of this research.

Student lesson design team. Student lesson design team is a structure where the students drive the design of the learning by co-designing lessons with their teacher.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions. One of the underlying assumptions in this study is that students are a critical dimension of the learning environment and are an untapped resource in enacting necessary educational reform. While the research is not intended to be generalizable to all school districts, the insights and the voices of students are essential to the field of education. The contributions of understanding a district-wide model that invites students' voices may inform and inspire the practices of other educators who strive to develop and sustain transformative school practices.

Another assumption on which this research is based is that all participants were honest during their interviews and that they were sharing their stories based on their free will with no hidden motives for participation. Finally, I assumed that the sample study was representative of the total population of educators in the major suburban school district.

Limitations. The District's leadership started the adoption of student voice to improve classroom instruction in an organic manner where teachers could opt into participating and determine the specifics of how student voice would look in their classrooms. However, there could be unknown conditions on a campus that could bias participant response and serve as a limitation to the study. This qualitative study concentrated on a student voice initiative in one specific mid-sized, suburban Texas school district. The location of the study could affect the generalization of the results. Although this study includes details of the efforts of the District's leadership over a 3-year period, there was a lack of time to measure the effects of the Student Voice Initiative beyond this period.

The lack of prior research studies on a district-wide implementation of student voice is an identified problem that justified this study. However, the lack of previous research also stands as

a limitation of the study as many of the participation models used within the District were designed by teachers and had not been vetted in other studies.

Delimitations. I examined student voice through the lens of classroom instruction and did not delve into the opportunities for students to have a voice to make decisions at the campus or district level that are unrelated to instruction. The study included the use of student voice to improve instruction during the initial 3-year phase of student voice implementation to the point of approaching full diffusion.

Summary

Students generally lack opportunities to have a voice in their learning. They are the consumers in the classroom-learning environment, but educators rarely include them in the process to improve classroom instruction. Although the literature has brought awareness to this need in education, there is limited research on models of implementation for educational leaders to follow. Through this study, I sought to provide a model for student voice implementation that educational leaders can use to implement a student voice initiative in their school as a method to improve classroom instruction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The inclusion of student voice in classroom learning decisions is beneficial for students and schools (Beaudoin, 2005; Costello et al., 2001; Dorman & Adams, 2004; Mitra, 2004, 2008; Quaglia & Corso, 2014). However, there is limited research on how to create a model for student voice at the district level or how to create a culture that can sustain the student voice initiative. In this study, I sought to describe how the educators within a specific school district defined student voice, which models of participation educators used, how the use of student voice affected the classroom, campus, and district instruction, and what the next steps should be to improve and sustain the model.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and disseminate one student voice initiative in a Texas suburban school district. In this study, I provided a historical narrative of the initial 3 years of the initiative, highlighted successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and made suggestions that could provide support for those in similar contexts wishing to implement a student voice initiative. From the lessons leadership in the District learned throughout this Initiative, I hoped to provide a portrait that would be useful to other districts with similar goals.

In this literature review, I introduced a theoretical framework based on constructivist and developmental theory, considering the historical context of student voice in the United States and highlighting significant events and research that shaped the current student voice practices in public schools. Moreover, the work of Jeroen Bron and Wiel Veugelers (2014) served as the framework for the “why” behind student voice inclusion in schools. Lastly, I applied the work of Eric Toshalis and Michael Nakkula (2012, 2013) as the conceptual framework for the Student Voice Initiative within the District.

I utilized the Abilene Christian University library to locate relevant literature to review, predominately using the following search engines: EBSCOhost; ERIC; ProQuest; Sage Journals Online; Sage Knowledge; Sage Research Methods; and Teachers College Record. I worked closely with the research librarian to find current literature to support the use of student voice and to establish a need for further research.

Student voice, pupil voice, and student participation were keywords used to search for literature. In addition to the resources identified through the library search, the Quaglia Institute (Quaglia & Corso, 2014), Student Voice, Inc. (2017) and SoundOut School Consulting are organizations that support the work of student voice by conducting research and providing resources in the field.

Student Voice Defined

Before beginning to review the many facets of student voice, it is important to clarify terms that are often used interchangeably in the literature. In researching the topic of student voice, one must note that pupil voice is used interchangeably in much of the literature. In addition, many consider the meaning of *voice* as more than the spoken word. Student voice can include any method that students use to express their thoughts and opinions or share in the school decisions that shape their lives (Kane & Chimwayange, 2013; Mitra, 2009). Seale (2009), a researcher in the field of student voice, defined student voice as

listening to and valuing the views that students express regarding their learning experiences; communicating student views to people who are able to influence change; and treating students as equal partners in the evaluation of teaching and learning, thus empowering them to take a more active role in shaping or changing their education. (p. 995)

Cook-Sather (2006) described student voice as having a legitimate perspective and an active part in the reform effort for school transformation. Ngussa and Makewa (2014) believed that the

most conservative form of student voice was giving students a say but with no guarantee of a response, while Cook-Sather (2006) believed that the most radical type of student voice called for “a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students” (p. 363). Therefore, educators can use student voice at various levels, from conservative to radical.

Defining student voice more broadly, Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) used the term to describe opportunities that happen both inside and outside of the school, including a range of activities from the expression of ideas to co-constructing the learning within the classroom. Although Toshalis and Nakkula defined student voice broadly, they narrowed their definition by clarifying that student voice activities should position students as change agents within their school, therefore noting the significance of educators going beyond hearing the voices of students to acting upon what is heard (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). As pressures to perform on standardized tests are increasing, Toshalis and Nakkula believed student voice to be the “antithesis of depersonalized, standardized, and homogenized educational experiences because it begins and ends with the thoughts, feelings, visions, and actions of the student themselves” (p. 23). Consequently, the shift to include student voice moved the focus from a student’s success on standardized testing to a focus on the entire well-being of the student.

Researchers most often used student voice in the singular form. Thomson (2011) acknowledged that the term student voice created an ambiguity as it implied there is one, homogeneous voice rather than the numerous heterogeneous voices of students. In this study, the term student voice represented the multiple voices of students heard within the classroom, school, and district. No matter how an individual defined student voice, the underlying premise was that educators heard students and enacted change based on their voice.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

Constructivism, as applied to education, is a more modern phenomenon drawn from the work of psychologists Jean Piaget (1973) and Lev Vygotsky (1978). Researchers supporting a constructivist approach believed that learning was an active process where learners connected new knowledge to things previously learned while constructing new learning (Bruner, 1966; Matthews, 2003). Bruner (1996) contended that students could construct learning through conversations with their teachers about how they best learned and what they already knew about the subject. Teachers then allow the student responses to drive classroom instruction. Supporters of constructivism framed the learner as more than a passive receiver of information, but as someone who constructed her own meaning while learning. When educators view students in this manner, it flips the traditional classroom model and positions teachers and students as co-constructors of knowledge (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

The developmental work of John Dewey (1916) underpinned educational constructivist teaching practices. One key notion of developmental theory is that the student should play an active role in the learning process and that learning should be student-directed rather than teacher-directed (Matthews, 2003). To this end, educational leaders can marry the ideology of developmental theory and constructivist theory to construct a framework where student voice can reside.

Delpit (1988) was one of the first to promote the idea that “the teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom” (p. 288). Fullan (1992), a proponent of educational change, later posed the question, “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?” (p. 170). Their views aligned with the beliefs of Freire (1993), an influential curriculum theorist, who believed that education was not a banking system where students are

perceived to have no knowledge and must rely upon educators to make deposits of learning for there to be value. He believed students had something to contribute to classroom instruction. More recently, Eisner (2001), another curriculum theorist, questioned “What opportunities do students have to formulate their own purposes and to design ways to achieve them? What opportunities do students have to work cooperatively to address problems that they believe to be important?” (p. 371). These theorists laid the groundwork for the inclusion of students in learning decisions and the right to have a voice in their learning.

Researchers have historically framed students in three different fashions: “the student ‘as a machine’ attempting to meet basic needs, the student ‘as a decision maker’ weighing the likelihood of attainment and value of an outcome, and the student ‘as creator of meaning’” (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008, p. 378). Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) aligned these three frameworks of students as behavioral tradition, cognitive tradition, and constructivist tradition and proposed that student voice provided the fourth framework of viewing students: as change agents. This research was based on the belief that students could construct meaning from their learning, were developmentally ready to have an active role in their educational decisions, and deserved the opportunity to act as a co-creator of learning.

Student Voice Conceptual Framework: The Why of Student Voice

Bron and Veugelers (2014) focused research on the inclusion of student voice in curriculum design. Bron and Veugelers (2014), based on the work of Huddleston (2007) and Kirshner and Pozzoboni (2011), formulated five rationales for why student voice should be an integral part of education in any country: the normative, developmental, political, educational and relevance arguments. These five rationales, which are explained in detail in the following

sections, supported the value of researching, implementing, and evaluating student voice in an educational setting.

The normative argument. A normative argument claims how things ought to be and is based on a certain standard. The normative argument for student voice asserts that students are entitled to participate in decision-making in their education based on the standard of children's rights as well as the idea that students are citizens in their own right rather than children waiting for a future citizenship (Bron & Veugelers, 2014). In this manner, educators play a role in ensuring they honor the rights of students.

Stenhouse (1983) advocated for a student's right to participate in decisions regarding their learning when he asserted, "the first claim of the school is that of its pupils for whose welfare the school exists" (p. 153). Similarly, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2016) argued that it was the democratic right of students for educators to involve them in decisions that affect their learning. The United Nations expanded on this view in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which asserted that children have the right to participate in decision-making in their education and are capable of influencing their education (Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Lundy, 2007; United Nations, 1989). The ratification of the CRC in 1989 hastened the development of student voice in educational practices throughout the world as many countries developed national mandates for youth participation. However, not only was the United States one of the few nations who did not ratify the CRC, they also lacked national educational mandates that dictated youth participation. Bron and Veugelers (2014) analyzed the successful educational reforms of multiple countries and found that student voice was a central aspect of the reform. For example, the Swedish national curriculum included standards for children to express views in matters that concerned their learning (Mitra & Serriere, 2014; Sheridan, 2016), the

Danish government promoted student voice as a means for creating democratic schools (Flutter, 2007), and in Chile, university researchers partnered with high school students to co-design pedagogies and curriculum materials (Fielding & Prieto, 2002). These countries were leveraging the power of student voice.

Although there are mandates and curriculum in other countries, the United States does not have a formal national policy regarding active student participation in the design of their learning. Mitra, Serriere, and Kirshner (2014) examined the avenues for youth involvement in the United States where there was not a national mandate for the inclusion of youth voice. They analyzed disciplinary, philosophical, and methodological approaches to using youth participation methods and found that youth activism, youth leadership, and classroom discussions were the main participatory activities for youth. These participation structures were often in the form of student councils and other opportunities for student governance but frequently excluded the voices of marginalized students (Bland & Atweh, 2007).

Without a national mandate for youth participation in the United States, educators turn to their content and grade level standards to determine what they teach in the classroom. In the United States, national educational standards do not exist and the responsibility of creating learning standards rests with the state. Although many states have adopted the Common Core standards, educational leaders did not include student voice in the development of these standards. The research of Mitra et al. (2014) concluded that without a national policy to formalize youth participation, these opportunities would have to develop from a bottom-up movement. While such changes lend themselves to a higher level of authenticity for students, the educators who support student voice must emphasize sustainability to ensure educational

leaders continue the bottom-up policies. Educators display the ideas inherent in the normative agreement when they include students in educational decisions that impact the students' lives.

The developmental argument. The developmental argument maintains that students are developmentally ready to participate in decisions regarding their learning (Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Coutinho, 2008; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2014; Steiner, 2006). The level of involvement may look different at various phases of student development; however, the opportunity to have a voice is important for all learners.

Children have proven to be “more robust, articulate and willing to be heard” (Craig, 2003, p. 41) than educators had previously assumed. Rather than viewing children as beings that are coming into adulthood, educators should perceive their young students as individuals who are capable of having a valuable voice in matters that affect their lives (Bragg, 2010; Christensen & James, 2017; Hallett & Prout, 2003). Moreover, children should be recognized as “competent agents, who are participants in, and producers of, rather than passive recipients of, social and cultural change” (Bragg, 2010, p. 22). Their views, when carefully solicited, are worthy of consideration. Craig (2003) further noted that “given opportunities appropriate to their age, intellectual and emotional development, children are clearly competent at expressing coherent views on a very wide range of important social, economic and personal issues” (p. 43). When educators view student voice as legitimate, it positions the student as a valid resource for improving instruction.

Although the research focused on youth participation and the age where students have a legitimate voice (Bragg, 2010; Christensen & James, 2017; Hallett & Prout, 2003), there was evidence that a school's youngest students were also capable of having a meaningful voice in their education. Sweden's 1998 adoption of the National Curriculum for Preschool allowed the

school's youngest students—age one to five—to have a voice. The National Curriculum for Preschool proposed that children should participate in decisions relating to their learning to become democratic citizens and to promote ownership in their learning (Sheridan, 2016). Sweden approached preschool education with a whole-child mentality, viewing children as individuals with rights of their own (Engdahl, 2004). The goal of the Swedish preschool education was the collaborative creation of meaning between the teacher, the student, and the curriculum that positioned the child as a co-constructor of learning (Giudici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001). The Swedish Ministry of Education and Science prescribed that the preschool education should

ensure that children develop the ability to express their thoughts and views, and thus have the opportunity to influence their own situation; accept responsibility for their own actions and for the environment of the preschool; and understand and act in accordance with democratic principles by participating in different kinds of cooperation and decision-making. The preschool staff should, therefore, work towards ensuring that the individual child develops the ability and willingness to exercise influence in preschool and that the opinions and views of each child are respected. (Ministry of Education and Science in Sweden, 1998, p. 16-17)

The work of the Swedish government in developing and reassessing their National Preschool Curriculum resulted in a framework to include the voice of a school's youngest population in decisions that impacted their learning.

Although student voice applies to students of all ages, the need for a voice increases as students age. The research of Simmons, Graham, and Thomas (2015) examined the correlation between student well-being and the role of student voice. Their research utilized the data from a large mixed methods study conducted in Australia centered on understanding well-being in schools. The study revealed that the need to have a say was not as prevalent with younger respondents, but the need increased with age. Younger students wanted the opportunity to

decide who they might sit with at lunch while older students yearned for a more democratic environment in school that would match the future opportunities they would have in society as a whole. However, Simmons et al. (2015) found that the oldest group of students had an evident need for agency to influence change in their schools.

As students enter adolescence, they are assuming more responsibility and freedoms outside of school; however, schools have often failed to give them these same responsibilities within the school. Bron and Veugelers (2014) claimed that today's adolescents have “increased economic power, social maturity, access to information and knowledge derived from the growing media culture surrounding them. Yet many schools still provide[d] few opportunities for young people to express their views constructively and to contribute meaningfully” (p.129). Given these advancements, adolescents are developing their sense of identity and becoming sophisticated thinkers at a rapid rate. Therefore, it is particularly important for adolescents to have a voice in decisions that impact them directly (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013). When students have the opportunity to act as co-participants in decision-making, they can become positive change agents in their schools. This feeling of empowerment is critical to adolescents and essential for schools to provide opportunities for student decision making (Lind, 2007).

Adolescent learners have qualities that align with adult learners. As students mature, learning moves from a pedagogical to an andragogical learning need: an increased need for self-directed learning, the opportunity to self-organize the learning, and experiential learning (Galbraith, 2004; Knowles et al., 2014; Lindeman, 1926). Adolescent learners begin to understand metacognitive strategies (Coutinho, 2008; Sousa, 2009; Steiner, 2006) and desire independence, self-direction, and discipline in learning (Griggs & Dunn, 1984; Pyryt, Sandals, & Begoray, 1998). Students can maintain engagement in their learning based on the degree to

which they experience choice and control in learning, coupled with high levels of care from their teachers: needs that align with adult learning traits (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2016; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). However, few educators give students a voice in their education (Downey, 2014; Mitra & Serriere, 2012).

Although there is evidence to support that students of all ages are developmentally ready to play a role in decision-making that impacts their lives, some experts suggest that listening to the views of children has been one of the most neglected aspects of educational research (Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015). Hadfield and Haw (2001) argued that the absence of student voice in education was not due to a deficit in the expertise of the students but the willingness of educators to listen to the voices of students in classroom decision-making. Students are articulate and willing to be heard, and educators must begin to listen and act upon these views to transform schools and improve instruction.

The political argument. Educators can position student voice as an issue of power. A sense of control is important to adolescent students but is paramount for marginalized students (Lind, 2007). These students are the center of many school conversations on how to address dropout rates, increase engagement and achievement, and to provide equitable learning opportunities. However, educators often exclude the voices of marginalized students (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011). The political argument warns schools not to forget the voices of marginalized groups and to ensure they are hearing the heterogeneous voices of all students.

Many schools disproportionately represent the views of the dominant culture and devalue the voices from subordinate cultures (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Bron & Veugelers, 2014). Yet, when schools give marginalized students a voice, this dialogue can promote diversity and

acceptance of differences amongst students. In addition, it can introduce different perspectives for all students in the classroom while providing them with opportunities to learn about other cultures (De Vita, 2000; Roehling, Kooi, Dykema, Quisenberry & Vandlen, 2010). Habermas (2003) argued for the necessity of dialogue to overcome the “many asymmetries of power so persistent in our contemporary society” (p. 87). Student voice allows for conversations between educators and students and opens the door to include the voices of all students in decisions that impact their learning.

As educators plan to provide a multi-voiced learning environment within their classrooms, they need models of civic engagement. Voight (2015) believed that youth civic engagement suggests three potential pathways to engage all students in dialogue:

1. direct action through which youth work together to leverage change in school policy and practice;
2. strengthened relationships amongst students and between students and teachers that result from shared experience in school-based civic activities; and
3. an aggregation of students who become more socially and emotionally competent individuals through their engagement. (p. 311)

Further, Voight argued that educators could reach all three pathways using student voice. When educators give students a voice and a sense of power over their learning, students may be able to leverage policy changes, strengthen classroom relationships, and develop a socioemotional competency to prepare them to participate in a democratic society (Voight, 2015). Schools need student voice participation models that give a voice to all students.

The educational argument. The educational argument claims that student voice can lead to the development of participative and democratic skills (Bron & Veugelers, 2014). These skills

help prepare students for their future careers and to participate in their communities as active citizens. Educators should include student voice practices to improve citizenship education and the development of 21st century learning skills in their students.

For the last decade, researchers have developed education models focusing on the acquisition of 21st century learning skills for students. These applied skills are considered by some to be the “survival skills” for today’s students (Wagner, 2008). The 21st century learning skills are collectively known as the 4Cs of learning: critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation (Soulé & Warrick, 2015). In addition to 21st century learning skills, students also need strong social and emotional skills for success in the current workplace culture. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21; 2015) emphasized initiative and self-direction, social skills, productivity, and leadership and responsibility as essential life and career skills. Educators must create learning opportunities for students to develop these critical skills.

A 21st century classroom begins and ends with students at the center and promotes the development of students as self-regulated learners. When students are able to talk about their learning experiences and have their voice taken seriously, they develop a stronger sense of self-as-learner and a stronger sense of agency (Flutter & Rudduck, 2006; Rudduck, Demetriou, & Pedder, 2003). Furthermore, when teachers listen to and act on student voice, classes naturally become student-centered. Students in classrooms where student-centered instruction is strengthened through the use of student voice have increased motivation, achievement, engagement, and agency, which better equips them for their future (Conner & Slattery, 2014; Cushman, 2015; Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013). Hattie (2009) argued that one of the most significant effects on student learning occurs

when educators can see learning through the eyes of their students and support them in becoming self-regulated learners. Student voice is a conduit through which this can happen.

Self-regulation theory recognizes that students are active participants in their learning and that they construct knowledge through this participation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013). Consultation with students through the use of student voice promotes self-regulated learning that leads to personal development (Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Fielding & Bragg, 2003).

The typical benefits of consulting students are increased

- self-respect,
- competence,
- confidence,
- trust in adults and themselves,
- self-esteem,
- social inclusion,
- sense of responsibility for taking increased control over aspects of their lives,
- understanding of decision-making processes,
- fun and enjoyment,
- and definable skills that might be useful in future employment or education, such as managing time, running meetings and public speaking. (Bragg, 2010, p. 24)

Ngussa and Makewa (2014) determined that consulting students regarding their learning improved their motivation, engagement, school attendance, and capacity for accepting responsibility for their work and learning. When educators consult with students about their learning, they develop a sense of identity as a learner, stronger communication skills, and a stronger commitment to learning and growing (Cushman, 2015; Donnini, 2015; Mariskind, 2013;

Morgan, 2011; Ngussa & Makewa, 2014; Pedder & McIntyre, 2006; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Thompson, 2009; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Zeldin, O'Connor & Camino, 2006).

Fielding (2007), in his study of Jean Rudduck's work on student voice, pointed to Rudduck's deeply held belief that student consultation was more than listening to students' perspectives; student consultation should position schools to serve as a model of democracy to prepare students for participation in school democracy and beyond (Fielding, 2007; Sheridan, 2016).

When educators consult students about matters that affect their lives and their learning, students develop 21st century skills to prepare them for their future careers and participation in a democratic society.

Citizenship education is another critical component of the educational argument for student voice. Gould et al. (2011) found that an interactive, collaborative classroom rich with dialogue centered on learning resulted in higher levels of achievement on all measured 21st century competencies including cooperative learning, self-regulated learning and communication. Moreover, Gould et al. (2011) identified a high correlation between citizenship learning and personal skills needed for employment in the 21st century. They believed when educators gave students a voice in their education, students were encouraged to extend that participation into civic areas outside of the classroom. Likewise, the research of Soulé and Warrick (2015) supported this conclusion. They contended:

Preparing students to be ready for work, life, and citizenship today requires new pedagogical approaches to individualized learning that focuses on helping students develop and improve their skills capacity. New learning methods not only require new outcomes for what students need to know and be able to do, but they also ask for a different orientation for teaching and learning in the classroom. (p. 183)

In almost every endeavor in life, people accept that mastery and excellence are products of repeated practice and dedication (Brabeck, Jeffrey & Fry, 2009). Effective citizenship is no

different. If adults want students to mature into active and engaged citizens, then educators must give them authentic opportunities to develop these habits (Cushman, 2015). Roberts (2003) claimed:

Participation is a fundamental right of citizenship. The creation of a society which combines a commitment to respect for the rights of individuals with an equal commitment to the exercise of social responsibility must promote the capacity of individuals from the earliest possible age, to participate in decisions that affect their lives. (p. 32)

Classrooms and campuses are ideal environments for students to use their voices to begin developing citizenship and leadership skills (Cushman, 2015).

When educators give students a voice in their own learning, it can lead to a greater sense of membership and agency that transitions with them into their adulthood as engaged citizens (McMurray & Niens, 2012; Rudduck et al., 2003; Simmons et al., 2015; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013; Warwick, 2008). If educators deny students an authentic voice in their own education, we have no reason to expect them to pursue their voice after they leave the classroom.

The relevance argument. Proponents of the relevance argument claim that students are rarely involved in developing the curriculum educators teach. Therefore, it is often not relevant to their lives (Bron & Veugelers, 2014). Through consultation with students and the inclusion of students in co-designing of learning, educators can determine the connections needed to make the mandatory curriculum relevant to their students. When the instruction is relevant to students, there is increased motivation, engagement, and academic achievement for students (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013).

By the time students reach their senior year in high school, they have devoted over 12,000 hours of classroom time observing instruction (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). They possess a knowledge and perspective of learning and how it is relevant to their lives that professional

educators may not possess (Mitra, 2009). When educators are privy to students' perspectives on learning, they can begin to find new ways to support student learning and build strong partnerships with their students (Rudduck, 2006, 2007; Rudduck et al., 2003). The inclusion of student voice practices within a classroom can redefine student-teacher relationships as a collaborative effort to improve learning. When educators collaborate with students to improve learning, they bridge the gap between students' lived experiences outside of school and those inside of school to make learning more relevant. Unless educators listen to students, they cannot effectively build on the students' prior experiences to make learning rich and relevant.

Students represent the majority of the stakeholders in the public-school system, yet they rarely have a voice in improving classroom instruction. However, students who had a voice in decisions regarding their learning were seven times more likely to be academically motivated, eight times more likely to be engaged in their learning, and nine times more likely to have a sense of purpose in their learning than those students who did not have a voice (Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016). Indeed, student voice benefits students.

Student Voice Conceptual Framework: The How of Student Voice

Bron and Veugelers (2014) provided a framework for educators to identify why student voice was necessary for a student. Lundy (2007), an international children's rights specialist, provided a simple guide on how to implement student voice. She enumerated four basic elements needed of student voice:

1. Space—children must be given the opportunity to express a view.
2. Voice—children must be facilitated to express their views.
3. Audience—the view must be listened to.
4. Influence—the view must be acted on, as appropriate. (p. 933)

Furthermore, Toshalis and Nakkula (2013) acknowledged the importance of student voice and the complexity of a student voice participation. They designed the spectrum of student voice-oriented activities and divided the methods of student voice into a continuum ranging from student expression to student leadership. Toshalis and Nakkula's spectrum served as the conceptual framework to research the various methods of student voice participation within the District.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2013) based the spectrum on Hart's (1992) ladder of participation, "a beginning typology for thinking about children's participation" (p. 9). Hart was a proponent of child participation but cautioned against methods that gave the illusion of child participation that were in actuality tokenistic methods. Hart's (1992) ladder of participation included eight rungs ranging from manipulation to decisions that positioned youth and adults as equals in the decision-making process (Fletcher, 2016).

The lowest rungs of the ladder included manipulation, decoration, and tokenism. Hart (1992) classified these as non-participatory methods, even though the adults facilitating the participation might have viewed them as youth participatory methods. Moreover, Hart (1992) considered activities where adults consulted youth, but never gave them feedback or allowed a voice after the consultation, as manipulation. Decoration involved activities where youth were invited to participate in events centered around a cause or effort but had little knowledge of the cause. In seeking youth participation and voice, adults must be careful of tokenism through efforts where educators feel they give students a voice, but, in reality, it is still adult controlled and there are no actions resulting from the students' feedback.

Hart (1992) included activities that had degrees of youth participation on the upper rungs of the ladder. Hart (1992) enumerated a number of requirements for a project to be considered participatory:

1. The children understand the intentions of the project;
2. They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why;
3. They have a meaningful (rather than ‘decorative’) role;
4. They volunteer for the project after the project was made clear to them. (p. 11)

On the highest part of the ladder, Hart incorporated participation methods that included assigned but informed, consulted and informed, adult-initiated shared decisions with children, child-initiated and directed, and child-initiated shared decisions with adults (Hart, 1992). Fletcher (2016) classified these rungs as youth informed, youth consulted, youth and adult equality, completely youth-driven, and youth and adult equity. The levels of participation on Hart’s (1992) ladder ranged from adult-driven activities on the bottom to youth-driven activities at the top. The underlying belief of Hart’s research was the idea that children need to be involved in meaningful partnerships with adults.

Following Hart’s (1992) research on student participation levels, Fielding (2001) identified four types of student voice-oriented programs that aligned with the levels determined by Hart (1992). Fielding’s (2001) four methods of participation and voice were those that positioned students as data sources, active respondents, co-researchers, or full independent researchers. Larson, Walker, and Pearce (2005) categorized student voice activities in a more simplistic manner—those that are adult-driven and those that are youth-driven.

Hadfield and Haw (2001) also developed a typology for student voice. They examined the type of voice rather than who initiated or led the voice effort. Their typology included three

types of voice: authoritative, critical, and therapeutic. Students with an authoritative voice shared feedback that was representative of an entire group. In contrast, students who had a critical voice challenged the previously held views and beliefs of the adults hearing the voice (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). The final type of voice identified by Hadfield and Haw (2001) was the ‘therapeutic’ voice which the authors assigned to students sharing challenging experiences from their life. The therapeutic voice, although important, was not included in this student voice research study.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) created their own typology influenced by Hart (1992), Fielding (2001), Hadfield and Haw (2001) and others. The spectrum moved students from data sources on the left to leaders of change on the right. As the method of student voice moved from left to right, the students became more involved as stakeholders in their learning.

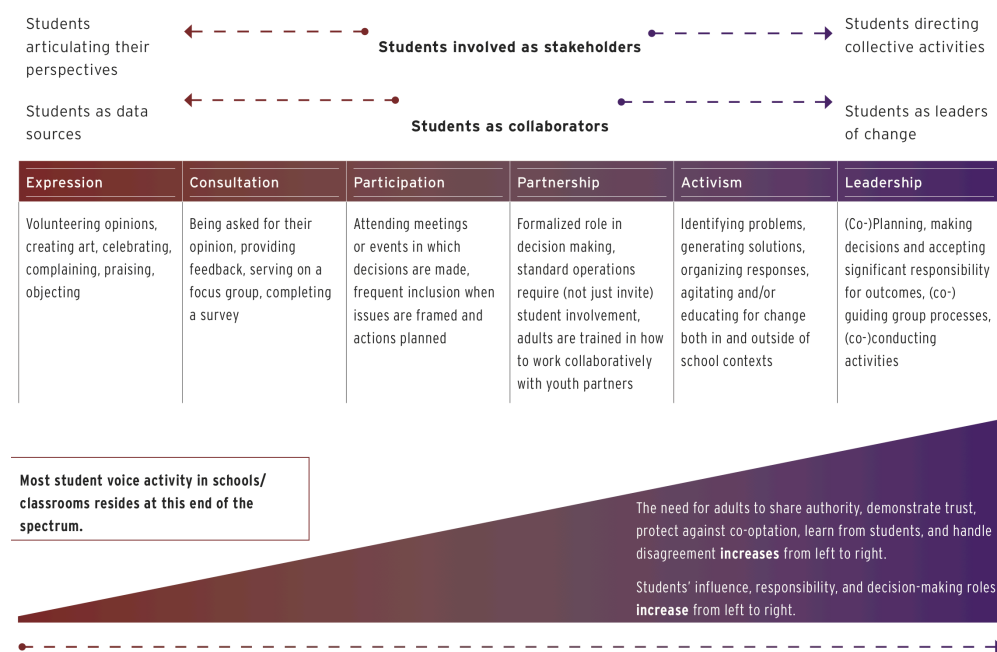


Figure 1. The spectrum of student voice. Reprinted from *Motivation, engagement, and student voice: The students at the center series* (p. 24), by E. Toshalis and M. Nakkula, 2012, Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. Reprinted with permission.

On the left side of the spectrum, student voice was gathered in the forms of expression and consultation. In these categories, students function as consultants who can share their thoughts, rather than empowered stakeholders. The middle of the spectrum—participation and partnership—recognized students as stakeholders while allowing students to collaborate with adults on adult-led projects. On the right of the spectrum, students may be directed collaborative efforts between students and teachers. Moving from left to right, student voices were “more included, formalized, and empowered” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013, p. 194).

Connecting the spectrum to the work of Hadfield and Haw (2001), students on the left side of the spectrum had an authoritative voice where students on the right side of the spectrum had a critical voice. Although students become more involved and empowered stakeholders as they move across the spectrum, any voice opportunities where educators asked, listened to, and acted upon students’ ideas were valuable to the student. Toshalis and Nakkula’s (2012) spectrum provided a framework in which to examine student voice participation methods.

The authoritative voice: Expression, consultation, and participation. A student’s authoritative voice could be heard through qualitative measures, such as interviews, or through quantitative measures like surveys. Bragg (2010) noted that whether or not the authoritative voice of the student was heard depended on how the view was articulated and if it aligned to the views already formed by the adults seeking the feedback. Hadfield and Haw (2001) maintained that an authoritative voice needed to be authentic and representative of the group. Students needed to be honest and not say what they thought their teachers wanted to hear to have an authentic voice. Hadfield and Haw further contended that:

At its best, those listening take a voice to be authoritative because it is an honest loud clear and inclusive voice. At its worst, it is cynically given authority because it can be used to justify the decision those listening have already made and because it fits in their

agendas. This is a voice that its audience can often choose to use in the way it wants, mainly because of how it is presented. (p. 489)

Similarly, authoritative voice aligned with Toshalis and Nakkula's (2012) spectrum categories of expression, consultation, and participation.

On the left side of the spectrum, students had opportunities to express themselves and share their perspectives. Students could express their ideas through art, writing, classroom conversations, or other avenues. Although expression was at the lowest level of the spectrum, when students expressed their viewpoints it opened the door for more formalized voice opportunities and a shift in how educators viewed students (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

The next category of student voice on the spectrum was consultation. Consultation occurred when educators gave students an opportunity to provide feedback on some aspect of their education—through the use of surveys, focus groups, or other avenues—to gather information needed to change educator practices (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Student voice at the consultation level was valuable for feedback on instructional styles, relevancy of the curriculum, and other classroom issues (Rudduck, 2007). When educators consulted students, it gave them insight into students' perspectives while aiding the students' personal development (Kirby & Bryson, 2002). Fielding and Bragg (2003) contended that when adults consulted with students, they improved student development in 21st century skills, like time management, leadership, and effective communication, that would be useful later in the student's life.

When educators seek the voice of students in matters pertaining to student learning, they can improve instruction and help their students reflect upon their personal learning needs (Bragg, 2010; Fielding, 2007; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Niemi, Kumpulainen, & Lipponen, 2015; Rudduck, 2006; Rudduck & Flutter, 2003; Thomson, 2010). Although there is a benefit to both

the educator and student, Bragg (2010) believed that “a key outcome of greater consultation is to change adults’ perceptions of young people’s capabilities, so that they become more willing to enter into dialogue with them” (p. 18), thus positioning educator practices to move across the spectrum to categories that begin to empower students to act as change agents in the transformation of learning.

Although there is a benefit in consulting students, educators must be cognizant of how they are consulting and what they do with the information they gathered. Lodge (2005) argued that following questions are crucial when consulting students:

1. Who is being asked? Are they representative of the population?
2. What are they being asked? Will the answers give the needed information to make an informed decision?
3. How are they being asked? Will the answers provide an authentic voice?

Often, the questions used in feedback mechanisms are teacher-created and lack follow-up actions (O’Neill & McMahon, 2012). One way of promoting effective consultation is to include students in the design of the questions used in feedback mechanisms (Mitra, 2008; Rudduck, 2007, Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013). After gathering feedback, educators must do something with the information. O’Neill and McMahon (2012) identified two criticisms for traditional student feedback instruments: the instruments were not always valid because they did not ask the questions students wanted to answer and the educators used them at a time where students could not see any action on the educator’s part, assuming the educator acted on the feedback they received. Roberts (2003) argued that educators needed to build capacity in using the data gathered from consultation and, if consultation was only for appearances, it was a tokenistic

effort that could lead students to become disillusioned, suspicious of educators actions, or indifferent to the learning decisions that impacted them the most (Bragg, 2010).

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) stated, “Despite students’ lack of formal power during activities restricted to expression and consultation, these remained important examples of student voice because they highlighted the fact that students were indeed authorities on educational practices” (p. 25). Consulting students in a meaningful way was beneficial to the educator and the student. Moreover, there was an added benefit to the student when the educator involved them in the design of the instruments utilized in the consultation. By including students in the design, educators began to move their practice towards the right of the spectrum, nearing the category of participation.

The final category that was set towards the left side of the spectrum and provided an authoritative voice was participation. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) classified participation activities as “attending meetings or events in which decisions are made, frequent inclusion when issues are framed and actions planned” (p. 24). When educators used participation strategies, they began to transition students from data sources to active participants in their learning (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2016). The belief that students were capable of acting as participants in the learning aligned to the social development theory of Vygotsky (1978), who considered participation within a community of learners the foundation for personalized learning. The middle part of the spectrum merged the idea of students as data sources and students as change agents in a way that recognized them as stakeholders in the learning while providing opportunities for them to collaborate with adults (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2016) recognized a movement from students as data sources to active participants in their learning. They argued for educators to find authentic

approaches to student voice that moved from “legitimation and guardianship” (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2016 p. 162) to a model where students were seen as active participants and co-designers of learning. It is important for students to have a voice and move up the “continuum of empowerment” (O’Neill & McMahon, 2012, p. 169).

The critical voice: Partnership, activism, and leadership. Hadfield and Haw (2001) considered the critical voice as one that was often challenging the previously held views and beliefs of the adults who heard the voice. A critical voice was often about

challenging existing policies, practices and views or stereotypes of a group or issue. It [was] more concerned with presenting unheard or alternative views to a specific audience, such as professionals, often through a process where young people work intensively with committed researchers or workers. (Bragg, 2010, p. 32)

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) concluded that educators who sought the critical voice of students to inform instructional practices, curriculum design, and the development of the school culture were tapping into an underutilized resource.

Moving across the spectrum to the right, the categories of student voice included participation, activism, and leadership. Each of these categories increased the student’s involvement. When student involvement extended to larger issues, it had positive effects on both the change effort itself and the students’ development as leaders (Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2004; Mitra & Gross, 2009). Thus, each of these student voice categories increased the degree that students were empowered to act as change agents in educational transformation and could enhance their personal leadership development.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) defined the partnership level of student voice as times where students had a “formalized role in decision making, standard operations require (not just invite) student involvement, and adults are trained in how to work collaboratively with youth

partners” (p. 24). Educator-student partnerships consisted of activities where all stakeholders in the partnership developed a collective vision for the work and apportioned meaningful roles for each educator and student member, with shared responsibility for decisions (Mitra, 2005; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Fielding (2010) conducted qualitative research to examine the use of student voice and its impact on student centered-instruction. Moreover, Fielding concentrated his research on two high schools and created collaborative environments focused on school improvement. The opportunity for all stakeholders to work collaboratively resulted in adults and students viewing each other differently and culminated in respectful collaboration, improved relationships, shared responsibility for learning, and mutual advocacy. Hence, there were multiple benefits to partnering with students to improve instruction.

Continuing across the spectrum, the next category of student voice participation was activism. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) classified activism as times where students were tasked with “identifying problems, generating solutions, organizing responses, agitating and/or educating for change both in and outside of school contexts” (p. 24). Toshalis and Nakkula (2013) declared,

One of the most powerful tools available to schools to increase motivation, engagement, and academic achievement [was] helping students feel that they [had] a stake in their learning. Fostering student voice—empowering youth to express their opinions and influence their educational experiences—has been shown repeatedly to play this crucial role. (p. 193)

The authors concluded that it was particularly important for adolescents to have a voice in matters that directly affected their lives and to participate as an activist to promote change in their schools. When student-adult partnerships focus on supporting reform efforts, students could gain important skills of identity exploration, self-confidence, social capital, social

competencies, civic competencies, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills (Ballard & Ozer, 2016; Mayes, Mitra, Serriere, 2016; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Zeldin et al., 2006).

In the final category on the spectrum, adults viewed students as leaders. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) identified leadership activities as “co-planning, making decisions and accepting significant responsibility for outcomes, co-guiding group processes, and co-conducting activities” (p. 24). These activities view student-educator partnerships as “distributed leadership” (Woods & Gronn, 2009, p. 440) and a form of “radical collegiality” (Fielding, 2006, p. 308) and position students as problem solvers with the skills necessary to lead educational transformation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

On the far-right side of the spectrum, adults served as mentors, or resource providers, as students were positioned as agents of change (Fielding 2001, 2007; Harper, 2003; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, 2013). When schools viewed students as positive change agents and provided opportunities for them to lead change and co-design learning, they moved away from “notions of power as a commodity, possessed by some [adults], exercised over others [children], and subject to re-distribution” (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, and Bottrell, 2015, p. 59). An added benefit to schools is a more sustainable outcome in educational reform when students play an active role in the change (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Toshalis and Nakkula (2013) categorized student voice participation along a spectrum of student voice. Educators moved students from data sources on the left to leaders of change on the right of the spectrum. Although the students became more involved stakeholders as they participated at levels that moved from the left to the right on the spectrum, participation methods on the right still benefitted the student and the school. Each student voice opportunity, if heard and acted on appropriately, could be beneficial to the student and the educator. The spectrum

served as the conceptual framework for how to research the various methods of student voice participation and the impact student voice could have on instruction.

The Role of Leadership in Student Voice

Prior researchers have identified many benefits of student voice and highlighted various models of student voice participation. Nevertheless, there were few research studies on the role school leadership played in supporting student voice initiatives (Pautsch, 2010). However, as has been demonstrated in other educational research, the school leader plays an essential role in shaping school culture and leading change (Carpenter, 2015; Deal & Peterson, 2009; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hipp, Huffman, Pankake & Olivier, 2008; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkin, 2008; Supovitz & Christman, 2003).

Shared leadership. The inclusion of students' voices in educational decisions aligns with shared and collective leadership theory. In shared leadership, the organization gives individuals opportunities to lead where they have an expertise rather than the power residing with one individual (Goldsmith, 2014; Wassenaar & Pearce, 2016). Backman and Trafford (2006) believed that leaders should base school governance on the involvement of students in all important decisions in the school, therefore creating a system of shared leadership. Students sit in schools each day and have a level of expertise that is valuable.

Educational leaders must move from a hierarchical model of leadership where the principal holds all power to a view of leadership as a social process and may require a shifting of a mindset for educators (Brasof, 2017; Cook-Sather, 2002; Taines, 2014; Wassenaar & Pearce, 2016). Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) stated, "the individual's capacity to act in a way that produces desired change...is about the extent to which an environment will allow that person to move in her/his desired direction. Social context and agency are therefore always mutually

interdependent” (p. 175), demonstrating that student voice and shared leadership were both social processes.

Shared leadership requires leaders to be able to relate to others within the organization. To support shared leadership with students, both educators and students must learn new patterns of interaction with one another that support their work together and build relationships between both parties. This is a shift in thinking from an educational context that has often reinforced adult power over youth rather than a shared leadership view (Akiva & Petrokubi, 2016). Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) stated that “social interactions are key in this concept, as leadership is seen as something that occurs in and through relationships and networks of influence” (p. 23). In their research, they examined shared leadership through the lens of relational theory. Voight (2015) saw a similar connection through student participation and believed students in shared leadership strengthened relationships amongst students and between students and teachers that resulted from a shared experience in school-based civic activities. In shared leadership, leaders need the skills of empathy, vulnerability, and emotional competence (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). Voight (2015) further believed student voice helped students become more socially and emotionally competent individuals through their engagement. Once relationships were formed, it was easier for leaders to create a shared vision. Like shared leadership, effective student voice models hinge on participants developing a shared, collective vision for their work with meaningful roles for all participants: both educators and students (Lambert, 2002; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Students, therefore, are positioned to play an important role in their school.

Carpenter (2015), in his qualitative research on school culture and leadership, posed the research question: “To what extent was supportive and shared leadership structures provided at schools?” (p. 683). Carpenter included three secondary schools from the community and

concluded that shared leadership was a central component of effective learning communities. He found evidence of a connection between a collaborative environment, shared leadership, continuous improvement, and student achievement. Furthermore, Carpenter believed schools should create a system of shared leadership in order to have highly effective learning communities. The schools that had spent time developing a system and culture for shared leadership had higher functioning learning communities.

Shared and collective leadership have proven benefits to organizations. When stakeholders take control of their work and collaborate with others, they have increased motivation and engagement (Wassenaar & Pearce, 2016). In shared leadership, collaboration provides a broader pool of ideas and innovations to enhance the work of the organization (Fenton, 2016). Wassenaar and Pearce (2016) claimed that shared leadership was a predictor of “attitudinal, behavioral, cognitive, and effectiveness outcomes, at the individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis” (p. 184). Student voice opportunities that lead to shared leadership can benefit the student as well as the school.

Although there are many noted identified strengths of shared leadership, there were barriers to implementing it within an organization. Shared leadership is difficult to implement and requires a significant change in mindset by leadership who must give up some degree of control. To have a successful shared leadership, leaders must be authentic and transparent (Fenton, 2016). Without these characteristics, shared leadership could fail. Shared leadership is successful where there is an interdependency between the individuals working towards a common goal (Wassenaar & Pearce, 2016). Although these barriers were noted for traditional leadership models within organizations, they are also applicable to the notion of student voice as shared leadership within educational institutions.

The challenge to rethink education to allow for student voice in educational change will require a paradigm shift for many educational leaders. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012)

acknowledged that educational leaders could face difficulties from a variety of situations:

the need to alter traditional structures, practices, beliefs, and values to allow student voice to flourish; the dangers of co-opting student voices rather than learning from them; the tricky business of cultivating respectful disagreement between youth and adults; and concerns about time limits, levels of administrative support, teachers losing power, and whether full inclusion of student voices [was] being achieved. (p. 199)

Although there are potential leadership challenges, a common vision shared between leadership, teachers, and students can help negate these difficulties and create a system where shared leadership between educational leaders and students could flourish.

Student voice leadership needs. Pautsch (2010) contended that principal involvement is necessary for student voice to reach its full potential. In the course of her research, Pautsch found few studies that focused on the process of implementing a student voice initiative, beginning with its inception to the long-term sustainability of the initiative. Pautsch conducted a qualitative study at a large urban school in a mid-sized Midwest city. The study concluded that the principal played an important role in providing the structure of the student voice program. Pautsch's research revealed multiple instances where student initiatives failed because leadership was not intentional with student voice.

A structure needs to be in place to allow for students and educators to come together to enact change. Meaningful student voice often runs contrary to the traditional school structure. Pautsch (2010) asserted that the principal must ensure that the school policy supported the empowerment of all students' voices. Lastly, Pautsch concluded that the principal must create a vision that included student voice and provided support to the students and teachers using student voice.

Biddle (2017) conducted a qualitative study to examine the factors necessary to develop trust in a shared leadership structure. Three high schools participated in instructional rounds to meet state accreditation criteria. The evaluation teams consisted of administrators, teachers, and high-school students from each school. The central research questions were: “How was trust established between youth and adults working within collaborative peer review teams?” and “What practices, beliefs and processes did participants perceive supported or undermined the formation of trust within these teams?” (Biddle, 2017, p. 2). Following the work of the evaluative teams, student and adult perceptions varied. Biddle noted that the students were more likely to “focus their reflections on feelings of empowerment to change pedagogy and classroom practices [while the educators identified] distinct gray areas of interaction between youth and adults where differing expectations led to conflict within groups and undermined trust and collaboration” (p. 13) within the shared leadership roles. The study concluded that it was important for school leadership to provide structure for student voice and shared leadership opportunities as well ensure there was a common language that students understood when discussing instructional changes. Biddle identified a key challenge to adult-youth partnerships when framing youth as colleagues. The adults expected the students to behave and lead as equal partners. When this did not happen, the adults were unsure whether to address the issues as traditional teacher-student interactions or as they would address colleagues. Through the course of the research, the idea of students as colleagues was phased out and greater emphasis was placed on the unique skill sets that students and educators brought to the partnership (Biddle, 2017). Biddle’s research demonstrated the importance of clearly defining the vision and purpose of youth participation and developing a structure for shared leadership where both educators and students have an equitable voice.

In the action research conducted by Termini (2013) in an urban high school, he found that student voice had a positive effect on both students and administrators. The results of Termini's study verified the belief that students need to be a part of the school transformation process in order for schools to make meaningful change. Moreover, the study identified that leaders in student voice initiatives must be willing to grow and lead by example. If school administrators expect teachers to take a risk by involving students in educational decisions, then they must model this same risk-taking by inviting students into shared-leadership opportunities (Termini, 2013). School administrators must support and engage in student voice projects in order for them to have the greatest opportunity for success.

The research into student voice initiatives within schools pointed to the important role school leadership plays. Administrators must set a vision, provide structures for the initiatives, and model shared leadership. There must be shared leadership with a collective vision to promote the sustainability of a student voice initiative: an initiative with the potential to change students' lives and the culture of the organization.

Concerns of Utilizing Student Voice

In today's educational environment, teachers' identities are ever changing. The push to move from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction has left many educators redefining their roles in the classroom (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). To add to the changing identity of educators, many are teaching in a world that does not honor teachers at the level they deserve (Bragg, 2007). Many feel that a move to including student voice to improve instruction in the classroom will blur their role even further. However, Kane and Chimwayange's (2013) research identified that, contrary to their participants' initial fears of their role in the classroom eroding, their teaching practice was enhanced when including student voice.

As schools look to implement student voice models, it is important to note that student voice is not pandering to students or relinquishing the role of the teacher in the classroom (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2016; Mitra, 2009; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Educators may also need a mind shift in how they view students. Research has noted that some educators view students as inexperienced, immature, and unreliable, and therefore do not have enough confidence in students to relinquish important classroom decisions to the students (Cushman, 2015). However, it has been found that the bigger issue is not the lack of expertise of students, but the unwillingness of educators to listen to student voice (Hadfield & Haw, 2001).

Another commonly identified concern is the possible tokenism of student voice. When students share their perspectives and provide feedback, it is essential that educators do more than just listen to their voice. Educators must ensure that student voice is heard and that action ensues. Students can become skeptical of participatory methods if it appears nothing happens as a result of their voice (Bragg, 2010). If educators continue to not act on student voice, it could lead to a disconnection from school and learning for the students (Fielding, 2004; Mitra, 2009; Mitra & Serriere, 2014). In the end, it does not matter how strong student voice is in the classroom, it is ultimately the responsiveness of the teacher that is most important (Pedder & McIntyre, 2006).

Conclusion

The research of Simmons et al. (2015) utilized the data from a large mixed methods study conducted in Australia that concentrated on the students' well-being in schools. Following an in-depth data analysis, four themes of concern emerged from the data. Improvements were needed in pedagogy, school environment, relationships and opportunities to have a voice. These findings led Simmons et al. to a more in-depth literature review that pointed to a well-

documented connection between student voice and overall student well-being. However, they believed that opportunities for student voice were still the exception in spite of evidence in research to support the benefits of student voice.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and disseminate one student voice initiative in a suburban Texas school district. In this study, I provided a historical narrative of the initial three years of the initiative as the District approached full diffusion of the student voice practice. Moreover, I highlighted successes and issues inherent in the implementation and made suggestions that may provide support for education leaders in similar contexts wishing to implement a student voice initiative. From the lessons learned through this initiative, I hope to provide a portrait that will be useful to other districts.

I used Toshalis and Nakkula's (2012) spectrum of student voice to serve as the conceptual framework for my research. Student voice empowers students and increases motivation, engagement, agency and more. Even though there is proven evidence pointing to the benefits of student voice, the United States has continued to lag behind other countries in integrating student voice practices into the school culture. There was also a lack of research on how to implement student voice at the organizational level.

If research is to create new knowledge, then we must look at a partnership of educationalists and students. It is time to break away from traditional patterns of both educational provision and thinking. For real education reform, now is the time not only to hear the student voice, but to listen to it. (Hopkins 2008, p. 218)

Students need student voice. Educators need student voice. Schools need student voice. Consequently, I hoped to provide a model that supported all of these stakeholders in transforming education through the use of student voice.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology used in this study. The organization of this chapter provides clarity on the research design, the participants in the study, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the research.

Background and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and disseminate one student voice initiative at a suburban Texas school district. Although the initiative covered Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12, the focus of this study was on the student voice participation in Grades 6 through 12. The scope of the study was narrowed to a subpopulation of the District to go deeper into the understanding of the initiative in a shortened period of time. Also, secondary students are more likely to become disengaged in their learning, and the opportunity to have a voice in their instruction had a more significant impact on their identity and achievement (Rakow, 2011). Therefore, I selected this subpopulation for the study. In this study, I provided a historical narrative of the initial 3 years of the initiative, highlighted successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and made suggestions that may provide support for advocates in similar contexts wishing to implement a student voice initiative. Data sources included focus group, narrative, and semi-structured interviews, as well as archival survey results. From the lessons the school district leadership learned through this initiative, I hoped to provide a portrait that would be useful to school leaders considering a similar initiative.

The following research questions guided the study:

Q1. What is the meaning of student voice for educators in the school district?

Q2. What is the story of student voice participation for educators in the school district?

Q3. How is the use of student voice affecting the classroom, campus, and the district instruction?

Q4. What are possible next steps to improve the current model?

Research Design and Method

To examine the diffusion of student voice as a tool to improve instruction throughout the school District's secondary campuses, I employed a qualitative research method. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) described, "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world.... Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). By using a qualitative methodology, I could engage in a deeper conversation and capture the detail of the complexities of integrating student voice into the practices of educators.

I used a narrative research design. Narrative design is a type of qualitative research that involves acquiring narratives that spotlight stories and the meaning people ascribe to the stories told (Josselson, 2006). Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience, "a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Patton (2015) considered the personal experiences of participants as an important source in developing an understanding of a phenomenon. In narrative inquiry, the personal story is considered as data and the narrative as analysis, which interprets the story and compares and contrasts the story with that of others (Patton, 2015). Educators in the District approached student voice from different perspectives and have implemented the practice in different ways, producing multiple personal stories to compare to make meaning of the use of student voice in the District and determine its impact on instruction.

The narrative research method aligns with the naturalistic inquiry paradigm where the researcher carries out qualitative research in a natural setting which provides contextual relevance and considers the participant as a human instrument. The individual researching within the naturalistic inquiry paradigm builds upon her tacit knowledge and incorporates interviews, observations, and other field documentation when analyzing the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I conducted interviews and observations in a natural setting inside of classrooms, campuses, and district administration offices in the District. By meeting participants in a natural setting, I gathered information by talking directly to participants, seeing student voice in action, and examining educator and student behaviors.

I used observations to write vignettes to report findings. Vignette writing uses real-life examples that tell a story about people, events, and behaviors (Hazel, 1995). These short descriptive passages, written as a story, give specific examples that reveal important information about participants and the research (Hughes, 1998; Ripamonti, Galuppo, Gorli, Scaratti & Cunliffe, 2016). The personal reflection involved in constructing vignettes acts as a form of discovery and increases awareness of the personal observations of the researcher (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Vignettes are one way to represent data found through qualitative reviews.

I conducted face-to-face interviews, including focus group, narrative, and semi-structured interviews. I used open-ended interviewing to capture the story of the District's educators who participated in the student voice initiative. The conversations were valuable as interviewees provided historical context to support the research objectives. I utilized a District survey sent to all secondary educators as a piece of archival data to ensure I captured a complete picture of the student voice initiative.

Population and Sample

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) classified Texas public school districts into eight district types ranging from *major urban* to *rural* using enrollment, growth in enrollment, economic status, and proximity to urban areas as determining factors. The TEA classified a district as major urban if it was in a county with a population of at least 950,000, its enrollment was the largest in the county—at least 70% of the largest district enrollment in the county—and at least 35% of the enrolled students were economically disadvantaged. The TEA classified a district as *major suburban* if the district was not urban and was (a) contiguous to a major urban district and student enrollment was at least 3% of the student enrollment of the largest contiguous major urban district or at least 4,500 students or (b) was not contiguous to a major urban district but located in the same county as a major urban district with a student enrollment at least 15% of the student enrollment of the largest major urban district in the county or at least 4,500 students (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

The District included in this research was a major suburban district. According to the TEA, there were 79 major suburban school districts in the State of Texas in 2016 (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Using district wealth as calculated by the TEA as a measure, there were 96 school districts in the state of Texas similar to the District included in the research study (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). However, there are limited records of other school districts implementing a district-wide student voice initiative, so the population of the research is the major suburban school district included in this study.

At the time of this study, The District employed almost 2,000 professionals. This study involved the participation of classroom teachers, curriculum and instruction team members, and campus and district administrators selected from the secondary campuses in the District. The

District launched a student voice initiative in 2015 beginning with a small group of pilot teachers who voluntarily sought participation. The District's leadership had a goal that 100% of its educators—including classroom teachers as well as educators working outside of the classroom—would use student voice to improve instruction by the end of the 2018-2019 school year. The District's leaders sent out surveys to gather information on the types of student participation teachers were using in their practice. I saved this archival data in a Google Drive folder managed by the District's student voice leadership team, of which I was a member. I included archival data, such as field notes, presentations, and survey results that I acquired through the course of my job responsibilities.

I developed and used The District's 2017-2018 Middle of the Year Student Voice Survey and used the results to select secondary educators who had a variety of experiences using student voice. I purposefully selected educators from different secondary campuses and grade levels to get a wide variety of experiences. I identified the educators and their campuses by name during the selection; however, I only provided their years of total teaching experience and their years of participation in the student voice initiative.

Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to identify participants that offer the most information for the purpose of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2015). I purposefully selected educator participants from middle school campuses, high school campuses, and district-level administration and curriculum and instruction to provide a full representation of the use of student voice within the secondary schools in the District. I also purposefully selected participants at various levels on the spectrum of student voice, a continuum of student voice participation from expression to leadership (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012), as well as educators with varying years of teaching experience.

Materials and Instruments

The following three measures of data were used in this study: (a) three, 1-hour-long, semi-structured, in-depth, focus group interviews with four to 10 participants; (b) a recorded narrative with five classroom educators, two campus administrators, two centrally-deployed educators, and two central administrators; and (c) a semi-structured, individual interview of the educators and administrators who participated in the recorded narratives. The three forms of interviews coupled with archival data provided multiple measures of data to ensure a full-representation of the student voice initiative within the District. Multiple methods of data collection allowed for triangulation of data to test for validity and increased trustworthiness (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

I convened three members of the District's student voice leadership team to serve as an expert panel to review interview and survey questions. Creswell and Miller (2000) noted that collaborating with participants who are knowledgeable in the field of study to create research questions leads to the validity of building a participant view of the study. The expert panel also grouped interview and survey questions according to the research question they addressed. This collaboration helped to assure I asked the correct questions during interviews and surveys to address the research questions and the problem of practice.

Interviews. I conducted focus group, narrative, and semi-structured interviews. Researchers using naturalistic inquiry usually create study-specific questions for their interviews rather than using interview instruments created by others (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). Before I conducted interviews, I developed an interview guide with potential question probes that guided the semi-structured focus group interviews (see Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C), individual narrative interviews (see Appendix D), and individual semi-

structured interviews (see Appendix E, Appendix F, and Appendix G). Chenail (2011) noted that “qualitative researchers tend to construct study-specific sets of questions that are open-ended in nature so the investigators provide openings through which interviewees can contribute their insiders’ perspectives with little or no limitations imposed by more closed-ended questions” (p. 255). The semi-structured interview allowed me to personalize the interview questions to deepen the conversation (Patton, 2015).

I recorded focus group, narrative, and semi-structured interviews using the Temi application (<https://www.temi.com/>), a web-based, password-protected transcription service, on one password-protected device and using the audio recorder on a different password-protected device. At the completion of each interview, before I left the location, I saved the audio file to both password-protected devices and my private password-protected Google Drive account with privacy settings that limited access to only my inter-raters and myself. I had the only edit rights to the Google Drive account and no other individual had the access rights that allowed for the deletion of the file or the ability to share the file with others. After saving each file, I uploaded the file to the Temi application for transcription.

Data Collection Procedures

I collected data from all sectors of the District ensuring that I included the voice of educators at all of the secondary instructional campuses. Focus group, narrative, and individual interview participants were selected based on their grade level and their participation level with the student voice initiative to ensure a broad range of experiences. I established neutrality so the persons interviewed felt comfortable speaking about their classroom instruction without fear of judgment (Patton, 2015). I began and ended all interviews with a script to establish the framework for the interview (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Archival data. In addition to the data described above, which I collected after my dissertation committee's acceptance of my prospectus and Abilene Christian University's Internal Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix H), I had archival data that I compiled and analyzed as part of my regular job responsibilities. This archival data included field notes from observations, shared Google Drive notes, and online survey results. I gathered much of the data through the role of participant. The opportunity to be actively involved in the student voice initiative and the work within classrooms deepened my understanding of the phenomenon. I included my archival data as part of my IRB application before beginning the analysis for this dissertation study. One major component of my archival data was the 2017-2018 Middle of the Year Student Voice Survey.

Before my IRB application, I composed an online survey (see Appendix I) for all secondary educators in District. A central administrator of the District administered the survey which I included as an archival data request in my IRB application. Participants were encouraged to participate, but participation was not required. I collaborated with members of the student voice leadership team to craft questions to measure educators' participation and perception of the student voice initiative. A central administrator sent a solicitation email to all secondary educators within the District and included the link to the Google Form survey. The survey did not collect email addresses, but respondents had the opportunity to provide their name if they chose. I populated all results from the survey into a Google spreadsheet stored in a password-protected Google drive that only I could access.

Focus groups. I conducted three different focus group interviews: one group of secondary teachers, one group of secondary campus-based instructional coaches, and one group of campus administrators. I selected between four to 10 educators to participate in each of the

focus group interviews. Patton (2015) encouraged multiple focus groups to gain a variety of perspectives and to increase confidence in patterns that emerge through the focus group interview process. I conducted semi-structured, focus group interviews to allow educator participants to discuss student voice as a method to improve instruction. The focus group method allowed for a more in-depth consideration of the experiences of the educators and recognized that “decisions are made in a social context, often growing out of discussions with other people” (Patton, 2015, p. 475).

Focus group interviews tend to evolve based on how other participants in the group respond and aids in the recall of those participating (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). A focus group allows a researcher to examine the general beliefs about a phenomenon. Kitzinger (1995) noted that the “processes [could] help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview” (p. 300). Focus group interviews allow the researcher to capitalize on the interaction among group participants to gather data.

During the focus group interviews, I asked participants open-ended questions about what student voice means to them, what it looks like in the classroom, on the campus and at the district level, and the impact it has had on instruction and students. While the educators varied in experience, they were all tasked with using student voice within their classroom or campus to improve instruction. I identified participants by their role and a letter (Teacher A, Administrator A, etc.), their number of total years of experience in education, and the number of years they had participated in the student voice initiative.

Narratives. A narrative is an individual’s story depicting how she perceives a phenomenon and can be a powerful tool to investigate structural and identity changes (Lee, Hunter, & Franken, 2013; Reissner, 2004). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believed teaching to

be an expression of personal stories and suggested the researcher use narratives when working with teachers to create stories of their educational lives. Reissner (2004) contended that the narrative stories told mirror the degree to which the speaker mastered the changes successfully. Thus, narratives of participants through interviewing were valuable tools for creating a narrative of the overarching District student voice initiative.

I selected five teachers representing various levels on Toshalis and Nakkula's (2012) spectrum of student voice to participate in a narrative interview followed by an individual interview to provide rich details of their experience. These interviews, coupled with the focus group interviews and the archival survey data, allowed me to reach a level of saturation. I selected multiple teachers who had more experience with the student voice initiative to capture a more complete story of the implementation of student voice in the District. In addition to the five teachers, I purposefully selected (a) two campus administrators, one from a middle school campus and one from a high school campus, who did not participate in the administrator focus group; (b) two centrally-deployed curriculum and instruction staff members; (c) a central administrator; and (d) the superintendent to participate in the narrative and semi-structured interviews. I identified participants by their role and a number, the number of total years of experience in education, and the number of years they had participated in the student voice initiative. I gave all participants a prompt that allowed them to narrate their experiences with student voice as a method to improve instruction (see Appendix D).

Interviews. I followed each narrative interview with an individual, in-depth semi-structured interview. I created an interview script and constructed open-ended questions before the interview to allow opportunities for participants to add their own perspectives (see Appendix

E, Appendix F, and Appendix G; Patton, 2015). A semi-structured interview allowed me to personalize the interview questions to deepen the conversation.

All but one of the individual interviews took place during the educator's contract time. The interview conducted after the contract time was at the request of the participant. I recorded and transcribed interviews and then allowed for participant checking to ensure the accuracy of intended communication. I followed a semi-structured interview protocol to add consistency to the interviews.

Surveys. The District's student voice leadership administered an online survey to all secondary teachers within the school District (see Appendix I). This survey provided qualitative data through open-ended questions and gave an opportunity for respondents to give responses in paragraph form. I used this archival survey data to ensure there was an opportunity to capture both positive and negative responses as well as to identify any possible additional areas of research needed to capture a complete story of the District's Student Voice Initiative.

I analyzed all of the included data sources to create a narrative of the student voice initiative at the secondary level in the District. The multiple data points supported telling the narrative story of the District in a rich, descriptive manner. Multiple sources of data and the collaborative nature of utilizing District experts to support the coding of the data ensured an accurate portrayal of the student voice initiative was captured and conveyed in the written narrative to help other school district leaders wishing to implement a similar initiative.

Data Analysis Procedures

I sought to describe and disseminate the District's Student Voice Initiative by providing a historical narrative of the first 3 years of the initiative at the secondary level, highlighting successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and made suggestions that may provide

support for those in similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives. I analyzed data as they were collected which allowed me to determine when gathering new data no longer lead to new insights and a point of data saturation was reached (Charmaz, 2006).

I used Temi to transcribe all interview data. I listened to each interview audio two times to cross-check the transcription to verify the interview was captured accurately, to strike any identifying information from the final transcript, and to have an accurate understanding of the interview. A copy of the transcription was uploaded to Google Drive and shared with each individual participant to confirm the accuracy of their interview account. I then made all edits requested by the individual participants.

I used Dedoose (<https://www.dedoose.com/>), a collaborative, web-based application, to facilitate data management and the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative measures. I uploaded the archival data into the Dedoose application. Hill (1993) noted that the analysis of archival data was an iterative process in which the researcher regularly revisited archival data in light of the new data gathered. Using the Dedoose application allowed me to code and identify themes within the archival data and regularly compare the older data to the most recent data. I also hand-coded all research data and entered it into a Google Sheet which was stored in a password-protected, restricted Google Drive.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) described the qualitative data analysis phase as the process of moving from interviews to “evidence-based interpretations.... by classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (p. 201). I identified patterns through coding, the process of carefully examining qualitative data to determine themes and ideas and then providing a code to aid the researcher in finding evidence

within her research to draw conclusions (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). I used priori, in vivo, and process coding to make meaning of the data. A researcher derives priori codes from literature and the researcher's prior knowledge of the research problem (Saldaña, 2015). In vivo coding involves assigning a label to a section of data using the exact word or short phrase used by the interview participant (Given, 2008). These codes helped me to make meaning of the multiple sources of data. The collaborative feature of Google Drive allowed me to work closely with others on the District's student voice leadership team to analyze interview transcriptions to code data and organize the data into categories and themes. Although the collaborative analysis of the data increased the likelihood of an individual to tamper with the data, I protected the validity of the data by duplicating all data sets before analysis. After completing analysis, I compared the analyzed data to the duplicate data to confirm the accuracy of the data set.

I presented the research findings as a historical narrative documenting the journey of the District's leadership as they diffused the innovative practice of the inclusion of student voice to improve instruction. The research included data gathered from the participants' narratives, including the various levels of student participation and the influence the participation had on instruction. The written narrative provided a plan that educational leadership can utilize to structure a similar student voice participation initiative.

Methods for establishing trustworthiness. While focus group, narrative, and individual interviews suffer from some common methodological shortcomings, Shenton (2004) believed their distinguishable characteristics also resulted in individual effectiveness. The different interview methods working in tandem with each other compensated for their shortcomings and enhanced their respective benefits (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Guba, 1981). Patton (2015) believed that one barrier to credible findings was the suspicion that the researcher shaped the

findings to match their beliefs. However, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) supported the belief that qualitative data could be trusted by utilizing participant checks, peer evaluation, and triangulation of multiple methods of data examination.

I demonstrated trustworthiness of the research data by collaborating with educators with student voice expertise for the coding and identifying of themes in the data. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) supported the idea that a researcher can trust qualitative data by utilizing participant checks, peer evaluation, and triangulation of multiple methods of data examination. Triangulation occurred by comparing the various pieces of data collected throughout the study, including focus, narrative, and semi-structured interview transcriptions, focus group transcriptions, field notes, and other written evidence.

Researcher's role. I had been employed with the school District on a full-time basis for the last 10 years. During this 10-year period, I worked on two different campuses and as a centrally-deployed employee based at the central administration building. I had been a secondary classroom teacher, part of the campus leadership team at an elementary and secondary school campus, and served as a Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 Instructional Coach. I served on the student voice leadership team since its inception.

In my student voice leadership role, the District's leadership assigned me the task of creating teacher surveys to use with students, surveys to capture teachers' voice, a student voice website for teacher learning and support, and multiple student voice presentations sharing the vision of the District at state-level conferences. I have collaborated with teachers implementing student voice and have designed professional development for the school District to increase student voice practices.

I was in classrooms and professional development sessions as a participant and as an observer. I participated in study groups where I was actively involved in the personal learning as well as student lesson design teams where I provided essential information for lesson design. In other observations, such as student voice participatory groups between the teacher and students, I was a complete observer without directly participating. Although I had many relationships within the District, I had nothing personally or professionally to gain from my role as a researcher in this project. My purpose in researching was to improve the current model within the District and to provide a resource for other districts.

Ethical Considerations

This qualitative study received IRB approval from Abilene Christian University before active data collection. Data I gathered before the IRB approval was done so as part of my job description and under the direction of the District's administration. To include this archival data in my study findings, I received approval from the District and included the permission with my IRB application. All archival data and data gathered as part of the study were securely stored at all times throughout the study. Each interview participant signed an informed consent agreement. I put this process in place to protect all participants from any potential risks associated with participation in the study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Since I was employed by the District while researching, there were many important ethical issues that I considered. Confidentiality was of the utmost importance, and I worked to uphold it throughout the study. I redacted the names of participants from all primary artifacts and from any materials distributed before, during, or after the course of the study. I did not reveal the identity of the participants and provided written assurance of full protection from negative repercussions affecting participants' employment due to participation in the study.

Educators participated on a voluntary basis and had the right to refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the interview process at any time. Before the start of the study, I notified the participants of their right to terminate participation at any time. I provided all participants with the transcription of their interview to allow them to redact any part of the interview.

Assumptions

I assumed that students were a critical dimension of the learning environment and were an untapped resource in enacting necessary educational reform. While the research was not intended to be generalizable to all school districts, the insights and the voices of students are important to the field of education. The contributions of a district-wide model that invites student voice may inform and inspire stakeholders within the school District and beyond who strive to develop and sustain transformative school practices.

I assumed that all participants were honest during their interviews and that they were sharing their stories based on their free will and had no hidden motives for participation. I also assumed that the sample study was representative of the total population of educators in the school District.

Limitations

The District started the adoption of student voice to improve classroom instruction in an organic manner where teachers could opt into participating and determine the specifics of how student voice would look in their classrooms. However, a limitation of the study is the possibility of unknown conditions on a campus that could bias participant response. This qualitative study concentrated on a student voice initiative in one specific major, suburban Texas school district. The location of the study and results could affect the generalization of the results. Although the study details the efforts of the District over the initial 3-year period of the initiative,

there was a lack of time to measure longitudinal effects of the student voice implementation beyond this period.

The lack of prior research studies on a district-wide implementation of student voice was an identified problem that justified this study. However, the lack of previous research also stood as a limitation to the study, as many of the participation models used within the District were teacher designed and had not been vetted in other studies.

Delimitations

I examined student voice through the lens of classroom instruction and did not include the opportunities for students to have a voice to make decisions at the classroom, campus, or district level that were unrelated to instruction. The study included the use of student voice to improve instruction during the initial 3 years of the District's Student Voice Initiative.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and disseminate one student voice initiative in a suburban school district in the State of Texas. In this study, I provided a historical narrative of the initial 3 years of the student voice initiative, highlighted successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and made suggestions that may provide support for those in similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives.

I used archival data gathered while performing my regular job responsibilities over the last 3 years. I collected qualitative data through three focus groups: secondary educators, instructional coaches, and campus administrators. I collected data through nine narrative interviews followed by semi-structured individual interviews.

These four data points allowed for triangulation of data. The data provided rich details to support the writing of vignettes to tell individuals' stories. I presented the results in a descriptive

historical narrative to describe the educators' experiences with student voice. Narrative rich in supporting details of the successes and issues inherent with diffusion of a transformative practice may provide a model for educators, administrators and stakeholders in other districts wishing to start a student voice initiative.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the student voice initiative in a suburban Texas school district. In this study, I sought to provide a historical narrative of the initial 3 years of the initiative, highlight successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and make suggestions that may provide support for others in similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives. From the lessons the District's leaders learned in this Initiative, I hoped to provide a portrait that would be useful to other districts.

I interviewed teachers, campus-based instructional coaches, campus-based administrators, centrally-deployed instructional coaches, and centrally-based administrators from the District to gain their perspective on the Student Voice Initiative within the District. The following research questions guided the study:

- Q1.** What is the meaning of student voice for educators in the school district?
- Q2.** What is the story of student voice participation for educators in the school district?
- Q3.** How is the use of student voice affecting the classroom, campus, and the district instruction?
- Q4.** What are possible next steps to improve the current model?

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) expressed that “people live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others” (p. xxvi). The stories of educators helped to inform others in the practical implementation of student voice as a method to improve instruction.

In this qualitative study, information was gathered from four data methods: (a) focus group interviews, (b) narrative interviews where educators told the story of their experiences implementing the District's Student Voice Initiative, (c) individual interviews of the educators

that participated in the narrative interview, and (d) archival survey data collected from the District’s secondary educators in the spring of 2018. Interview participants were purposefully selected from within the school District to capture the perspectives of the first-year teacher to the superintendent of the District. With the exception of one participant, the focus group participants were not among those interviewed individually.

Table 1

Research Participants

| Method of data collection | <i>n</i> |
|--|----------|
| Secondary teacher focus group | 4 |
| Secondary administrator focus group | 10 |
| Secondary curriculum and instruction focus group | 6 |
| Narrative interview | 11 |
| Semi-structured individual interview | 11 |
| Archival survey data | 318 |

Note. $N = 360$.

In this chapter, I describe the analysis of the data collected and presented the results of the qualitative analysis. To provide a sense of context regarding the Student Voice Initiative, this chapter begins with a brief description of how the Initiative began and developed over the initial 3-year time period covered by this narrative. Then, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the interview and archival data organized by research question.

Background of the Student Voice Initiative

The Initiative began in the District when the superintendent visited another district in the state and learned how that district was using student voice to inform decisions on the campus. This visit piqued his interest in further exploring student voice.

At the same time—independent of the superintendent’s interest—another District administrator, Central Admin 1, identified a problem of practice within the District: there needed to be a formal mechanism in place to allow students to give feedback to teachers on the classroom culture and instruction in a formative way. When the problem was identified, the District was in year 3 of an extensive 10-year strategic plan that impacted every aspect of the District. The strategic plan was interwoven through all of the District’s decision-making and planning. One of the main tenets of the strategic plan was the movement from a teaching platform to a learning platform. Inherent within teaching from a learning platform was the premise that students are the drivers of the learning. The Central Admin 1 observed, “if we weren’t listening to [students] about how the learning was going and all kinds of iterations of that type of questioning, then how could we be doing learning platform?” and believed that there seemed to be a “natural marriage” between the identified problem of practice and the District’s plan for educators to move to a learning platform.

Central Admin 1 began to research methods for capturing student voice. At this time, there was limited research on the use of student voice as a tool to transform learning. However, Quaglia and Corso (2014) had recently published the book *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* which focused on the power of engaging student voice as a mechanism to improve instruction. Their research served as the launching pad for the Student Voice Initiative.

When diffusing an innovation through an organization, it is recommended to connect a change agent with a group of early adopters (Rogers, 2003). Central Admin 1 contacted participants of another program in the District who were known for their growth mindset to see if any of them would be interested in participating in a pilot effort to seek feedback from students on their learning. Slightly over half of the program, 11 participants, representing teachers from

both elementary and secondary campuses, agreed to participate in the 2015 pilot. This cohort of 11 teachers was the first phase of the District's Student Voice Initiative. The group collaborated to build a bank of questions that teachers were invited to use in designing their own surveys. Participating teachers were allowed to choose the frequency and content of their surveys and were asked to reflect with their administrator at the end of the semester on their experience with student voice. On the last day of the 2014-2015 school year, the pilot teachers met as a group to share their experiences. Each teacher used surveys with a frequency from once per week to once per semester to capture student voice. The teachers had an overwhelmingly positive experience with capturing student voice in their classrooms. They reported that the process changed the dynamic in their classroom, strengthened relationships with students, and increased their efficacy as teachers.

Based on the word of mouth, the Initiative began to spread organically through the organization to other early adopters. The Superintendent committed to "create and implement a plan to systemically pilot 'student voice' as a mechanism for feedback over the next three years" starting in the 2015-2016 school year. In the Initiative's first year as a district-wide pilot, 75 District teachers volunteered to include students' perspectives in the development of their instructional designs. The 2015-2016 cohort of teachers focused on exploring a broad range of participation methods to involve students more actively in their education. Teachers were encouraged to use a wide variety of tools and options for including students' voices. These included

- focus group conversations on campuses,
- classroom surveys administered by teachers,
- student involvement in the design of units of instruction, and

- school-wide surveys with more global questions about learning perceptions.

During the school year, the 2015-2106 pilot teachers participated in a *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* book study and met three times throughout the year to collaborate and share their findings and results. The criteria for teacher participation in the first year of the Initiative were simple:

- participation is a choice;
- ask students what they think;
- listen to/read what they say;
- act on or discuss what they tell you; and
- meet with a campus leader to report on your learning.

As the teachers reflected on the year, the teachers observed that trust between the teacher and student grew, instruction improved, and kids were respectful, honest, and knowledgeable.

Moving into the second full-year of the Initiative, the District's student voice leadership team had a more widespread communication effort through newsletters and teacher highlight videos on the District's YouTube channel. The District's leadership added another cohort of teachers participating in a book study. In addition to the teacher book study, the campuses principals participated in a book study as well. Principals had the option of reading *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* (Quaglia & Corso, 2014) or *A School of Our Own: The Story of the First Student-Run High School and a New Vision for American Education* (Levin & Engel, 2016). The book study deepened the principals' student voice understanding so they could better support the Initiative on their campuses.

To ensure that the Initiative was spread to all campuses, each campus within the District was required to include student voice plans as part of its yearly Campus Improvement Plan. The

leadership of all campuses was also charged to take an inventory of student voice practices that were used on their campus during the school year (see Appendix K). This allowed the District's student voice leadership to understand how teachers were using student voice throughout the District to better target the professional learning needs of teachers for the 2017-2018 school year. These communication efforts aligned to Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory suggesting that once early adopters espoused the innovative practice, organizations should shift from communication focused on early adopters to a mass communication effort to encourage the early majority to learn about and embrace the innovation.

The Superintendent kicked off the 2017-2018 school year with a District-wide assembly focused on voice. Every educator in the District attends the yearly assembly and heard the message of the importance of voice and the expectation of the Initiative. Not only did educators hear the message from the Superintendent, but students from elementary age to high school age spoke to the power of having a voice. The expectation of using voice was reiterated with campus leaders. Each campus principal was asked to complete a collaborative document capturing the student voice plans for each campus for the 2017-2108 school year. At the end of the year, principals reflected on their student voice accomplishments. Student voice practices were evident on all campuses within the District, positioning the District's leaders to move into the 2018-2019 school year and 100% educator participation in the Initiative with a solid foundation of educators using student voice to improve instruction.

Qualitative Analysis Results

Three data collection methods were used in the study: focus group interviews, narrative interviews in which educators told the story of their student voice experience, and individual semi-structured interviews with the educators that participated in the narrative interview. In

addition to these data methods, archival data were used to provide historical evidence, provide additional details, and deepen the understanding of the interview data.

Focus group interviews. The educators participating in the focus group interviews were identified by their role and a letter. There were three focus groups conducted: a teacher focus group, a curriculum and instruction focus group, and an administrator focus group. Interview questions were constructed to align to the four research questions (see Appendices A, B, and C for the focus group interview questions).

The teacher focus group was comprised of four secondary classroom teachers representing three secondary campuses, both core content and elective subjects, and a range of experience (see Appendix A). The teachers knew each other from their work within the District. The focus group interview lasted 45 minutes and was conducted away from the teachers' campuses.

The curriculum and instruction focus group was comprised of six Curriculum and Instruction Department team members representing six secondary campuses and a range of experiences (see Appendix C). The instructional coaches knew each other from their work within the District. The focus group interview lasted 1 hour and was conducted away from the instructional coaches' campuses at the District's professional development center.

The administrator focus group was comprised of 10 administrators representing eight secondary campuses—principals and assistant principals—and two central administrators, with a range of experience (see Appendix B). The administrators knew each other from their work within the District. The focus group interview lasted 1 hour and was conducted away from the administrators' campuses at the District's professional development center.

Narrative. The educators participating in the narrative interview were identified in this analysis as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, Teacher 4, Teacher 5, C&I 1, C&I 2, Admin 1, Admin 2, Central Admin 1, and Superintendent. The participants included both middle school and high school educators with varying years of experience (see Appendix D). The narratives ranged from 2 to 10 minutes depending on the amount of information the educators wanted to share. These educators were asked to respond to an open-ended prompt so specific questions would not bias their responses. The narratives were conducted at a location selected by each participant to ensure they were comfortable sharing their story.

Individual interviews. The educators participating in the individual interviews were the same participants as the narrative interviews and were identified the same. After the educators gave their narratives, they were asked interview questions aligned with the research questions. The individual interviews of the 11 educators ranged between 25 to 40 minutes each (see Appendices E, F, and G for the individual interview questions).

Qualitative analysis techniques were used to analyze participant responses, beginning with a complete review of the data. The data were coded for recurring themes using priori codes, process codes, and in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2016; Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). The themes and ideas that emerged from the data are reported below.

Research question 1: What is the meaning of student voice for educators in the school district? For leaders to replicate the Initiative in other educational institutions, it was beneficial for educational leaders to know how the District's educators implementing the Initiative defined student voice. Each interview participant was asked how he/she defined student voice. These responses were analyzed to create a definition of student voice according to the District's educators.

At the time of research, the goal of the District's leadership was that 100% of educators would use student voice to improve instruction by the 2018-2019 school year. Each interview participant that responded to the interview question contended that student voice involved, at a minimum, students having input, or giving feedback, on their learning. However, some participants defined student voice as more than expression and included shared decision making between teachers and students. Teacher 2 defined student voice as "giving kids the opportunity to participate in their learning." Teacher 3 emphasized that student voice was more than just casually giving students an opportunity to participate, but instead contended that student voice was "deliberately and intentionally seeking to collaborate with students" where students were "important members of the team." Teacher B defined student voice as "allowing the students to make decisions that steer everyday curriculum choices and pedagogy." A few educators expanded their definition beyond expression and partnership with students to include advocacy and leadership. Admin 1 thought that student voice was about students "taking leadership and making decisions." C&I 2 believed student voice involved giving students an "avenue to give feedback and to have a say in what [was] happening" coupled with a feeling of "ownership and leadership in the classroom, because they see their input having an impact in the classroom." Admin 2 contended that student voice consisted of "students being able to advocate for themselves and their needs as a learner" and that school leadership should be "promoting the culture of students advocating for themselves in the classrooms" and developing student "ownership" in their school.

It was evident that participants considered student input a critical component of student voice, but they equally agreed that another critical aspect of student voice was acting on the voice of the students. Teacher 1 noted that after asking for voice, teachers must listen to student

input and then do something with the input so that student voice was “affecting curriculum and impacting their achievement.” Teacher 4 asserted that “student voice [was] not valuable if nothing [was] done with it” and that half of student voice was educators reflecting on the input and making changes—asking and acting were both essential components.

The next step in analysis of the definition of student voice in the District was to use process codes for all responses to the first interview question. I recorded the verbs used in defining student voice to use as a process code. I then took all of the process codes and classified them as either an action required of the student, the teacher, or leadership. Each individual verb was classified under general themes that arose in the data (see Figure 2).

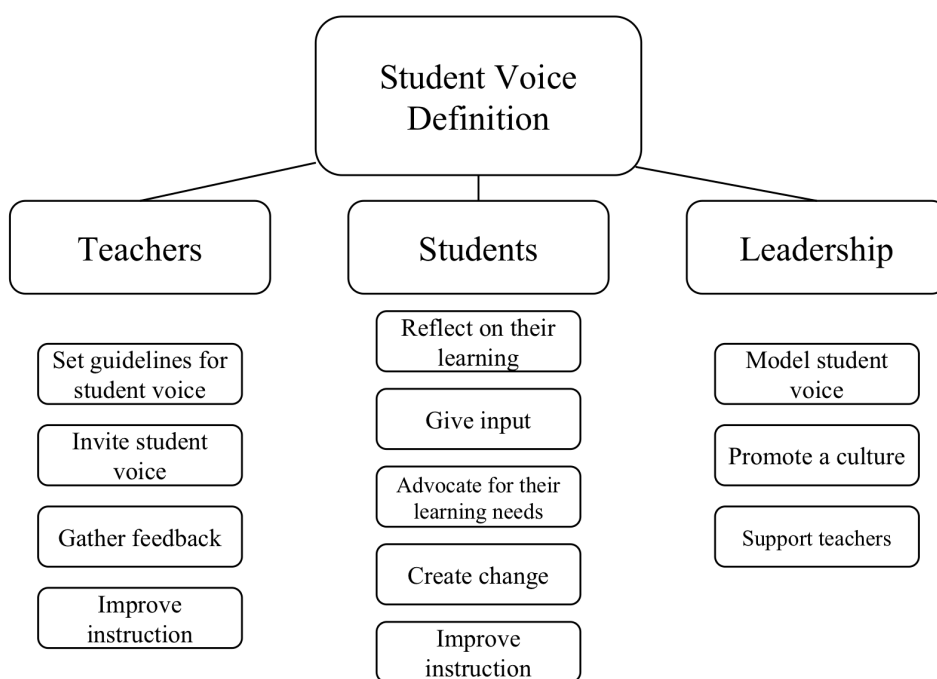


Figure 2. Actions of student voice. This figure illustrates the overarching actions research participants noted in defining student voice.

According to interview participants, teachers, students, and campus leadership had roles in integrating student voice into the classroom. Teachers set guidelines for student voice and then

provided opportunities for students to have a voice in their instruction. Students then reflected on their learning and gave input on classroom instructional decisions while advocating for their individual learning needs. Teachers gathered this feedback and used it to improve classroom instruction. The leadership of the District modeled student voice practices in their leadership and created a culture where students felt empowered to have a voice and teachers felt safe to shift the traditional classroom roles of the teacher and student.

Although the participants verbalized various aspects of student voice from expression to advocacy, the analysis of the data through in vivo and process coding supported participant alignment with the Superintendent's definition of student voice used in his goals. He simply defined student voice as "improving instruction through student feedback" which captured both listening and acting but allowed for varying implementations for each educator.

Research question 2: What is the story of student voice participation for educators in the school district? I used interview responses to create stories of participant experiences. Hearing the stories of the educators provided a richer description of the model. During the interviews, sub-questions occurred regarding the participants' perceived impetus for joining the Student Voice Initiative, the constraints they had encountered, and the support they received to ensure successful implementation. The narrative interviews and responses from all interview participants contributed to the story of student voice participation for the educators in the District.

In order to collect data on the full implementation of the Initiative, it was important to interview participants that were active with the Initiative for multiple years. However, it was equally important to capture the story of a first-year teacher new to the District and the Initiative. Since many of the educators shared a similar experience, I included vignettes representing the

full range of experiences of the interview participants. The vignettes of the educators participating in narrative and individual interviews began to tell the story of educator participation in the Student Voice Initiative within the District. These short descriptive passages, written as a story, give specific examples that reveal important information about participants and the research (Hughes, 1998; Ripamonti et al., 2016).

The story of participation of teachers. Teacher 5 was a middle school core-content teacher in his first year of teaching. He emphasized that the Student Voice Initiative was something that was shared with him from his first days in the District. In his First Year Teacher Academy, there was a strong emphasis on student voice. The idea of student voice was new to him as it was not something that had been emphasized in his college training. Teacher 5 believed he had seen success in implementing student voice because his campus leadership had continued to emphasize it and encouraged all teachers to include student voice as part of their individual yearly goals and departmental goals. Teacher 5 reported that he most frequently used informal methods of student voice: “just relationships with kids, getting to know them.” However, he also integrated surveys into his student voice practice every nine weeks. His first survey focused on learning styles of his students. Teacher 5 considered the second survey to be a more traditional feedback survey where he asked questions such as “What are things that you liked about this unit? What are things that you did not like?” For his most recent survey, Teacher 5 solicited feedback from students on what they wanted to learn after they finished the mandated curriculum. Although Teacher 5 used surveys to capture student feedback, he still believed that improving instruction started with truly knowing his students and building relationships. As a first-year teacher, he tried to keep his head above water but planned to continue to improve his use of student voice to improve instruction.

Teacher 3 was a high school Fine Art elective teacher in his seventh year of teaching and his second year as part of the Student Voice Initiative. He believed student voice to be a “multi-faceted endeavor.” He contended that student voice could be an “immediate thing” or it could be a “premeditated thing.” He recounted a recent classroom experience:

Pretty much after every single second-period class, I ask my students for immediate feedback, just verbal feedback, ‘shoot it to me straight’ if the daily quiz and the content of the daily quiz were reflective of their reading assignment for their homework. Every day my students take a daily quiz and they're held responsible and accountable for the reading assignment they do at home and I get valuable feedback right then and there from my students whether the quiz was appropriate or not. If it's not appropriate, I change it right then and there. It's not the, ‘I'm the teacher, this is my quiz. You will take my quiz’ mentality. It is, ‘This is my quiz. It is also your quiz as a tool for formative assessment’ and if it is not up to par with what I am expecting of you, then it is not fair for you to take this quiz.

Teacher 3 solicited feedback from his students every day to make sure he could be his best for his next class period. He claimed that student voice was going to make him a “more aware and better educator.” Teacher 3 solicited feedback through student voice surveys and casual conversations. He worked collaboratively with students in the design of his course syllabus and regularly updated the syllabus based on student learning needs. He has also shared his individual planning reports from the College Board with a focus group in his class and encouraged them to use the data to help him improve his instruction. Teacher 3 reported:

They gave me some of the most rewarding summaries and suggestions based on that individual planning report...and it has made a world of difference. I have changed my syllabus this year because of what those students said to me and it has made a significant change in the scope and sequence of how I approached [named course] this year.

Teacher 3 believed his students go above and beyond for him because “they know their voice and their work is validated” in his class. In addition to the methods previously mentioned, Teacher 3 used student voice surveys that asked questions such as “How prepared were you for the test? How confident did you feel in this test? Was your voice heard during class discussion?”

He had a pool of questions that he pulled from over and over to gather student feedback. Teacher 3 followed up with the students after the survey and claimed, “when students actually realized that you read their responses and that you tailor class to their responses, then they really start to become honest and more reflective.” He asserted, “Use your students. Use their skills. These kids are amazing.” Teacher 3 believed there was no better way to improve instruction than to listen to his students.

Teacher 4 was a high school teacher who taught both pre-advanced placement core-content class sections and elective college-preparation class sections. She was in her eighth year of teaching and her third year with the Student Voice Initiative. She was a new teacher at the District the year the Student Voice Initiative began and heard about it through casual conversations with other educators. As a new teacher at the District, she was unsure about joining the group of educators piloting the Initiative but decided to reach out to the organizer by letting her know that she was interested in learning more. Teacher 4 joined the second cohort of teachers. Her first student voice learning was through a book study on *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). The most valuable component of the book study for Teacher 4 was collaborating on the questions asked of students to capture their voice. She saw student voice as an easy instructional strategy to implement and not something that was just a theoretical idea. Her cohort of educators was challenged to give a survey and then debrief the survey results with their students. Her first survey was comprised of questions included in *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). Many of those questions had a sliding scale, and Teacher 4 found the scale provided an easy way to look at the data with her students, and it gave her a way to measure her own instructional growth. She committed to giving these surveys to her students every nine weeks. However, Teacher 4 quickly realized that

there were components that were missing and decided that more open-ended questions could give her more information on the whole child than questions on a sliding scale, so she started adding questions like “What is most beneficial about this class? What is least beneficial?” Around the same time, the “I wish my teacher knew…” movement started on Twitter, so Teacher 4 began to include this prompt on her surveys as well. Although she chose to keep the “I wish my teacher knew…” responses private, she projected the remaining anonymous data for her students to see and engaged her students in a discussion on the results of the survey. Teacher 4 realized:

There were huge gaps that were missing [in the instruction] and through students’ lenses, they were noticing those gaps. I remember one of the first changes kids asked me to make was how we were doing stations. I would set up a one-minute timer and I would have the timer go off every minute so they could rotate and they said it gave them anxiety and made them feel rushed. I realized that it was not always a big instructional change that had to happen. Sometimes it was small details that gave the kids what they needed to feel safe in the classroom.

Since that time, student voice in Teacher 4’s classroom has morphed from the surveys and discussion to “just the general air of the class.” Teacher 4 believed student voice would always be a part of her instructional practice. She commented:

Once you have had [student voice] and you have seen the impact and you have understood the impact it has on the relationships and the trust that is built between the teacher and the students and between the students and students, I don't know how not to do [student voice] because it is so easy and honestly it makes me a better teacher. It makes my lessons ten times more engaging. It allows students to have a stake in what they are actually doing. I just do not think it will ever make sense to not include the students in the work that they are doing.

Teacher 4 continued to integrate student voice into all of her class periods and was pushing herself to move further along the spectrum to higher levels of student participation.

The methods of teacher participation. The teachers in the District used various methods of student voice participation. In the District’s 2017-2018 Middle of the Year Student Voice

Survey (the Survey), respondents were asked, “Of the following three levels of student voice participation, which are a part of your regular student voice practice?” with three methods based on the Pyramid of Voice (Mitra & Gross, 2009). The District’s teachers received 318 responses from secondary classroom teachers (see Table 2).

Table 2

2017-2018 Middle of the Year Student Voice Survey Methods of Voice

| Years experience with student voice initiative | Students being heard | Students collaborating with adults | Students building capacity for leadership |
|--|----------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| 0 | 88% | 25% | 25% |
| 1-2 | 83% | 34% | 24% |
| 3 or more | 86% | 48% | 39% |

Secondary teachers, regardless of years of experience in education or with the Student Voice Initiative, most regularly utilized Students Being Heard. On the Survey, examples of Students Being Heard included surveys, circle-up conversations, video responses, and other methods for student expression. As many teachers gained experience with using student voice, they also increased their use of students as collaborators to improve the classroom learning.

In the focus group and individual interviews, educators referenced using student feedback. This feedback could come from many sources, ranging from casual conversations in the classroom to more structured surveys. Before analyzing the interview data, two members of the District’s student voice leadership team determined priori codes for methods of student voice participation. I, along with a member of the District’s student voice leadership team, coded all interview data using the priori codes to summarize the methods of participation (see Table 3).

Table 3

Student Voice Participation Method Priori Codes

| Participation method | Percent of participants who used method |
|------------------------------|---|
| Collaboration | 32% |
| Conversation | 48% |
| (continued) | |
| Participation method | Percent of participants who used method |
| Feedback | 68% |
| Follow-through from feedback | 65% |
| Survey | 61% |

The most popular structured method of capturing student voice was the survey. Of all interview participants, 61% mentioned the use of a survey. However, when considering only the responses of the individual interviews of the five classroom teachers, 100% mentioned using surveys as a method of participation. Each of the teachers interviewed started their implementation of student voice using a survey. One teacher commented that a survey was the “gateway drug” of student voice.

Participants referenced using surveys differently. Some teachers gave students a survey after each unit while others gave one per grading period or one per semester. All teachers who participated in individual interviews shared that they used Google Forms or other web-based methods to survey their students. With a web-based survey, teachers could analyze their data more quickly to share with their students. For this reason, some teachers preferred to include questions with a scale so they could have a visualization of progress over time. Another teacher commented that she preferred to use a paper survey and include the same question at the end of all surveys so she could file the responses in each student’s folder and look for student growth

over the course of the school year. Teachers asked survey questions to gather information, such as the type of environment students liked to learn in, the instructional strategies students believed best supported their learning needs, the rules students felt needed to be in place to have a supportive learning environment, and changes students saw that could make the classroom instruction more effective. No matter the form of the survey used by the teachers, each teacher who participated in individual interviews still used surveys at times during the school year.

Although surveys were a popular method of student voice participation, educators also found them to be challenging. Admin 1 feared that students felt survey “overkill” and therefore, some students did not take them seriously anymore. C&I 2 noted, “the data [she] was getting by the end of the year were a bit skewed because [the students] were just trying to get through the survey as fast as they could.” C&I D was afraid that if the survey did not say what the teacher wanted to hear, then the teacher may not want to hear the voice of the student again. Comments left on a survey lacked the interpersonal connection that face-to-face conversations provided.

C&I 1 believed the survey was the simplest method of student voice to execute but also one of the most challenging because

some teachers just give the surveys and they don't talk afterward or some people just give the surveys and they never do anything else and so that has kind of been the double-edged sword of a [survey]. It's not hard to implement, it's just the variation that is needed and the nuances of it.

However, multiple teachers noted the benefit of having instructional coaches who could support teachers in writing survey questions and reflecting on the data to effect change in the classroom instruction.

As the educators interviewed became more comfortable over time with the use of student voice, student voice became part of the classroom culture. Teacher interview participants noted

that student voice was used informally in the form of “casual conversations” that happened “any time and any way” and even resembled “questioning non-stop” as a way to get immediate feedback and to gain clarity for what students needed to be successful.

Some of the interview participants transitioned to collaborating with students in the lesson design. C&I 1 referenced her time as a classroom teacher and the use of student lesson design teams. She described student lesson design teams as a “very in-depth, exciting process because we were able to bring kids in and give them the state standards and allow them, in small groups, to create lessons using instructional strategies they enjoyed.” The students were challenged to determine how they were going to get the new information, process the learning, and show mastery of the learning. The lessons they designed were both relevant and engaging for their classmates and C&I 1 noted increased student ownership of the learning. Of all teachers interviewed, 44% identified the use of collaborative design as a method of student voice participation.

Although follow-through—taking subsequent action on student feedback to improve instruction—was not a method used to capture student voice, the District’s student voice leadership team identified it as an important component of student voice. Without follow-through, students may feel, as C&I 2 explained, as if they were “yelling out into nothingness.” The interview data confirmed this theory as 65% of those interviewed referenced the importance of following through on the feedback received from students. When given the opportunity to share her student voice experience with another teacher, Teacher 2 emphasized:

I would tell them that the whole key is that you have to follow-through, you have to follow-through. You cannot solicit the feedback and then just sit on it, or give them the choice, but then limit it later. I think that if [teachers] take anything from it, it has to be that they have to listen and they have to respect that the kid is opening up and sharing.

Since follow-through was noted as a critical component of student voice, it is included as a student voice participation method. Additional information on follow-through is included later in this chapter.

The story of participation of curriculum and instruction. C&I 1 had been an educator for 7 years and was in her third year of the Student Voice Initiative. When she was in her first year with the District in the role of classroom teacher, her Director shared her vision of having student voice implemented into the classroom. C&I 1 had no prior knowledge of the term student voice prior to coming to the District in the fall of 2016. When she realized it was a District initiative, she quickly decided to learn more. She accepted the opportunity to join the second cohort of teachers involved in a book study on *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). C&I 1 found the book study with the cohort to be “invaluable.” Participants read a portion of the book and then came together to discuss and share the ways they were implementing student voice in their classrooms. C&I 1 shared:

What I quickly learned was that the idea of student voice and the concept of student voice was right in line with my beliefs as an educator. It was something that I recognized within my practice already in some ways. But in other ways, there was a specificness to student voice that I had not ever implemented in my classroom instruction.

Participants in this cohort were challenged to ask students for feedback and then act upon that feedback. C&I 1 appreciated the support she found in a shared practice with her cohort.

Following that experience, C&I 1 began to work with her campus-based instructional coach to use students to help design lessons. She brought students in and shared the state standards and allowed them to create lessons using instructional strategies they enjoyed. Her students designed lessons that were engaging to all students in her classroom.

C&I 1 transitioned from a classroom teacher to a centrally-deployed instructional coach. She continued to lead book studies, support teachers in the student lesson design team process, and design student voice professional development modules for campus leaders to use on their campuses. She believed the spectrum of student voice to be an effective visual representation of the various levels of student voice participation to encourage the use of student voice in the classrooms throughout the District. When asked about the impact student voice had on her as an educator, C&I 1 endorsed:

It has given me a whole new lens with which I view education. It has changed the way I interact with students, how I work with teachers, valuing feedback from others, and collaborating to make things stronger. It has changed how I do everything.

At the time of the interview, C&I 1 was designing a resource for teachers who were looking for additional ways to use student voice and she continued to support teachers as they leveraged students as a resource to improve instruction.

C&I 2 was in her eleventh year of education and her third year of the Student Voice Initiative in the District. She joined the Initiative with the second cohort of teachers. C&I 2 started soliciting student voice through a survey each grading period. She asked some of the same questions each time in order “to see how that data was lined up horizontally to see what areas [she] grew in as [she] made adjustments throughout the school year.” She asked questions such as “Is this course providing the right amount of challenge for you?” and “Do you think the teacher takes time to get to know you?” C&I 2 observed that as her students started seeing her make changes based on their feedback it began to build a relationship of trust between her and her students.

In the instructional coaching and curriculum developer role that C&I 2 held at the time of the interview, she believed it was essential to identify the primary stakeholders and listen to their

voice the same way teachers were encouraged to listen to their students. She acknowledged that her biggest takeaway from the Student Voice Initiative was learning how to “listen to those various voices and perspectives of all involved and all of those who are impacted by our decisions on a regular basis.”

The use of student voice to improve instruction impacted C&I 2. She shared:

It has shown me that my students have a lot more to offer than I gave them credit for initially. They have amazing ideas, they are creative and they are respectful in their input and their feedback and it has completely changed the way I view instruction and view students and I cannot think of going to do it any other way.

At the time of the interview, C&I 2 was leveraging student voice to improve instruction in her work with the Curriculum and Instruction Department by utilizing focus groups of students to help revise the course curriculum.

The methods of curriculum and instruction participation. The Curriculum and Instruction Department strove to support teaching and learning goals across all subjects, grades, and schools in the District. The department’s areas of focus were developing curriculum resources, providing instructional support, and designing professional learning opportunities for staff. A core part of the District’s Curriculum and Instruction Department is a team of instructional coaches. The District’s instructional coaching model included campus-based instructional coaches as well as centrally-deployed instructional coaches for all core-content subjects, advanced academics, world languages, and other instruction.

One of the main methods of student voice participation for the instructional coaches was regular support of the implementation of the Student Voice Initiative throughout the District.

Teacher 5 validated the importance of the instructional coaches:

Our [campus-based instructional coach] has always been available to help if we needed advice on student voice. [Student voice] has been a choice in our professional

development. I have been able to have a say in my professional development, which is [Curriculum and Instruction] using student voice. They have modeled that for sure. Just having all these resources available where they are not just saying ‘do this, but we are going to leave you out to dry’, but instead, ‘okay, do it, but here are all the things we can do to help you.

As a first-year teacher, the instructional coaches made him feel supported in trying a practice that was new to him. Without prompting, 60% of teachers interviewed mentioned the importance of the instructional coaching model in providing support for the successful implementation of student voice to improve instruction. This support included individual coaching sessions with teachers and the development and leading of professional development around the District.

The story of participation of administration. Admin 2 was a high school principal in his twelfth year of education and his third year of the Student Voice Initiative. He believed that student voice campus-wide was imperative to his campus’ success at the high school level. He viewed high school students as adults and considered them developmentally ready to advocate for what they needed in their high school experience. Admin 2 argued that student voice was “one of the most powerful things” he had done. As the campus leader, Admin 2 facilitated student voice in multiple ways. One method he used was challenging all of his administrative team to conduct “two-by-two” conversations. This involved each administrator having two conversations with any stakeholder in the school and asking two questions: “What are two things we are doing well in the classroom?” and “What are two things you wished we did differently in the classroom?” At the weekly administrative team meeting, everyone shared their two-by-two conversations and the data were recorded on a spreadsheet so the team, along with learning leaders, could analyze and refine their practice for the next year. As the campus principal, he planned to meet individually with every senior and ask “What has been good?”; “What has been bad?”; “What has been ugly?”; and “How do we improve” the high school experience? Admin 2

believed this use of student voice allowed students to believe, “the principal knows my name and we have a relationship” and, in turn, created a stronger campus culture.

Admin 2 encouraged shared leadership opportunities with his students. Each school year, he selected a student advisory committee that included a broad representation of the campus. The goal of this committee was to identify issues for the campus and to create solutions. The committee was divided into three sub-groups: student life, academics, and school spirit. Each group had a short-term and long-term goal they were tasked to achieve and took ownership in achieving their goals. Admin 2 contended that student voice had

promoted a culture of advocacy. I think it has promoted a culture of kids feeling comfortable to talk to administrators and to teachers about what they need—what is going on. Those are the things that I think we want in schools.

Admin 2 continued to build a school culture to develop advocacy in the students and was excited to see how student voice continued to impact the students in the District.

Central Admin 1 had led the District’s Student Voice Initiative. After discussing some student concerns with a teacher, Central Admin 1 left the meeting frustrated that “there had not been a less formal mechanism in place previously to help students interact with [the teacher] about some of these concerns.” At the same time, Central Admin 1 was part of the Learning Forward Academy, a learning experience where educators worked collaboratively to identify and solve learning problems in their schools (Learning Forward, 2017). She realized that the lack of opportunities to hear student feedback and to formally involve students in instructional decisions was a significant problem of practice. Central Admin 1 discovered the book *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). Through reading the book, she determined that the Student Voice Initiative at the earliest stages would mean asking students what they thought about their learning, what was working for them and what wasn’t working for them.

Central Admin 1 convened the District's first student voice cohort comprised of 11 teachers who taught a range of students from Kindergarten to Grade 11. She led the group in a collaborative conversation around surveys and how they would look at different grade levels. The teachers agreed to give the surveys and then return to debrief with the cohort. Central Admin 1 noted the following:

The most resounding piece of feedback in that initial cohort was the difference in the level of trust in the classroom, especially with secondary kids, when they started asking and listening to what kids said. The teachers said that, at first, the kids were really hesitant about it because nobody had ever asked them before and so they were nervous and kind of distrustful about how that information would be handled, but when they realized their teachers were actually listening and not being punitive with the feedback that was given, they said the culture did a complete 180 degree turn and it was just palpable the difference they saw in their classrooms.

With such successful results, Central Admin 1 considered how to expand the Student Voice Initiative. The next year, she led another cohort of approximately 75 educators representing most campuses in the District. The second cohort also completed a book study and worked to brainstorm lists of questions and what student voice could look like beyond a survey. Central Admin 1 considered student surveys the "gateway drug" to student voice, but at a more advanced stage, student voice was "a mindset about partnering with students about what school looks like, what the classroom looks like, and what instructional design looks like."

Central Admin 1 watched the Initiative grow beyond the survey, as educators in the District began to ask:

What would happen if a student designed this lesson with me? What would happen if students formed committees and lobbied for certain things they wanted in the school? What would happen if the principal had a focus group just to have students to provide input on this, that, or the other?

The Initiative grew exponentially under the leadership of Central Admin 1 and was so much more than the District's leadership had ever envisioned. She reported that with the

Superintendent's and school board's support, student voice just became the way the District's leadership "did business." Through this Initiative, Central Admin 1 learned "how valuable and astute students' perspectives are", and when educators begin to partner with students in their learning, it can positively impact classroom efficacy. Central Admin 1 affirmed that this "seemingly obvious and no-cost method for improving teacher and student relationships and classroom effectiveness" had been a previously underutilized tool that had the potential to drive positive change for learning.

When the Superintendent first heard mention of student voice while visiting another district, he thought "I have to know more about that!" He knew it was difficult to transform a secondary school, so hearing how it had positively impacted another school motivated him to see how student voice could be a leverage for change in the District. The Superintendent believed that to

truly personalize education, which [was] really what our strategic plan [was] about, we had to actually think about the student and how what we were trying to teach was impacting the student. The only way to find that out was to ask them.

From his leadership experience, he knew that the best way to produce a successful transformational change was to slowly introduce the innovative practice to the District through small rollouts and then build upon that. The District's leadership began the Student Voice Initiative by asking for teacher volunteers. The Superintendent acknowledged that "typically the first people that volunteer are the folks that are already working on that particular topic...and it gives a chance for some early wins." The District's leaders decided to build upon the success of the first cohort and the Superintendent asked the school board to set student voice as one of his official yearly goals. At the time of the interview, the goal was that every teacher in the District

would use some form of student voice by the end of the 2018-2019 school year. He believed the following:

When the best teachers in the school district are supportive of a particular transformational item, then other people will want to be doing what the best people are doing and that is just kind of where we have been at. Some of the best teachers in the district have said, ‘Man, this is awesome and it is really helping me. It is scary, but it's really helping me’.

He believed the District’s leadership was successful in their implementation because they were

real flexible and not lockstep in how this happens. We have been pretty insistent on the ‘what’ that happens, but not necessarily the ‘how.’ People have been able to pick and choose ways that fit their personality, their teaching style, their students, their teaching field, their subject, so that they have some flexibility about how to gather that feedback.

The Superintendent characterized his leadership of the Student Voice Initiative as giving “a slow, steady gentle nudge toward student voice that has really picked up steam.” He continued to be open to new ways of capturing student voice that teachers tried to implement. He believed student voice had improved student engagement and instruction in the District.

The methods of campus administrator participation. Administrators played an important role in the success of the Student Voice Initiative by creating a supportive culture that was safe for teachers to take risks and that supported student voice. Admin 2 maintained, “I think my job in getting student voice from the global campus perspective is to remove those barriers that [teachers] may see, to create that culture for students advocating for themselves in the classrooms.”

Central Admin 1 believed teachers who knew they would be supported by their administrators were more likely to implement the suggestions of their students. Teacher 1 agreed and emphasized that it was the “mindset of everyone from the top down...it is the support that they have the same foundational belief of [student voice]” that served as the greatest support

to her in implementing student voice. Teacher 3 identified his campus administrators as “patient and understanding,” but also respected them for continuing to uphold standard for student voice in the District. The support of the District’s administrators played such an important role that 100% of the teachers who participated in the individual interviews noted the support of the District’s administrators and the role their support played in the Student Voice Initiative.

This supportive culture was identified district-wide. Central Admin 1 reported, “Our superintendent's support has latched on to [student voice]. Our board's support has latched onto [student voice] and now it has become the way we do business.” Admin 2 stated that the culture of the District was “a belief system that as a collective whole we are going to do better than I would as an individual.” The District’s administrators promoted the success of the Initiative by creating a supportive district and campus culture.

The most common method of student voice participation among the District’s secondary administrators was focus groups. Of all administrators interviewed, 82% specifically mentioned the use of a focus group, such as a principal panel or a student panel, as a method for the stakeholders to hear the voice of the students. Admin E and Admin K had lunch with a panel of students each month, a more informal use of a focus group. Admin K shared the specifics of her principal lunch panel:

Once a month, a student is chosen from each lunch period and they can bring up to four friends. There have been some [lunch panels] that have been very unique and interesting, but most tend to be more where I just ask general questions like, ‘What do you love about [our school]?', "What could we improve upon?", or “What is your favorite class period?’ It is really fun to hear what their thoughts are or if they think things are going well. They offer a lot of great information, and of course, it builds relationships afterwards. If I am standing in the hallway, those kids always come up to me, high five, or say ‘hi, [Admin K]’.

Admin D used her focus group as a visioning committee for the campus where she challenged students to “imagine if...” She believed that the students’ voices helped move campus initiatives forward because the teachers knew they could be successful with change if they had student support. Admin E used student focus groups as a method to transform classroom practices. By using student panels, he noted:

We are getting the feedback from the kids in front of a whole group. I think that is a powerful piece where some people have some ‘Aha’ moments and are able to translate that into a change at a campus level but also into [their] own classrooms.

Focus groups were used in multiple ways by administrators, each providing them information to affect change for their campus and an opportunity to model student voice for their staff.

System-wide components of student voice. Since many elements of student voice participation were used at all levels of the District, some components of the data were best addressed from a system-wide viewpoint. In this section, I address student voice constraints and student voice support provided by the District.

Student voice constraints. One of the greatest difficulties that teachers faced with student voice was overcoming their fears. Teacher 2, C&I E, C&I 2, and Admin 2 acknowledged that some teachers had a fear of what their students might say. However, C&I 2 commented, “I was pleasantly surprised to see I only had maybe one or two that just took the opportunity to complain, but overall, the feedback I received was very, very helpful.” Central Admin 1 also believed fear to be one of the greatest classroom constraints for student voice. She noted, “student voice is built on the notion that students' perspectives could change things. If you have a teacher that is fearful of relinquishing that control ... that fear could keep [student voice implementation] from happening.” Embracing student voice required giving up a level of

control and a high degree of vulnerability which created a fear that some participants personally felt or identified in their colleagues.

Educators also viewed time as a constraint. Teacher 1, Teacher 3, Teacher B, and Admin J observed a connection between student voice and differentiation of instruction. Teacher B contended, “We can inform our instructional methods for the different levels of our student achievements off of the feedback that we are getting from [students]” and that differentiation and student voice “dovetail really nicely together.” However, Teacher 1 acknowledged that it took time to meet the needs of every student and every class. The idea of acting upon student voice to this degree seemed daunting, but Teacher 1 believed it to be “worth every minute” of time spent.

Teacher 4 reported that receiving student feedback and reflecting upon it was often rushed. Admin 2 observed this on his campus, as well. He observed that some teachers were so stressed trying to teach all of the components of the curriculum that “student voice [became] a back-burner thought of ‘I will get to that when I can.’” Teacher 3 agreed that time was an issue and that it kept him from frequently soliciting feedback. However, he emphasized, “when I do ask for feedback, I really do cherish that time that I built into the class.”

Participants identified one of the most difficult methods of student voice implementation was knowing how to follow-through on student feedback. Of those interviewed, 65% referenced the importance of follow-through on student feedback. Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 addressed the benefit of the survey data and used it as a visual to address students’ feedback. However, the data did not stand alone; the teacher used it as a talking point for a conversation with students to gain clarity on their feedback to improve the instruction. C&I 2 observed that “surveys transformed into conversations that were more casual and open-ended and that gave me even

more information to work with and I was able to clarify a lot of misconceptions through [conversations].”

Although the educators stressed the importance of follow-through and acting on student feedback, it did not mean that they made every change that was suggested. However, they did believe in the importance of having a conversation about the feedback. Teacher 1 reported that it gave her an opportunity to share the research behind teaching practices with her students. C&I 1 and C&I 2 found the opportunity to share information about state standards with their students and to increase their understanding of lesson design. It was noted, through field observations, that students appreciated a deeper understanding of why they were learning specific content in their classrooms. Teacher 2 approached student feedback that she could not fully act upon by saying, “This is what I heard. This is what I have the ability to change and to fix or alter. So, let's try this and if it doesn't work, we will reevaluate at the end of the year.” Students felt heard and compromises were reached, but the teacher honored the instructional constraints that were in place.

Educators also noted that it was difficult to not take some feedback personally. C&I E suggested educators “take the really highs and the really lows, take them out and look for the big picture of what kids are trying to tell you.” Teacher 4 believed negative feedback provided an opportunity to model a growth mindset. She argued that accepting negative feedback was “a skill that should be modeled more, being vulnerable and being able to accept criticism and use it as a way to be better.” She also believed that including students in the solution helped build leadership and advocacy in students. She stated:

I do not have to create the solution by myself. ‘All right, so you don't like it, tell me how to fix it. You tell me.’ Nine times out of ten, the kids had far more ideas on how to fix something than I did. So, that is how I dealt with [negative feedback]. I just addressed it.

Follow-through was an essential component of student voice and one that teachers noted as a challenging component of student voice implementation.

Student voice supports. Individual interview participants identified four main areas of professional support that had helped them successfully implement the Student Voice Initiative. Each of these methods also aligned to priori codes pre-selected by members of the student voice leadership team prior to coding data. The teachers who participated in the individual interviews and focus group interviews believed the most beneficial professional learning components were:

- book studies (58%);
- collaborating teacher to teacher (67%);
- instructional coach support (63%);
- and modeling of student voice participation methods (55%).

The District's leaders began the Student Voice Initiative by inviting a small cohort of teachers to participate in a book study on *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). For the following 3 years, the District's leadership continued to offer this book study, both face-to-face and online through Google Classroom, for teachers who were interested in participating and deepening their knowledge of student voice. C&I 1 found the book study "invaluable because my knowledge base was nonexistent before that book study." She also acknowledged that the collaboration between teachers as part of the book study was valuable to her student voice implementation. She shared:

The way the cohort was structured, we read certain chapters and then we came together and discussed not only what we learned from the book, but then what were the small ways that we were beginning to implement student voice in our classroom.

C&I 2 also found the book study beneficial. She noted, “I think [the book study] is a piece of the process that is so essential for teachers to have a good foundation and understanding of the ‘why’ behind [student voice].” Teacher 4 also found the book study valuable and reported that the first survey questions she used with her students came from the book and her time collaborating with the other teachers in her book study cohort.

Campus administrators also participated in a book study. Administrators were given the option between two books, *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change* (Quaglia & Corso, 2014) and *A School of Our Own: The Story of the First Student-Run High School and a New Vision for American Education* (Levin & Engel, 2016), and divided into cohorts based on their book selection. Admin 2 reported that the book study “sparked the work” that he was doing with student voice on his campus. Teacher 3 mentioned that his campus administrator took the book study back to his campus and had his departmental learning leaders participate in a book study. The departmental learning leaders were charged to take their learning from the study back to their departments to continue the diffusion of the Initiative. Teacher D was also part of a campus-based book study and reported that the book study was exciting and resulted in “people looking at student voice differently than they had before.”

When asked what advice they would give a school-district administration looking to implement a student voice initiative, Teacher 3 enthusiastically replied, “Buy the books for your teachers and do not just give it to them, but have a program in place that is going to make them read it and discuss it.” C&I cautioned administrators to

begin with growing the knowledge base around what student voice is. I think it could be a little haphazard had I not been a part of the book study. I do not think I would have understood the Student Voice Initiative. I think that book study really gave me a knowledge base.

The opportunity to learn more about student voice and to understand the research behind the Initiative was important for teachers, but they equally found value in studying the book in a cohort where they had an opportunity to share in their new common practices.

The District's instructional coaching model was an effective support to teachers implementing student voice. Of the classroom teachers interviewed, 63% noted the role instructional coaches played in the success of the Initiative. Teacher 5, a first-year teacher, acknowledged that the District's leadership had done a great job in preparing him to include student voice in his instructional design, because his campus-based instructional coach was always available to help and included opportunities to learn more about student voice in their campus-based professional development. Teacher 4 liked that teachers could call a campus-based or centrally-deployed instructional coach and simply say, "Can you help me get started with this?" She believed that many teachers were more willing to try student voice in their classrooms because they had multiple supports in place to help them "feel comfortable and confident with dipping a toe in the student voice pond." Teacher B appreciated that instructional coaches had a schedule that allowed him to collaborate with them during his conference period and that their availability and willingness to support teachers made "conversations easier to be frequent and to follow-up with the coach to make those goals more of a reality." C&I 1 shared how she supported teachers individually:

[Instructional coaching support] has allowed teachers to first identify where student voice currently used in their classroom. This has been very encouraging to some teachers to realize, 'Oh, I do take feedback on this and that!' and it is kind of natural for them already. Also, I have seen some teachers that could not identify any current practice of student voice, so then to come in with some support, to share the spectrum of student voice, to kind of talk through that model and share some different ways that we have seen other teachers implement [student voice]. Just giving ideas and examples and helping them—coaching them through what would work in their classrooms.

She believed that these supports gave teachers ideas they could easily implement the next day that would not be overwhelming to them.

The District's leadership also believed that the instructional coaching model was a support to help diffuse the innovative practice of student voice. The Superintendent believed that one of the more important supports the District's leaders provided was instructional coaches to help teachers implement student voice in classrooms throughout the District. Central Admin 1 shared that select instructional coaches led campus-based student voice professional development sessions and that in year 3 of the Initiative, the District's leadership more formally considered professional development. According to Central Admin 1, during the 2017-2018 school year, two instructional coaches designed a training module for the Curriculum and Instruction team. The purpose of the module was to train other instructional coaches and provide a pre-packaged training that could be presented to all campuses across the District. C&I 1 reported that "as instructional coaches learned more about student voice, each instructional coach was bringing that lens into their coaching conversations as well." She believed the District's leaders kept the Student Voice Initiative moving forward because it had not been the support of one person, but of an entire team. Instructional coaches supported teachers with the Initiative by providing professional development and individualized support to make it safer for teachers to include the voices of students in their instructional design.

The District's leadership provided professional development that supported teacher implementation. The Superintendent believed that he could not "expect teachers to do what they do not know. Teachers are working hard every day. I do not believe that we can ask teachers to work harder, but I think this is the way that we can work smarter." The Superintendent believed that the best approach to diffusing the Student Voice Initiative was to provide appropriate

professional development before the school year and then embedded throughout the year in the form of formal and one-on-one learning opportunities to support teachers in their transformation.

Another support of student voice participation was the practice of modeling by administrators. Of the educators participating in individual or focus group interviews, 55% referenced the importance of leadership modeling the use of student voice. C&I D contended that the student voice participation method that had the greatest impact was seeing the campus administration model the use of student voice. Teacher 4 referenced how her campus-based instructional coach and administrators modeled the use of student voice and that “at the district level, it is modeled so efficiently that it was natural for the campuses and teachers to do the same with their students.”

Campus administrators also recognized the importance of modeling for their staff. Of all administrators who participated in individual or focus group interviews, 86% referenced campus and district leaders modeling student voice. Admin G believed, “the biggest way you can get the ball rolling [was] by doing the things that you want your staff to do with the kids.” Admin 2 acknowledged, “a piece of culture is modeling, and if I want teachers to ask for student voice in the classroom, I better model that as a building principal.” Central Admin 1 confirmed, “when we model it, it not only sends the message ‘this is what we do’, but that we are also willing to be vulnerable.” When leadership modeled student voice, not only did they provide learning opportunities on student voice participation methods, they also demonstrated vulnerability and the supportive culture of the campus.

The main student voice participation methods for teachers were classified as Students Being Heard. These methods included feedback from conversations and more structured methods, such as surveys. After gaining experience with student voice, many teachers

transitioned to collaborating with students in the design of instruction. Educators asked for and listened to student voice, but participants also noted the importance of acting on the student voice to improve instruction. The main methods of participation for the Curriculum and Instruction Department were designing and leading student voice professional development and supporting teachers in the implementation of the Initiative throughout the District. Curriculum and Instruction also empowered students by including them in curriculum design at the district level. Administrators played an important role in the success of the Student Voice Initiative by creating a supportive culture that was safe for teachers to take risks and that supported student voice.

Research question 3: How is the use of student voice affecting the classroom, campus, and the district instruction? The analysis of the data identified four themes of student voice outcomes. This section provides details on the student voice outcomes and how the participants measured the effectiveness of the Student Voice Initiative.

Student voice outcomes. Interview questions were written to differentiate between the impact student voice had on the instruction, the student, and the educator. However, it was difficult for respondents to differentiate between each of these as they identified a strong interconnection between each of these components. For instance, when asked about the impact student voice had on instruction, respondents reported “improved morale,” “happier students,” and “improved relationships.” Therefore, for the purpose of data analysis, the responses to the research questions were integrated together:

- What impact has allowing student voice had on your instruction and the learning in your classroom?
- What impact has allowing student voice had on your students?
- What impact has allowing student voice had on you, the educator?

Positive outcomes. Of all individual interview and focus group interview participants, 89% reported improved classroom and campus culture. Teacher 3 identified that student voice had “created a classroom demeanor of open communication, collaboration, trust, and respect because students [knew] they [were] heard.” C&I E observed that both students and teachers appeared happier in classrooms where student voice was utilized. Teachers reported that the culture of the classroom changed as students began to feel genuinely heard, respected, and valued as stakeholders in the learning.

The improved culture stemming from student voice had a direct impact on other components of learning as well. Teacher 2 shared that the greatest impact of student voice was

getting to know my kids better and to build the relationship so that it is a classroom of trust, and that I am allowed to build their education to benefit the kids and what they need academically and socially, because the feedback that I get is not just academic feedback. A lot of it is social feedback and emotional feedback. And I think the biggest impact is that social and emotional piece that I did not realize was going to come through with [student voice].

Teacher B shared the following:

until students know that you care for them, they are not going to care what you know. I think however we are accomplishing student voice, we are letting students know on a regular basis, ‘I care about what you think and I care about how you want to learn.’ I think that builds a relationship for us to have more of an impact in their learning.

The relationship and culture of trust in the classroom was a supportive structure for an improved learning environment.

Through knowing their students better, teachers were able to improve instruction.

Teacher 3 reported that the relationships built through student voice allowed him to hold his students to a higher standard that they strove to reach. Teacher 1 and Teacher B believed that the relationships that were built through student voice helped them differentiate their instruction and inform their instructional practices, thus improving instruction. Teacher 4 shared the following:

student voice has impacted me personally because it has allowed me to see the design and the instruction of my classroom in a lens that I had never considered. It allowed me to get to know my students better and to hold a mirror up and really and truly reflect on “Is what I am doing most effective and if it is not, why am I doing it?” And if it is, how can I make sure that it remains effective?

Understanding the needs of the students allowed teachers to improve their instruction.

When teachers designed lessons tailored to the needs and desires of their students based on student voice feedback, they noted increased student engagement. Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 observed an increased level of student engagement when students realized they had been listened to and that their teachers respected their thoughts and ideas. Teacher 3 acknowledged that

activating student voice and letting the students find their voice in my class really engaged them on sort of a personal level in making meaning in the class that goes beyond the content. We are dealing now with a sort of interpersonal connection between me and the students and the students and each other.

According to the data, 47% of participants reported improved instruction. However, 26% of those that reported an improvement in instruction contributed to the improvement to an increase in student engagement.

The increased engagement was not only noted for students but for teachers as well. Data results show that 53% of the participants reported an increase in their educator levels of engagement. Teacher 1 declared, “It has totally impacted me. It makes me just want to keep learning and I do keep learning from [my students].” Teacher 3 agreed, “They fire me up. It is the relationships I have in every class that push me and motivate me to keep my [instruction] fresh and relevant for my students so they best succeed.” Student voice encouraged and reignited a passion in some educators.

The improved culture and engagement were components of an overall increased collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy is the collective belief of the school in

their ability to educate students and make a difference (Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018). C&I 1 acknowledged that student voice

has given me a whole new lens with which I view education. It has changed the way I interact with students, how I work with teachers, valuing feedback from others and collaborating to make things stronger. It's changed how I do everything.

She was not alone in this belief. C&I 2 shared,

It has shown me that my students have a lot more to offer than I gave them credit for initially. They have amazing ideas, they are creative and they are respectful in their input and their feedback. It has completely changed the way I view instruction and view students and I cannot think of going back to do it any other way.

C&I E believed that teachers were happier and believed in the overall potential for their individual success, because they started to realize that their students could help them reach that success. C&I F believed that teacher efficacy was the way to measure the success of the Student Voice Initiative. She stated,

You can measure [student voice] in terms of teacher efficacy, or the sense of 'I can do this'. So, instead of thinking 'I have this curriculum and I have to drag everybody along with me.' It is 'We are a team. We are working together.' You are not on your own. You are in collaboration with your students and therefore, there is an increase in teachers' feeling that they can be successful with these classrooms endeavors.

Central Admin 1 shared this same belief:

The most powerful lesson that I have learned through this process is how valuable and astute students' perspectives are on the work they do in the classrooms. The power of teachers inviting them to be partners in designing either instructional contexts or even curricular sequences can make a major difference in classroom efficacy. It has been really cool to see, after many years in the field, that this seemingly obvious and no cost method for improving teacher and student relationships and classroom effectiveness was right beneath our nose the whole time. And now we are finally capturing it.

When teachers began to view students as having valuable input on the learning, they became more engaged in the classroom instruction and believed that, together, they could create a change for the better.

Of the participants interviewed, 47% also reported an increase in student agency: the level of control, autonomy, and power to act or make choices in their learning. The Superintendent acknowledged that “students know themselves best. They know how they like to learn, what they need to work on, and the topics they are interested in.” Multiple teachers stated that student voice gave students more ownership in the classroom and their learning. C&I 2 believed student voice was helping students to

raise awareness of their own learning styles. By asking them these questions, we are forcing them to be a bit reflective and to think about what is truly working and not working for them. So, they are having to pause and think about their learning style.

For many students, student voice has provided them their first opportunity to reflect on their learning preferences.

C&I C and Teacher 2 observed that this sense of ownership empowered students as they became active participants in the design of their learning. Admin 2 thought student voice “promoted a culture of advocacy; a culture of kids feeling comfortable to talk to administrators and to teachers about what they need.” C&I 2 believed

a big benefit for students is they are going to have a better understanding of how they learn best and know how to better advocate for themselves and their learning in the future. Hopefully, there is also the benefit of feeling very safe and secure in classrooms where their voice is valued and the relationships built with their teachers.

The students’ sense of ownership of the learning, the empowerment to know they could make a difference in the learning, and the opportunity to advocate for their learning needs contributed to an overall increase in student agency.

Although only 47% of participants specifically mentioned improvement of instruction as an outcome, teachers sensed a change in the classroom and campus culture, deepened relationships, and increased levels of trust. Educators identified an increase in their personal

levels of engagement and student levels of engagement. Overall, both aspects contributed to increased levels of collective teacher efficacy and student agency.

Student voice effectiveness. Measuring the effectiveness of the Student Voice Initiative in the District was difficult. As mentioned previously, participants noted the change in the culture, increased student agency, increased teacher efficacy, and more. However, these outcomes were challenging to quantify. Central Admin 1 believed

you measure it through some things that appear to be intangible, but collectively they are more tangible: the culture of the building, the degree to which students feel pride and ownership in their school and in their classroom, the types of relationships you see between teachers and students—respectful and trusting. I am seeing students more invested in their classrooms. It is hard to measure, but it also does not cost anything.

Student voice had a major impact on students, teachers, and administrators in the District and the District's student voice leadership continued to capture anecdotal data on the effectiveness of the Student Voice Initiative.

Negative outcomes. Participants were asked, "What impact has allowing voice had on your students?" If participants did not identify any negative outcomes, a follow-up question was asked, "What negative student outcomes came from using student voice in the classroom?" Of the classroom teachers who responded to the question, 80% stated that they saw no negative impact to the student. Teacher 4 recounted seeing a negative impact when her students reported that another teacher on the campus gave a survey and then used the feedback punitively against her students. Teacher 4 witnessed that teacher's actions having a negative effect on the trust, relationship, and culture of the classroom. However, she believed when teachers were open to feedback and followed through on the feedback, it would improve the classroom culture "tenfold."

Two teachers and one member of the instructional coach focus group identified possible negative outcomes for students who were uncomfortable speaking out. Teacher C feared that when English language learners were asked to have a voice, they may not feel comfortable with some student voice participation methods. C&I B shared this same fear. She recognized that there were students who

had not been taught or allowed the opportunity to have a voice and it is terrifying for them. They do not know how to have a voice because it is scary to them. What if they are wrong? What if they don't really know their needs and state something and it is not right? There are kids that culturally, [their voice is not allowed] in their family situation. So now we are asking a child, 'what do you think?' and they are coming from a culture that says, 'Your teacher knows all of this. You are not supposed to talk. You are not supposed to speak out. You need to do what your teacher says.' We have to help them have experiences where they begin to trust that they can speak out and to trust that inner voice. I do not think we can assume that every student is capable of launching into what we are wanting them to do.

However, it was not only English language learners who might feel uncomfortable voicing their opinions in the classroom. Teacher B suggested, "if I have a student that deals with anxiety or stress and that is a major issue for them, they are probably going to be a lot less likely to be very vocal and make their voice very loud."

Some Curriculum and Instruction participants identified possible negative impacts to students. C&I 2 voiced concern over teachers not implementing student voice well. She cautioned, "if you don't do something with the feedback and the input, it could have negative or hurtful side effects and consequences for the student." C&I 2's second concern was the possibility of teachers responding poorly to student feedback and the effects that could have on the student and teacher relationship. She recognized that student voice was a process that students had to learn in how to give appropriate feedback, and teachers should consider student voice as a "teachable moment." C&I F agreed with the importance of teachers understanding

how to receive feedback and appropriately acting on it. She believed that if students provided feedback and then nothing happened, it fostered a “sense of helplessness” and students could feel “less empowered.” C&I E considered a possible future negative outcome from empowering students to have a voice knowing that in their future studies and employment, not everyone would welcome feedback and thoughts on how to improve. She believed that if the District’s leaders continued to empower students to have a voice, then they also needed to help students navigate when to have a voice and determine if their voice would be valued.

Interview participants saw value in student voice. However, to avoid possible negative impacts to students, educators should consider the needs of all students and provide appropriate methods for students to have a voice. Secondly, educators should teach students how to give feedback and to determine the appropriate times for feedback. In addition, educators needed to know how to respond to the feedback they received to avoid negative outcomes for the student. Participants identified many positive outcomes of student voice that outweighed the negative. The major positive outcomes of student voice were improved classroom and campus culture by building stronger relationships, increased student engagement and agency, and increased teacher efficacy. Each of these outcomes contributed to a participant identified improvement in instruction.

Research question 4: What are the possible next steps to improve the current model? Participants were asked “What campus and district level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction?” and “What is one thing you wished your campus and district level administrators better understood about implementing student voice?” These questions, along other interview questions were pertinent

information was shared, were coded using the priori codes for Issues of Student Voice and for Next Steps of Student Voice (see Appendix J).

It was difficult for many participants to identify any campus or District-level constraints that hindered student voice success. All of the administrators interviewed and 60% of teachers interviewed stated that there were no District-level constraints to student voice. A few teachers identified the large amount of curriculum they had to teach, which made time a constraint to implementing the Initiative to its fullest. The other teacher who responded with a different District and campus-level constraint shared a possible concern for District administrators to make meaning of the feedback from a diverse population of teachers and students. Although these two concerns were listed as campus and district-level constraints, the curriculum was state mandated and, therefore, not a constraint created by the District's leadership. The difficulty to make meaning of a large amount of feedback was a concern for implementation but not a constraint created by the District's leaders that would impede classroom implementation of the Initiative.

Although it was difficult to identify outside constraints on student voice, respondents were able to identify things they wished their administrators better understood about student voice. These responses are worthy of consideration for a leader considering a student voice initiative of their own. Teachers wanted administrators to be "patient with the process." Teacher B acknowledged, "there is value in giving time for [teacher] reflection as professionals." Teacher A hoped administrators would remember "how uncomfortable it is to learn new things." She encouraged administration to understand that "one, the teachers need time and two, they are going to need some encouragement and to know that it is okay if my student voice is very different than so and so's student voice." It took time to transform an instructional practice, and

teachers appreciated the patience and empathy of an administrator to ease into the Initiative at a comfortable pace while balancing other classroom obligations.

Educators representing each role included in the interviews identified the importance of administrators not mandating the specifics of the student voice in the classroom. Teacher 4 believed “the second [student voice] became mandated, it would turn punitive in a way.” She recommended that the Initiative be about a teacher’s personal desire to improve and not something done out of compliance that a teacher would be evaluated on upon their execution. District administrators felt the same way. The Superintendent asserted, “We do not want to use the Student Voice Initiative as a hammer.” Central Admin 1 explained the expectations of the Initiative:

What will be mandated is that students' voices will be involved in the educational process intentionally and formally in some way, but what will not be mandated is what that looks like in every teacher's classroom.... Our district values student voices so much that we are just going to make this a part of the culture and part of the baseline expectations, but [educators] still get all kinds of latitude in what that looks like for [them].

Admin F agreed, “it is beneficial to a lot of initiatives, but particularly student voice, that there is no mandate ‘it will look like this in every classroom.’ There is no cookie cutter method to it.”

Teachers needed to have the flexibility to use student voice in a manner that was most effective for themselves and their students. The Superintendent agreed that the “how” of student voice would look different between campuses and classrooms. He acknowledged the following:

We have [over 900] teachers and in any organization, taking a particular initiative to scale is difficult. So what is hindering is just that we have [over 900] different people and different personalities and different years of experience and different strength of content.... You cannot say everybody is going to do it one way or another because what we have learned is that humans are different from each other. We have to make change appealing. We cannot make it mandatory. If you make it appealing over the long run, it becomes a part of your culture. If you make it mandatory, usually those kinds of things do not last ...it takes time to change a practice.

Multiple respondents suggested that administrators can best hold teachers accountable by continuing to talk about student voice, include student voice in professional development, and to model it in the practices of the District's and campuses' leadership.

Although no individual interviewed identified a specific limitation or restriction the District's leaders placed on teachers, individuals did identify issues that kept student voice from being as effective as it could be. Interview participants shared some misconceptions that they had encountered when speaking to their colleagues:

- Student voice means students have control over what they do or learn in the classroom;
- Student voice means that a student's voice is always welcome in the classroom and in all matters;
- Student voice is captured through surveys alone;
- Allowing students to have a choice is the same as having student voice; and
- Student voice implementation requires a great deal of time.

Participants also identified fear as a hindrance to student voice. Two of the fears identified by participants were a fear of giving up a level of control in their classroom and a fear of what students might say about their instruction.

The greatest concern noted by participants was the impact of requiring 100% of teachers to use student voice to improve instruction. Many believed that student voice required a growth mindset and were unsure about the possible negative effects of forcing teachers with a fixed mindset to ask for student voice to improve what they were doing in the classroom. Teacher 4 acknowledged that "it is hard to force or mandate someone to do student voice if it is not innately in their character." C&I 1 believed that

Student voice is a mindset. It is not a checklist of things to do and that is uncomfortable for some people because they would rather have the checklist. I think it is uncomfortable for some people because they do not have that mindset. I feel like those are the biggest constraints for [student voice].

C&I 2 believed that teachers approaching student voice implementation must have the right mindset and be open to growth and improvement. She cautioned, “if that mindset is not there, then I think it could be dangerous for [teachers] to open up to that kind of feedback.” Others believed that a teacher’s lack of a growth mindset could also be detrimental to students if they gave their feedback and then faced negative repercussions for their voice.

Although a teacher’s mindset could impact the effectiveness of student voice, some participants believed teachers could have success with student voice no matter their mindset. When asked about the goal of 100% teacher participation, C&I 1 shared, “I love that goal because it says we are all about students and we are all about listening and valuing the voice of our kids.” C&I 1 wondered if the goal of 100% participation might “move [fixed mindset teachers] towards wanting to listen to [their] students and see the value in their perspective.” Despite the fixed mindset of a teacher, C&I 2 believed that it was possible for all teachers to seek student voice in a manner that would not be detrimental to teachers or students. She encouraged teachers new to student voice to avoid questions that were personal in nature and focus on asking students questions directly related to the curriculum.

It was difficult for many participants to identify any campus or District-level constraints that hindered student voice success. Although it was difficult to identify outside constraints on student voice, respondents were able to identify things they wished their administrators better understood about student voice. Participants wanted administrators to be patient with the process and not mandate teacher participation. They also identified common misconceptions of student

voice as well as the fear of giving up control and what students might see as hindrances to implementing student voice. The greatest concern noted by participants was the impact of requiring 100% of teachers to use student voice to improve instruction, as they believed the correct teacher mindset was crucial to successful implementation of student voice.

Summary of the Data Analysis

The data collected in this study consisted of three focus group interviews, 11 narrative interviews, and 11 semi-structured individual interviews. The participants were all educators from within the suburban Texas school district. The educators were secondary classroom teachers, secondary campus administrators, secondary instructional coaches, and central-office administrators. All interview responses were used to answer the research questions. The responses addressed the educators' definition of student voice, their student voice participation methods, the outcomes of student voice participation, and issues for other educational leaders to consider in leading a student voice initiative. Data was coded in collaboration with other members of the student voice leadership team using priori, in vivo, and process codes.

The analysis of the data revealed a summary of overarching themes. Student voice was most simply defined as "improving instruction through student feedback." The most common methods of student voice participation were feedback from conversations, structured surveys, and the follow-through on the feedback. The instructional coaches supported the implementation of the Student Voice Initiative throughout the District by designing professional development and providing support to teachers in their implementation. The District's administrators played an important role in the success of the Initiative by creating a supportive culture that was safe for teachers to take risks. The participants identified potential negative impacts to students from participating in student voice that identified a need to support students in their learning of how to

have an effective voice in their learning and to support teachers in their learning on how to solicit effective student voice and then respond to it appropriately. The major positive impacts of student voice were improved classroom and campus culture by building stronger relationships, increased student engagement and agency, and increased teacher efficacy. Each of these outcomes contributed to a participant identified improvement in instruction. Looking forward, participants acknowledged the importance of administrators who were patient with the process and did not mandate teacher participation. They also identified common misconceptions coupled with fear that hindered some educators' implementation of student voice. The greatest concern noted by participants was the impact of requiring 100% of teachers to use student voice to improve instruction, as they believed the correct teacher mindset was crucial to successful implementation of student voice. These identified constraints and hindrances are considered as next steps in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of the research study, including the problem statement, the purpose of the research study, the research questions addressed, and the methodology of the research study. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings in terms of past literature, noting similarities and differences and implications about what this means for the District. This chapter concludes with recommendations for the District's leadership and others desiring to implement a student voice initiative as a method to improve classroom instruction and for future research.

Overview of the Study

Problem statement. There has been research on the importance of student voice in the lives of students (Beaudoin, 2005; Freire, 1987; Young & Sazama, 2006) and the impact on practice and culture at the classroom and campus level (Flutter & Rudduck, 2006; Mitra, 2004, 2008; Rudduck, 2007, Young & Sazama, 2006). However, there is little research on how to implement, diffuse, and sustain the use of student voice at the district level and the role school leadership plays in this process (Jobs for the Future, 2012; Libby et al., 2005; Matthews, 2010; Mitra et al., 2012; Pautsch, 2010). There is a need for a model of district-wide implementation of student voice that educational leaders can follow to implement a student voice initiative in their schools.

Purpose of the study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and disseminate one student voice initiative in a suburban school district in the State of Texas. In this study, I provided a historical narrative of the initial 3 years of the initiative, highlighted successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and made suggestions that may provide support for those in similar contexts wishing to implement a student voice initiative. From the

lessons the District's leaders learned in this Initiative, I hoped to provide a useful portrait for other school leaders to use when implementing a student voice initiative.

The following research questions guided the study:

Q1. What is the meaning of student voice for educators in the school district?

Q2. What is the story of student voice participation for educators in the school district?

Q3. How is the use of student voice affecting the classroom, campus, and district instruction?

Q4. What are possible next steps to improve the current model?

Methodology. To examine the diffusion of student voice as a tool to improve instruction throughout the District's secondary campuses, I employed a qualitative research method. I used a narrative research design and conducted face-to-face interviews, including focus group, narrative, and semi-structured interviews. I used open-ended interview questions to capture the story of the school District's student voice participants. I included archival data, predominantly from the District's 2017-2018 Middle of the Year Student Voice Survey. The data were analyzed by coding with priori, in vivo, and process codes to capture the stories of implementation of the Student Voice Initiative within the District.

Discussion of Findings

This section is divided into four sub-sections based on the research questions. The findings are discussed for each research question as well as the connection to published literature.

Research question 1: What is the meaning of student voice for educators in the school district? For leaders to replicate the Initiative in other educational institutions, it was beneficial for educational leaders to know how the District's educators defined student voice.

According to interview participants, teachers, students, and campus leaders had roles in integrating student voice into the classroom. Teachers set guidelines for student voice and provided opportunities for students to have a voice in their instruction. Students then reflected on their learning and gave input on classroom instructional decisions while advocating for their individual learning needs. Teachers gathered this feedback and used it to improve classroom instruction. The leadership of the District modeled student voice practices and created a culture where students felt empowered to have a voice and teachers felt safe to shift traditional classroom roles of the teacher and student.

Although the participants identified various aspects of student voice from expression to advocacy, their responses aligned with the Superintendent's definition of student voice, "improving instruction through student feedback," which captured both listening to and acting on the voice but allowed for varying levels of implementation for each educator.

The definition of student voice within the District aligned with various definitions found in literature. Ngussa and Makewa (2014) believed that the most conservative form of student voice was giving students a say but with no guarantee of a response. As reported by interview participants, there were educators within the District that gave students a say but did not follow through with any response to the student feedback. Although Ngussa and Markewa considered this a conservative form of student voice, the organizational goal within the District's was that 100% of teachers would use student voice to improve instruction. If students do not see evidence of change from their feedback, it can impact their trust and the classroom culture and, therefore, has the possibility to harm instruction rather than improve instruction.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) defined student voice more broadly, using the term to describe opportunities that happened both inside and outside of the school and including a range

of activities from expression, performance, and creativity to co-constructing the learning within the classroom. Although they defined student voice broadly, they narrowed their definition by clarifying that student voice activities positioned students as change agents within their school, therefore acknowledging the significance of educators going beyond hearing the voices of students to acting upon what is heard (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The idea of acting on student voice aligned to the constructivist beliefs of Bruner (1996) who noted that educators must allow the student responses to drive the classroom instruction. Seale's (2009) definition of student voice extended beyond asking and acting by including "empowering students to take a more active role in shaping or changing their education" (p. 995).

Although it was reported that some educators used student voice in the most conservative form, others saw the importance of leveraging students as change agents within their school. In their definition of student voice, participants identified student actions of reflecting on their learning, giving input, advocating for their learning needs, creating change, and improving instruction. These opportunities aligned more with the ideals of Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) who viewed students as change agents within their classrooms and schools.

Although the district leaders' definition of student voice was simple, it was concise and powerful: "improving instruction through student feedback." As can be seen in literature, student voice can include many components, but, by including the goal of improving instruction, it gave teachers within the District a benchmark to use when reflecting on their student voice practices. Research, as well as interview respondents, pointed to the importance of acting on student voice. If a teacher were only asking for student feedback without having evidence of follow-through on that feedback, it would be difficult to argue that the student feedback was improving instruction.

Research question 2: What is the story of student voice participation for educators in the school district? Lundy (2007) and Bron and Veugelers (2014) provided a framework for schools to use in designing participation methods for the inclusion of student voice. Toshalis and Nakkula's (2013) spectrum of student voice divided student voice-oriented activities into a continuum from expression to leadership. As educators moved their practices left to right across the spectrum, students' roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority grew. This spectrum was used as the conceptual framework for how to research the various methods of student voice participation within the District.

On the left side of the spectrum, students have a voice in the form of expression and consultation. In these categories, students function as consultants rather than empowered stakeholders. Expression as a form of student voice happened throughout the district. According to the Survey, 88% of teachers in their first year of participation, 83% of teachers with 1 to 2 years of participation, and 86% of teachers with 3 or more years of participation with the Initiative responded that they used participation methods aligned with Students Being Heard. These included methods such as surveys, casual conversations, classroom exit tickets, two-by-two conversations, principal panels, and more. As educators become more comfortable with student voice, there is a decrease in methods aligned to consultation and an increase in methods that positioned students as collaborators in their learning. When asked what method of student voice participation had the greatest impact on instruction, surveys were mentioned most often. Referencing surveys, two interview participants considered them as the "gateway drug" to student voice. A particular benefit of surveys was the concrete data that were quickly available following an administration of a survey. Surveys also provided tangible data which allowed the educators to individually examine their student feedback to improve current practices and to

carry that data to their Professional Learning Community to engage in reflective conversations about classroom instruction.

Although surveys were the most commonly used form of student voice activities, there were also implications for the use of surveys. When time was of the essence, surveys were a quick method to capture student voice. However, it was also easy to forget to return to the survey results and clarify responses with the students. Participants acknowledged that without this clarification, or follow-up conversation, students might be left with the impression that their voice was not really heard by the teacher. This belief aligned to the research of O'Neill and McMahon (2012) who criticized traditional feedback instruments, because they could be used at a time where students could not see any action on the educator's part, assuming the educator acted on the feedback they received.

Another concern of student-voice surveys was the overuse of the strategy by teachers. For many, it was the safest way to begin listening to student feedback. However, when students began to receive surveys in multiple classes asking many of the same questions, it was reported that students began to not take the process seriously.

Lodge (2005) argued that the following questions were crucial when consulting students:

- Who is being asked? Are they representative of the population?
- What are they being asked? Will the answers give the needed information to make an informed decision?
- How are they being asked? Will the answers provide an authentic voice?

As an organization considers implementing student voice, it will be important to consider guidelines on the frequency of surveys and possible sampling methods to reduce the number of surveys that all students must complete. As Lodge (2005) suggested, educators should examine

who is being asked and consider alternative samplings that would still provide representative feedback.

Lodge (2005) also cautioned teachers to intentionally craft questions that would give the needed information to make an informed decision about their instructional practices. Although participants did observe that some students felt over-surveyed, many students were receiving surveys with the same questions. Teachers implementing student voice could benefit from support in writing quality survey questions that can capture the voice of students without answering multiple, repetitive questions. O'Neill and McMahon (2012) observed that traditional student feedback instruments are not always valid because they do not ask the questions students want to answer. One way of promoting effective consultation is to include students in the design of the questions used in feedback mechanisms (Mitra, 2008; Rudduck, 2007, Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013). Variety in the questions asked and student ownership of the questions used could reduce student frustrations with the overuse of a survey as a student voice participation method.

Lodge's (2005) final suggestion was to consider how students are asked for feedback. To reduce the overuse of the survey, teachers need learning on additional student voice activities. The survey was safe for teachers in that student feedback was provided in a controlled manner. The survey was also safe for students, as it allowed them some level of anonymity and a platform for those who were uncomfortable sharing their views out loud in class. However, additional participation activities that could yield quality data would reduce the use of the survey as the main method of student voice participation.

In addition to students being heard, educators have realized that follow-through was a crucial component of student voice participation. Roberts (2003) argued that educators needed

to build capacity in using the data gathered from consultation and that if consultation was only for appearances, it was a tokenistic effort that could disillusion students, making them suspicious of educators' actions or indifferent to the learning decisions that impacted them the most (Bragg, 2010). Pedder and McIntyre (2016) argued that it did not matter how strong student voice was in the classroom, it was ultimately the responsiveness of the teacher that was most important to the success of the student voice implementation. The interview participants within the District agreed; if an educator was not going to follow through with the feedback received, then it was in the best interest of the relationship and the student to not ask for the feedback to begin with.

Another noted benefit of student consultation was a change in the way students were viewed in the educational setting. Bragg (2010) believed that "a key outcome of greater consultation [was] to change adults' perceptions of young people's capabilities, so that they become more willing to enter into dialogue with them" (p. 18), thus positioning themselves to move across the spectrum to categories that began to empower students to act as change agents in the transformation of learning. Teacher 3 was a prime example of an adult's changed perception of young peoples' capabilities. He declared, "Use your students. Use their skills. These kids are amazing." Teacher 3 started with a survey and consulted his students and moved to teacher-student collaboration. He was not alone; many of the educators encountered in the District spoke to their students being capable of so much more than they had originally realized. After observing a group of students co-designing a lesson with their teacher during a 45-minute period, an observer of the process shared that the students accomplished more effective planning than any professional learning community of teachers she had been a part of previously.

Student voice at the consultation level, which included the use of surveys, was valuable for feedback on instructional styles, relevancy of the curriculum, and other classroom issues

(Rudduck, 2007). The act of consulting students gave educators insight into students' perspectives. However, educators must be cognizant of how they are consulting and what is done with the information they gather.

In the middle of the spectrum—participation and partnership—students were recognized as stakeholders while allowing students to collaborate with adults on adult-led projects. According to the Survey, 25% of teachers in their first year of participation, 34% of teachers with 1 to 2 years of participation, and 48% of teachers with 3 or more years of participation with the Student Voice Initiative moved to the middle of the spectrum and responded that they used participation methods aligned with Students Collaborating with Adults. This included methods of participation, such as focus groups targeting improved classroom instruction and educators co-designing lessons with their students.

Participation strategies began to transition students from data sources to active participants in their learning (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2016). The belief that students were capable to act as participants aligned to the social development theory of Vygotsky (1978) who considered participation within a community of learners the foundation for personalized learning. The middle part of the spectrum merged the idea of students as data sources and students as change agents in a way that recognized them as stakeholders in the learning while providing opportunities for them to collaborate with adults (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Many research participants identified increased student ownership of the learning through student voice participation, thus placing students as involved stakeholders in the learning. C&I 1 was a forerunner in the District in co-collaborating with students in the lesson design process. She observed that collaborating with students in the lesson design resulted in lessons that were relevant and engaging and increased student ownership of the learning.

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2016) believed using students as collaborators transitioned them from data sources to active participants. Although student voice positioned students as collaborators, it was important for educators to first have accepted students as a valid data source prior to moving to collaboration with students. Those more experienced with the Initiative viewed students as collaborators invaluable to the design of meaningful classroom learning experiences, but not all educators in the District agreed. In the Survey, some secondary teachers in the District questioned the validity of students as collaborators in the design process. Some teachers believed that students would design activities that required the least amount of work. One teacher challenged that students had limited life experiences and wanted freedom without responsibility. Each of these concerns suggested that, for some educators, the student was not yet considered a valid data source. Before moving to the middle of the spectrum where students were stakeholders and collaborated with adults to improve instruction, the educator must first have had buy-in of the validity of a student's voice and established a relationship where there was shared ownership of the learning within the classroom.

The notion of inviting students to have a voice in the instructional design was initially met with fear by some educators. Educators feared that students would not understand what they needed to learn, instructional strategies appropriate for learning, the importance of optimizing classroom instructional time, and the level of rigor instruction needed to ensure mastery of the standards. However, the more comfortable teachers became with student voice, they reported a shift further to the right of the spectrum. Some educators in the District requested support to generate additional collaborative participation methods to use in their student voice implementation. A menu of options would support their needs and help ensure the Initiative was sustainable.

On the right of the spectrum, the students directed collaborative efforts between students and teachers. This section of the spectrum included student activism and leadership. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) classified activism as times where students were tasked with “identifying problems, generating solutions, organizing responses, agitating and/or educating for change both in and outside of school contexts” (p. 24). In the final category on the spectrum, students were viewed as leaders. Toshalis and Nakkula identified leadership activities as “co-planning, making decisions and accepting significant responsibility for outcomes, co-guiding group processes, and co-conducting activities” (p. 24). These types of activities positioned student-educator partnerships as a form of “distributed leadership” (Woods & Gronn, 2009, p. 440) and “radical collegiality” (Fielding, 2006, p. 308) and positioned students as problem solvers with the skills necessary to lead educational transformation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

According to the Survey, 25% of teachers in their first year of participation, 24% of teachers with 1 to 2 years of participation, and 39% of teachers with 3 or more years of participation with the Initiative moved to the far right of the spectrum and reported they used participation methods aligned with Students Building Capacity for Leadership. Examples of building capacity for leadership listed on the survey included students identifying issues and solving them and student led-conferences. Although teachers responded that they used methods aligned to Students Building Capacity for Leadership, when asked “What are some ways you have used student voice in the classroom (or in your role outside of the classroom)?” many of the examples included did not align to building capacity for leadership. Some teachers listed activities that did align to building capacity in leadership, such as co-designing work with students and student athlete leadership programs. However, other survey respondents listed surveys, choice in learning options, and asking students questions as methods that built capacity

for leadership. To truly build a capacity for leadership, students need opportunities to own the learning or the work they are doing. Strong examples of students building capacity for leadership were evidenced in the responses of Fine Arts teachers who had many student-driven opportunities, including selecting performance pieces, designing sets, and choreographing performances. Beyond the Fine Arts classrooms, the strongest examples of activism and leadership were at the campus level, where students had leadership opportunities through organizations like student council as well as the work that students were doing through campus administrator focus groups. The survey results of teachers who selected that they used strategies that built leadership capacity in students compared to the methods actually listed signaled a need for additional learning on participation methods aligned to the highest levels of student voice.

The work of secondary teachers in the District aligned with the methods of participation along the full spectrum. In addition to classroom teachers, student voice methods were also utilized by the Curriculum and Instruction Department. The department's main areas of focus were developing curriculum resources, providing instructional support, and designing professional learning opportunities for staff. C&I 1 and C&I 2 met with student focus groups at each of the middle school campuses to examine the redesign of the middle school Language Arts curriculum. This participation method aligned with the middle of the spectrum, where adults collaborated with students. However, the co-designing of the curriculum and of the classroom lessons also aligned with Bron and Veugelers' (2014) relevance argument that students were rarely involved in developing the curriculum they were taught, and therefore, it was often not relevant to their lives. Through consultation with students in the curriculum design and the inclusion of students in co-designing of learning, educators can determine the connections needed to make the mandatory curriculum relevant for their students. The work of C&I 1 and

C&I 2 began to lay the framework for future student collaboration in the curriculum design to ensure the relevancy of the curriculum available to the educators in the District.

Pautsch (2010) contended that principal involvement was necessary for student voice to reach its full potential. This was true in the District as well, as campus administrators played a major role in the implementation of student voice. Administrators modeled the use of student voice methods, ranging from consultation to leadership. Termini (2013) emphasized that if school administrators expected teachers to take a risk by involving students in educational decisions, then they must also model the same risk taking by inviting students into shared-leadership opportunities.

One of the most common practices among the District's campus administrators was the use of focus groups. Admin 2 employed student voice at the highest level on the spectrum through the work of his school's student advisory committee. The committee was tasked with identifying issues for the campus and to create and take ownership of the solutions. This form of student voice leveraged students in a shared leadership capacity; leadership where the power does not reside with just the principal, but gives students an opportunity to take leadership positions where they have an expertise (Goldsmith, 2014; Wassenaar & Pearce, 2016). Voight (2015) believed shared leadership strengthened relationships among students and between students and educators. Admin K and Admin 2 observed this same benefit; they acknowledged that student focus groups not only offered a great deal of information, but they also built on-going relationships between the administrator and the students. Another benefit to shared leadership within the school was a broader range of ideas. Admin 2 shared that students were creating solutions for improving campus services and facilities, ranging from the variety of vegetarian options provided in the cafeteria to the environment of the campus restrooms. Admin

2 shared that he had never considered either option, but it made sense when he heard it from the students. Because of student feedback, he was able to support change on the campus in areas he would have never previously considered. These examples of shared leadership benefits aligned to the research of Fenton (2016) who identified that shared leadership provided a broader pool of ideas and innovations to from which to draw. Although the campuses did not have data to connect the results of shared leadership to improved instruction, Wassenaar and Pearce (2016) found that shared leadership was a predictor of improved cognitive outcomes, and, when individuals took control of their work and could collaborate and make decisions, those same individuals had increased motivation and engagement. Therefore, the principal focus groups not only served as opportunities for administrators to model student voice, but they also provided an improved campus culture, improved relationships, and had the potential to impact the students' overall learning.

The District's administrators played a crucial role in the overall success of the Initiative by creating a supportive culture, modeling student voice practices, and setting a mandate for student voice but allowing for educators to implement student voice in the way that was most comfortable for the individual educators. During the implementation of the innovative practice, the Superintendent's role was important, as he communicated the vision and inspired and motivated stakeholders to take a collective action to reach that vision. Visionary leaders attract more followers, especially in times of change (Halevy, Berson & Galinsky, 2011). In educational transformation, followers—campus administrators, teachers, parents, and students—can help superintendents achieve their visionary goals (The School Superintendents Association, 2014).

The Superintendent also modeled the use of student voice at the district level. The School Superintendents Association (2014) acknowledged that “leading superintendents follow

through on their vision by ‘walking the walk’—visibly championing, modeling and celebrating the use of innovative [practices] in their communities” (p. 7). By modeling student voice practices, the Superintendent demonstrated the same vulnerability and openness to feedback that he was asking of campus administrators and teachers.

Although the Superintendent characterized his leadership of the Student Voice Initiative as giving “a slow, steady gentle nudge toward student voice,” Central Admin 1 identified the importance of his role in the Initiative; with the Superintendent’s and school board’s support, student voice just became the way the District’s leadership “did business.” All of the teachers who participated in the individual interviews agreed that the support of the District’s administrators played an important role in the Student Voice Initiative.

Although there were methods of student voice participation specific to teachers, curriculum and instruction, and administration, there were also system-wide components. A particular system-wide component of the Initiative was the professional learning opportunities provided throughout the District. The study identified the four most beneficial professional learning components as book studies, collaborating with a teacher, instructional coach support, and the modeling of student voice activities. Each of these components were part of an intentional plan of the District’s leaders. The educators with the most experience with the Initiative found the book studies and cohort beneficial to their success. However, the first-year teacher had not had an opportunity to participate in a study and he wished he had more opportunities to deepen his understanding of student voice participation methods. Teachers who had been a part of a cohort that allowed for collaboration with other educators voiced a desire to have ongoing collaboration opportunities whether face-to-face or online. The use of instructional coaches was an important component listed by participants at various experience

levels. None of the beneficial professional learning components were haphazard. They were planned and designed into the Initiative. However, as the participation spread throughout the District, there was not as much intentionality in bringing groups of teachers together to learn and participants identified this missing component. Much of the success of the diffusion of the Initiative was contributed to student voice being embedded into so many different facets of the organization that there were regular reminders of the importance of student voice practices.

The use of student voice in the District aligned with the theoretical framework derived from literature. Students were allowed to construct meaning of their learning by providing feedback and seeing changes made to instruction based on their feedback. The practices of educators in the District corresponded to the levels of student voice participation outlined on the spectrum. The majority of uses of student voice fell towards the left side of the spectrum with students being heard, but there were higher levels of student voice participation from more experienced educators that moved students from the role of participant to a place of collaborator and leader.

Research question 3: How is the use of student voice affecting the classroom, campus, and the district instruction? Although only 47% of participants specifically mentioned improvement of instruction as an outcome, teachers sensed a change in the classroom and campus culture, deepened relationships, and increased levels of trust. These were all factors in the learning environment which played an important role in student learning. The learning environment included the physical space but also encompassed the relationships that were necessary for students to feel they were learning in an environment that provided support and challenged them in their growth (P21, 2009). When educators were privy to students' perspectives on learning, they could find new ways to support student learning and build strong

partnerships with their students (Rudduck, 2006, 2007; Rudduck et al., 2003). The inclusion of student voice practices within a classroom can redefine student-teacher relationships as a collaborative effort to improve learning; this was evidenced in the data collected within the District.

Educators also reported an increase in their personal levels of engagement as well as student levels of engagement. These findings aligned with previous research where students who had a voice in decisions regarding their learning were reported to be seven times more likely to be academically motivated, eight times more likely to be engaged in their learning, and nine times more likely to have a sense of purpose in their learning than those students who did not have a voice (Quaglia Institute, 2016). It can be difficult to quantitatively measure increased engagement in students. However, I observed increased engagement while working with student focus groups as part of my job responsibilities. Student voice was improving engagement in the District.

Overall, improved culture, student engagement, and teacher engagement each contributed to increased levels of student agency as well as a collective teacher efficacy. When students were able to talk about their learning experiences and have their voice taken seriously, they developed a stronger sense of self-as-learner and a stronger sense of agency (Flutter & Rudduck, 2006; Rudduck et al., 2003). Hattie (2017) found that collective teacher efficacy was 3 times more predictive of student achievement than student engagement, motivation, and persistence and was the greatest factor to influence student achievement. School culture plays a large role in whether or not teachers have a collective teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) and the positive change to school and classroom culture was noted by both teachers and administrators.

Overall, the interview participants identified few negative impacts on students from allowing voice. However, participants suggested educators consider methods of allowing voice for students who were uncomfortable with verbalizing their thoughts. Some participants attributed the uncomfortableness to a student's personality while others noted the struggle of students who were English language learners. In addition to some populations facing a language barrier, they also noted that student voice could have a negative impact if students were required to have a voice when collaborating in a collegial manner with an adult was not acceptable in the individual's culture. However, prior research has pointed to the benefit of student voice for marginalized students (Lind, 2007). Others have found that schools disproportionately represent the views of the dominant culture and devalue the voices from subordinate cultures (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Bron & Veugelers, 2014). Quaglia and Fox (2018) challenged educators to "intentionally create platforms and opportunities for the shy, insecure, non-native speaking, and challenging students" (p. 17). They advocated that "all students need to know that their voices matter even if, or especially because, their ideas and opinions are different" (p. 17). Current research supports that student voice can be a positive for all students, but the educational leaders in the District must be intentional in the design of student voice opportunities to meet the needs of all students.

The final concerns noted by participants were that students needed supports to learn how to voice appropriate feedback and to determine when their voice was welcome; educators needed support to know how to respond appropriately to student feedback to avoid possible negative outcomes for students. Quaglia and Fox (2018) agreed

for student voice to become systemic and impactful, to become a natural way of being in schools, there must be an effort to ensure that all students, staff—the entire

organisation—are ready and willing for the voice of students to be heard and valued. (p. 15)

Quaglia and Fox (2018) defined educator and student readiness as “having the skills, abilities, and knowledge to integrate student voice [which included the ability to] formulate, articulate, and share their ideas” (p. 15). They equated untrained student voice to “student noise” and stressed the importance of educators in transforming the “student noise” into “meaningful student voice” by teaching students to be responsible for what they say (Quaglia & Fox, 2018, p. 15). Students must also be given ample opportunities to have a voice to gain much needed practice in formulating and articulating ideas. As Quaglia and Fox (2018) aptly noted, “We do not expect students to suddenly read without instruction, modeling, and practice. Likewise, we cannot expect students to hone their voices without the same” (p.17). Quaglia and Fox (2018) also observed that when educators and students lacked the essential readiness skills, student voice became frustrating and individuals began to question the effectiveness and potential of student voice. Biddle (2017) argued that school leadership must provide a structure for student voice and ensure a common language that students understood when discussing instruction. The findings of Biddle (2017) and Quaglia and Fox (2018) aligned to the identified needs of the participants within the District and points to a need for further student and educator learning to increase the readiness for student voice.

Interview participants saw value in student voice. Participants acknowledged many positive outcomes of student voice that outweighed the negative. The major positive outcomes of student voice were improved classroom and campus culture by building stronger relationships, increased student engagement and agency, and an increased teacher efficacy. Each of these outcomes contributed to the participant identified improvement in instruction. However, to

avoid a possible negative impact to students, educators should consider the needs of all students to ensure there are appropriate methods for students to have a voice. They should teach students how to give feedback and how to determine the appropriate times for feedback. In addition, educators needed to know how to respond to the feedback they received to avoid negative outcomes for the student.

Research question 4: What are the possible next steps to improve the current model? Participants were asked “What campus and district level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction?” and “What is one thing you wished your campus and district level administrators better understood about implementing student voice?” Participants were unable to identify specific actions the District’s leadership took that hindered the success of student voice in the District. However, participants were able to identify issues that limited the effectiveness of student voice. Many of these issues arose from misconceptions participants encountered while sharing student voice with their colleagues. Some common misconceptions were the following:

- Student voice means students have control over what they do or learn in the classroom;
- Student voice means that a student’s voice is always welcome in the classroom and in all matters;
- Student voice is captured through surveys alone;
- Allowing students to have a choice is the same as having student voice; and
- Student voice implementation requires a great deal of time.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) identified similar difficulties that educational leaders could face while implementing student voice:

The need to alter traditional structures, practices, beliefs, and values to allow student voice to flourish; the dangers of co-opting student voices rather than learning from them; the tricky business of cultivating respectful disagreement between youth and adults; and concerns about time limits, levels of administrative support, teachers losing power, and whether full inclusion of student voices is being achieved. (p. 199)

In the Survey, some secondary teachers suggested that students would take the easy way out when given the opportunity to have a voice or choice in their learning. These same educators believed students lacked life experiences that would give them the expertise necessary to speak to classroom learning. Cushman (2015) identified many of these same concerns and reported that “many adults harbor[ed] uneasy feelings that adolescents—impulsive, inexperienced, immature, resistant to authority—are too young to trust with the important things” (p. 56). However, Hadfield and Haw (2001) found that the bigger issue was not the lack of expertise of the student but the unwillingness of educators to listen to student voice. Hadfield and Haw’s (2001) finding aligned to the previous participant-identified need for additional teacher support to ensure that educators knew how to take the data from student voice and use it to improve classroom instruction.

Another identified next step for the District’s leadership was to examine the expectation that 100% of teachers would use student voice to improve instruction. Many believed that student voice required a growth mindset and were unsure about the possible negative effects of forcing teachers with a fixed mindset to ask for student voice to improve their classroom instruction. These concerns, coupled with the previously mentioned misconceptions, centered around who owned the learning and the structure of student voice in the classroom. These concerns demonstrated a lack of true understanding of student voice by some educators in the

District and a need for additional educator learning. This finding is not new in the field of student voice. Specific adult skills are key to successful implementation of student voice (Mitra, Lewis, & Sanders, 2012). Mitra et al. (2013) found that educators

frequently lack the understanding of how to scaffold the process of increasing youth roles in the [youth/adult] partnership. Even more important, perhaps, is that adults sometimes neglect to recognize that they themselves need to change in order to facilitate a partnership relationship with young people. (p. 198)

Han (2017) believed that describing the characteristics of an adult who trusted the voice of students and expecting that educator to execute student voice was not enough, but challenged that educators needed to be taught how to listen and respond to student voice. Once educators learn how to listen and respond to student voice, then educators must find a structure that balances the voice of the student with the responsibility the educator has in ensuring all content is taught and that learning standards are upheld. Cushman (2015) believed

one of the hardest challenges for educators is to find the sweet spot between too much and too little adult participation. Too much adult involvement, and student voice loses its authenticity and its power to involve youth as true problem solvers and stakeholders. Too little, and student voice can become diffuse, exclusive, and ineffective. (p. 56)

Mitra et al. (2013) acknowledged that there was an identified need for future research on methods to support educators in developing the skills to work collaboratively with students in a youth-adult partnership. The participant-identified need for educator learning around student voice coupled with the research-identified need had implications for the District's leaders as they moved forward with the Student Voice Initiative.

Limitations

This study was designed to provide a historical narrative of a student voice initiative as a method to improve instruction in one Texas school district in hopes to support other school administrators considering implementing a student voice initiative in their respective schools.

Generalizations should be interpreted carefully, given the following limitations. First, the study provided findings from secondary campuses in one major-suburban school district in the State of Texas. Although Grades Pre-Kindergarten to 12 were included in the District's Student Voice Initiative, this research study focused on secondary educators only. Second, the findings are based on the perceptions of a small number of secondary teachers, administrators, and curriculum and instruction interview participants. Though the number of participants was small, it represented a variety of educators with different experiences in the field, and a variety of years of experience teaching. To help reduce this limitation, archival survey data of a much broader district representation were analyzed and included to support the interview findings. A third limitation was that of positionality. As an educator employed in the school district in which the study was conducted, I had access to resources as well as carried biases that might have affected the study. This position also brought with it a depth of insight about the Student Voice Initiative and the school District community. I strove to ensure participants felt comfortable during individual and focus group interviews and that confidentiality was paramount to my research. However, educators may or may not have felt comfortable with me during the individual and focus group interviews, due to my position as an educator in the school district. I took precautions in trying to assure that the data were analyzed objectively. These precautions included inviting others on the student voice leadership team to construct questions to ensure questions aligned to the research questions, triangulating the data from interviews, and cross-checking interview responses with participants by sharing transcripts of all interviews to establish the accuracy of the data. Given these limitations of the research, there were many contributions that could be ascertained from the outcomes of this research.

Implications

The District's leadership had a goal that 100% of the educators within the District would use student voice to improve instruction. Based on the current research, there were implications for the District's leaders as they moved forward into the final phase of implementation and sustainability of the diffusion of student voice as a method to improve classroom instruction. The Student Voice Initiative required a diffusion of an innovative practice throughout the organization. The following implications are presented through the perspective of Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovation*, a theory that seeks to explain how, why, and at what rate new ideas are spread throughout an organization. Rogers (2003) concluded that four main elements influence the spread of a new idea or innovative practice: student voice, communication channels, time, and a social system. These four elements served as a guide to organize the suggested implications from the Student Voice Initiative.

Student voice: The innovation itself. The District's leaders limited their definition of student voice to "improving instruction through student feedback." There are many ways that student voice can be used to improve the organization, the relationships, and the skill development of students. However, by limiting the targeted use of student voice, the District's leaders were able to more quickly reach a point of saturation of student voice participation amongst the District's educators. The District's leadership did not limit the use of student voice to only improving instruction and began to integrate student voice into other areas of the organization. The practices of educators in the District corresponded to the levels of student voice participation outlined on the spectrum, with the majority of uses of student voice falling toward the left side of the spectrum where students are being heard; however, there were higher levels of student voice participation from more experienced educators that moved students from

the role of participant to a place of collaborator and leader. Student voice scholars have found that by providing more formalized roles for students in leading school transformation, schools have more sustainable transformational outcomes, and it supports the development of civic efficacy in the involved students (Donnini, 2015; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). As the Student Voice Initiative approached full diffusion in the District, consideration should be given to participation methods that allow students to identify issues and take ownership in the solutions.

Although student voice participation methods aligned to the full range of the spectrum, some educators within the District identified the use of student voice activities aligned to activism and leadership while providing examples that were more correctly aligned to expression and participation. Additional professional learning opportunities utilizing the spectrum of student voice as a benchmark to place current practices and to brainstorm additional student voice activities could be beneficial to the District by deepening the educators' understanding of student voice activities and the Initiative itself.

The Student Voice Initiative was beneficial for the District. The major positive impacts of student voice were improved classroom and campus culture through stronger relationships, increased student engagement and student agency, and increased teacher efficacy. Each of these outcomes contributed to a participant identified improvement in instruction. However, some participants noted concerns regarding the inclusion of all voices and the need for a platform for students that may not feel comfortable voicing their ideas through some of the current student voice participation methods. These concerns pointed to a need for additional educator learning. This implication is addressed further under the heading *Time*.

Communication channels. The District's leadership was very intentional in its communication to educators during the early stages when deciding to adopt the innovative

practice of student voice. The Superintendent and Central Admin 1 worked closely together to determine the first steps in the Initiative. The Superintendent played a vital role in the success of the Student Voice Initiative. When implementing an innovative practice, the superintendent should communicate the vision and inspire and motivate stakeholders to take a collective action to reach that vision. Visionary leaders attract more followers, especially in times of change (Halevy et al., 2011). In educational transformation, followers—campus administrators, teachers, parents, and students—can help superintendents achieve their visionary goals (The School Superintendents Association, 2014). By including the Student Voice Initiative in his annual goals, the Superintendent communicated a clear vision to the stakeholders of the District while upholding a standard that campuses and teachers would use student feedback to improve instruction.

Although the Superintendent cast the vision for the Initiative, Central Admin 1 was tasked to lead the initiative. Her first effort to diffuse the innovation was to reach out to a small group of educators who were known to be early adopters. These educators collaborated with each other and shared successes and concerns as they grew their understanding of student voice as a method to improve instruction. From these early stages, the Student Voice Initiative grew by word of mouth with additional cohorts added to the Initiative until it reached a point of widespread diffusion within the organization. In its third full-year of the Initiative, the District's leadership continued to communicate about student voice at its district-wide convocation school year kick-off theme, Twitter chats on the topic of student voice, and campus-wide professional learning. However, there were no formal book-study cohorts or small-group collaborations planned by the District's leaders in its third year of the implementation. The absence of learning opportunities was noted by individuals on the 2017-2018 Middle of the Year Student Voice

Survey and by interview participants newer to the Student Voice Initiative. Although the District's leaders provided learning opportunities and communication regarding student voice to the educators in the District, some participants were not able to identify these communication efforts, thus signaling a need for reevaluation of the communication methods needed to fully diffuse student voice within the District by the end of the 2018-2019 school year.

Leaders of the District worked to ensure that there was regular communication to the educators in the District. However, in the early stages of the initiative, there was little communication of the Student Voice Initiative to students, parents, and community members. This created some misconceptions of what student voice actually meant within the community. Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2015) identified parental engagement as a factor that could impact a student voice initiative. Parents needed to be educated to understand the Student Voice Initiative and the impact it could have on the classroom instruction and the student so they could support the development of an effective voice in their child at home. In addition, students needed to understand what student voice was and why it was important. Student voice has the potential to increase student ownership in learning and promote future civic engagement. However, many students did not understand the purpose of student voice or the impact it could have on their learning. Additional communication to the students on how they can have an empowered voice and opportunities to use their voice to advocate and lead could enhance the District's Student Voice Initiative.

Time. Time is a precious commodity for teachers. Every teacher who participated in the individual interviews mentioned time as a constraint to successful student voice implementation. Therefore, providing time for student voice implementation was essential. Time must be set aside for training administrators and classroom teachers. Educator skill sets have been

consistently shown to be a critical component of successful student voice initiatives (Mitra et al., 2012). The intentionality of the District's leaders in their slow roll-out allowed early adopters to learn about student voice and collaborate with others. This learning was valuable to their understanding and allowed for an implementation that moved student voice and educator practice further along the spectrum to students collaborating and partnering with adults to improve education. However, as the District approached full diffusion of the innovative practice, there were fewer formal learning opportunities. Interview participants and survey respondents within the District identified a need for additional educator learning on the topic of student voice. There needed to be additional learning about the "why" of student voice to help late adopters understand the need for student voice as well as the "how-to" implement student voice for all educators. Educators wanted to learn about additional ways to integrate student voice beyond the survey. The early adopters believed that many who were developing their student voice practice needed instruction on how to respond to the feedback they received on surveys or in classroom discussions to avoid negative outcomes for the student. Additional student voice instruction could also negate many misconceptions of student voice. Without proper training, conclusions are often drawn from a lack of understanding and can be detrimental to the success of a student voice initiative and the relationships between educators and students.

Time must also be set aside for classroom teachers and students. The most successful student voice reports came from teachers who took the time to build relationships with their students. Relationships between teachers and students do not happen haphazardly but require time and intentionality on the behalf of the teacher. There should also be time for educators to train students on how to have a voice that is focused on solutions and improving instruction. Most students do not understand state standards or best practices. The educator participants who

took the time to teach their students about learning targets and instructional strategies reaped the benefits in the collaborative work they did with their students. Finally, there must be time for teachers and students to collaborate together. Many educators had a desire to do more with student voice but felt limited to the bell schedule and the time they had the students in their classroom.

When the decision was made by the District's leadership to move forward with the innovative practice to use student voice as a tool to improve instruction, there was not a timeline put on the process. Seeds were planted amongst educators in the District and allowed to grow to the point where educators on all campuses were using student voice as a tool to improve instruction. Since the use of student voice had very little risk with great potential, a timeline was created to encourage full-diffusion of the practice by the 2018-2019 school year. Even though all teachers will be asked to use student feedback to improve instruction, there will be no mandate on what that looks like in each classroom or how frequently student feedback should be gathered. The District's leaders realized that time was important for teachers to embrace the inclusion of student voices into their instructional practices. As Admin B surmised, student voice is best when "you go slow to go fast."

Social system. Rogers (2003) defined a social system as those who found together by the sharing of a common goal. The structure of the organization can facilitate or impede the diffusion of an innovation. The culture of the District was an important factor to the success of the Student Voice Initiative. The supportive environment lent itself to have members who were willing to try new things and embrace innovative practices. Campus administrators felt supported by district leadership. Campus administrators described the district administrators as individuals who were not afraid to take risks and supported student voice by modeling it in their

practice. Campus administrators noted that the district administrators were willing to be vulnerable themselves and “pull back the curtain” in order to do what was best for the students. Classroom teachers also felt supported by campus administrators who had a “permission giving nature” if the idea was good for kids. The support of their administrators allowed them to take risks and to step out to use student voice as a tool to improve classroom instruction. The growth-mindset culture of the District and of the teachers was important to the success of the Initiative. For student voice to become embedded into the school culture, a supportive culture is essential.

Embedded in the idea of supportive leadership is trust. Teachers needed to know that their campus leadership believed in them and would stand behind them as they adopted the innovative practice. Campus leadership also trusted District administrators to do the same for them. Trust was important in all relationships, but when a practice such as student voice shifts how traditional roles are viewed and performed, it held an even greater significance. Shifting the mindset of educators to accept students in roles of shared leadership required a shift in paradigm away from the traditional school roles of principal, teachers, and students to a view of the school as a community of participants seeking the best for each other.

A positive culture of the organization is important when considering a student voice initiative. Individual members within the organization must feel supported to take risks within their classroom and know that leadership would be willing to consider new ideas presented that might be contrary to traditional practices within education. This feeling of safety comes from relationships built upon trust and are important for both educators and students within the organization.

Recommendations

The results shared in Chapter 4 provided a framework for a student voice initiative as well as insight into areas that need to be strengthened for a student voice initiative to be most successful. Recommendations for leaders considering a student voice initiative are presented through the lens of Rogers' (2003) four main elements that influence the spread of a new idea or innovative practice: student voice, communication channels, time, and a social system. These elements served as a guide to organize the suggested recommendations for an organization considering a student voice initiative. The recommendations are further delineated by the different major roles within the school organization. Following the recommendations for practical application is the recommendation for future research.

The leadership of a district is important to the success of a student voice initiative. The following recommendations are made to support the role of the district administrator:

1. Learn about student voice; the innovation itself. A district's leadership should build a knowledge base around student voice including an awareness knowledge—What is student voice? Why does student voice work?—and a “how to” knowledge from studying other student voice initiatives and published research. Rogers (2003) cautioned that “when an adequate level of ‘how to’ knowledge is not obtained prior to the adoption of an innovation, rejection and discontinuance are likely to result” (p. 173).
2. Develop communication channels. Innovative practices are diffused more quickly and have a greater chance of sustainability when an opinion leader—seen as a change agent—is connected to the innovation. Determine who in the organization will be the “face” of the student voice initiative and coordinate the communication and learning

- efforts of the district. Although the superintendent, as visionary leader, may not be the “face” of the student voice initiative, he or she plays a major role in developing the learning culture and should be a change agent within the organization (Devono & Price, 2012). Rogers (2003) identified diffusion of innovation communication channels as mass media and interpersonal communication. Although many diffusions are successful beginning with a mass media communication, it is recommended the diffusion of a student voice initiative begin with interpersonal communication and then followed by a mass communication effort. Select a small group of early adopters within the district—ensuring adequate campus representation—who are respected by their peers. Communicate the student voice initiative directly with this cohort and allow for small group collaborations and conversations around the innovation. Trickle-down theory suggests that the early-majority learn of the early adopters’ personal experiences with an innovation and will then follow suit. This helps spread the innovative practice throughout the educators who are most interested in student voice. After building a knowledge base and growing the student voice practices amongst early adopters in the organization, develop a mass communication effort. Rogers (2003) contended that larger-scale communications were effective at creating a knowledge of an innovation, quickly spreading information about the practice, and changing weakly held educator beliefs.
3. Devote time to student voice. In order to ensure that student voice is used with fidelity and in ways that benefit teachers and students, it takes time. Be patient with the process and allow for the organic diffusion of the innovation throughout the organization. If student voice is quickly mandated, educators may ask for voice from

- their students out of compliance and may jeopardize the success of the initiative. A district's leadership should also devote time to their learning about student voice as well as campus administrators' learning. The majority of the actual practice of capturing student voice happens on the campus and in the classrooms. It is important for campus administrators to have time to learn about student voice and collaborate with their peers in order to support the best practices of student voice on their respective campuses. There needs to be a continual cycle of learning where district administrators continue to grow administrator practice while reflecting on campus-based student voice practices, thus redefining the initiative. Redefining occurs when the innovation is re-invented to best meet the district's needs and structure more closely, and when the district's structure is modified to better fit the innovation (Rogers, 2003). Each of these critical components takes time, but it is time well spent if it supports the overall successful implementation of a student voice practice.
4. Develop the culture. The culture of the district starts with the district's leadership. The district's leadership should model student voice practices in their work with campus administrators and other stakeholders. This creates a culture of "all-in-this-together" and helps ensure that campus administrators and educators know that they will be supported as they transform their current practices. This sense of support stems from the trust they have in the district leadership because they have seen them model the student voice practices and be vulnerable to the outcomes. Although it is important for the district leaders to exercise caution in mandating student voice practices, accountability and continual reinforcement should be present within the

organization to continue moving the student voice practices forward throughout the organization.

The leadership of the campus administration is also vital to the success of a student voice initiative and similar in many ways to those of the district administrators. The following recommendations are made to support the role of the campus administrator:

1. Learn about student voice; the innovation itself. The campus administrator should build a knowledge base around student voice including an awareness knowledge and a “how to” knowledge from studying other student voice initiatives and published research. Although it is important for campus administrators to understand how to implement student voice in the classroom in order to support classroom teachers, they should also learn how to leverage student voice at the campus level.
2. Develop communication channels. Ensure the campus has representation in the cohorts of early adopters within the district. The teachers selected to participate should be respected by their peers and possess a growth mindset; willing to take risks and be vulnerable with others. Create a system for the early adopters to share about their student voice practice and the impact it is having on their classroom instruction. Trickle-down theory suggests that the early-majority learn of the early adopters’ personal experiences with an innovation and will then follow suit. Student voice should be communicated regularly through mass communication efforts as well as interpersonal relationships. These opportunities should exist at the campus level as well as professional learning communities to allow for interpersonal communication to diffuse the practice of student voice. The early majority will often embrace an innovation after hearing of the innovation. However, the late majority and laggards

- often require interpersonal communication to adopt an innovative practice. Develop a plan to allow for campus early adopters to meet with the late majority to personally share of their experiences with student voice. When change agents directly contact those in the late majority and share an innovation, that meets a need for late adopters, and the response has often been encouraging (Rogers, 2003). Discussing and sharing student voice practices regularly at all levels will help establish student voice as a method to improve instruction and increase its sustainability as an initiative on the campus.
3. Devote time to student voice. In order to ensure that student voice is used with fidelity and in ways that benefit teachers and students, it takes time. Be patient with the process and allow for the organic diffusion of the innovation throughout the campus. The campus' leadership should devote time to their learning about student voice as well as teacher learning. It is important for campus administrators to have time to learn about student voice and collaborate with their peers in order to support best practices of student voice on their respective campuses. Next, campus leadership should ensure teachers have adequate time to collaborate and learn about student voice practices. Student voice can be captured and utilized in numerous ways and teachers need time to collaborate and share successes, issues, and brainstorm additional methods of participation. It is also important for campus administrators to support classroom teachers in finding time for creative student voice practices. Many practices may take time outside of the traditional classroom instruction block of time and need the support of administrators to think creatively on how they can meet with students during non-traditional blocks of time. Each of these critical components

- takes time, but it is time well spent if it supports the overall successful implementation of a student voice practice.
4. Develop the culture. The culture of the campus starts with the campus' leadership. The campus' leadership should model student voice practices in their work with teachers and students. When leadership models student voice practices and being vulnerable to their outcomes, it creates of a culture of "all-in-this-together" which helps teachers feel supported as they transform their current practices. It is important for the campus to exercise caution in mandating the specifics of how student voice will look in each classroom; teachers need to have the flexibility to use student voice in a way that is most effective for themselves and their students. Without mandating the specifics, administrators can hold teachers accountable by continuing to talk about student voice in casual conversations and professional learning opportunities and model it in their administrator practices. Campus administrators need to make student voice appealing over the long run for it to become routinized; when an innovation becomes such a part of the culture that it loses its separate identity (Rogers, 2003).

Although leadership may set the tone and provide support for student voice, in order for student voice to improve classroom instruction, the majority of the responsibility falls on the classroom teacher and students. The following recommendations are made to support the role of the classroom teacher and students:

1. Learn about student voice; the innovation itself. It is important for the teachers who are implementing a student voice initiative to understand the "why" of student voice and the positive impact it can have on the classroom culture and the student when

- implemented well. It is also important for teachers to understand the possible negative outcomes student voice could have if it is not implemented well. Next, teachers must build a knowledge base of the “how-to” of student voice. Student voice, in and of itself, can appear quite simple—ask students about their learning preferences and then change instruction accordingly. However, there are many nuances of a successful student voice implementation that must be learned and considered. It is easy for misconceptions to arise without a foundational knowledge of the practice. Consider exploring the topic of student voice collaboratively between teacher and student so both parties have a foundational knowledge so they can collaboratively design student voice norms and practices that would be most effective to improve instruction.
2. Develop communication channels. Student voice may be a new concept to both the students in the classroom and their parents. The teacher must also determine when they will capture student feedback in their instructional day and how they would prefer students to communicate their learning needs. It is beneficial for students to know when their voice is welcome and how it should be heard. Parent communication should also be considered. Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2015) identified parental engagement as a factor that could impact a student voice initiative. Parents need to be educated to understand the student voice initiative and the impact it can have on the classroom instruction and the student so they can support the development of an effective voice in their child at home.
 3. Devote time to student voice. Just as administrators must be patient with the process of student voice, teachers must also be patient. It takes practice for educators to learn

how to ask the correct questions and for students to learn how to give specific constructive feedback. Teachers must also take the time to analyze the student feedback and create an action plan to address the recommendations. Although student voice implementation takes time, it has proven to be time well spent that can impact instruction and learning.

4. Develop the culture. Student voice is most successful where there is a trusting relationship. Teachers need to provide a classroom culture where students feel safe in voicing their thoughts and know that their teacher has their best interest at heart. There must also be a culture of respect; teachers should respect that students have valid opinions in regards to learning and students must be respectful in the feedback they give teachers. Time should be allotted to teach students how to give strong feedback that is solution and results driven.

When the school leaders strategically plan according to the recommendations for the specific roles within the learning organization, the initiative should have a faster implementation with an increased chance for sustainability leading to routinizing of student voice where it is no longer viewed as an initiative, but simply part of the school's learning culture.

Recommendations for future research. There is a large body of research on student voice and the impact it has on learning. In this study, I sought to provide a model of student voice implementation that others in similar contexts could follow. My findings in this research identified implications for future student voice research.

Expansion of the current study. The findings of this study are based on data collected from secondary campuses in one school district. It could be expanded in a variety of ways. One possibility for future research would be to broaden the study to include elementary teachers.

Although Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 were included in the District's Student Voice Initiative, this research study focused on secondary educators only. While I believe the diffusion of the innovative practice throughout the District would remain the same at the organizational level, the perspectives of elementary teachers could provide depth to the findings as well as possibly identify different outcomes due to the attitudes and ability levels of a different student population.

Longitudinal research possibilities. This current study could be extended to include a longitudinal approach to this research. There is limited research on how to lead a student voice initiative from implementation to a point of full diffusion and sustainability. The District included in this study was completing its third year of the initiative and hopeful to reach full diffusion during the 2018-2019 school year. Oftentimes, when initiatives reach a point of full diffusion and are not at the forefront of conversations, people assume it is no longer a practice and it may fall to the wayside. Further research on how to reach the point of routinized practices with full sustainability is needed to ensure that the transformative practice of using student voice to improve instruction remains an active practice in the learning organization.

Follow-up of the current study. Much of the student voice research examined student voice through the lens of giving students a voice through school government. Few studies were identified that focused on the use of student voice to improve instruction. A deeper look at this practice and the specific connection it has to overall improved student achievement would be an asset to the educational community.

In addition, the research participants identified a need for additional educator learning on the topic of student voice. Specific educator skills are critical to the successful implementation of student voice (Mitra et al., 2012). A culture of trust is necessary in the classroom. Educators

need to be taught how to listen and respond to student voice as well as how to structure the changing roles of the teacher and student. Currently, there is limited research or material on teaching the specific skills needed for educators to work in partnership with students. In addition, there is a need to better understand how school leadership can best support the important work of classroom teachers working in partnership with their students.

Finally, schools cannot expect students to come into the new partnership between teachers and students and know how to use their voice to improve instruction. There is a gap in research in how to support the student during the changing of their classroom roles. A study on what skills are missing from students and how to grow those skills are important to the sustainability of a student voice initiative. Without improved teacher and student practices around student voice, both parties could become disenchanted and frustrated with the practice and impact the success of the student voice initiative.

Summary

In 2015, I was first introduced to the concept of student voice. Although I was unfamiliar with the name, I was not unfamiliar with the concept of asking students about how they best learn and then partnering with them to design engaging work. I only wish I knew of the powerful difference partnering with students and providing opportunities for them to fully share in the leadership of the classroom could make for both educators and students while I was still a classroom teacher. However, at the time I was introduced to the idea of student voice, I was months away from beginning a doctoral program in Educational Leadership and was intrigued by the implications of such a practice on educational leaders and wondered how this transformative practice could be diffused throughout an organization.

As I began to explore the topic of student voice, I found that there was plenty of research on the importance of student voice in the lives of students (Beaudoin, 2005; Freire, 1987; Young & Sazama, 2006) and the impact on practice and culture at the classroom and campus level (Flutter & Rudduck, 2006; Mitra, 2004, 2008; Rudduck, 2007, Young & Sazama, 2006). However, there was little research on (a) how to implement, diffuse, and sustain the use of student voice at the district level and (b) the role school leadership plays in the process (Jobs for the Future, 2012; Libby et al., 2005; Matthews, 2010; Mitra et al., 2012; Pautsch, 2010). There was a need for a model of district wide implementation of student voice to improve instruction that educational leaders could follow to begin the implementation of a student voice initiative in their schools.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and disseminate one student voice initiative in a suburban school district in the state of Texas. In this study, I provided a historical narrative of the first 3 years of the initiative within the District. It was important to start with a definition of student voice. Although there were many ways to define student voice, “improving instruction through student feedback” captured both listening to and acting on student voice while allowing for varying methods of implementation for each educator.

Educators used student voice in varying ways throughout the District. The District’s leadership modeled student voice in their practices and supported the initiative by providing a framework and resources for early adoption of the practice. Campus administrators also used student voice practices. The most commonly used method was student focus groups to gain insight on campus practices. Through focus groups and other practices, campus administrators were modeling student voice participation methods. This was an important component of the Initiative. Campus administrators mentioned the importance of district administrators modeling

student voice and teachers mentioned the importance of campus administrators modeling student voice.

The use of teacher practices with student voice ranged from gathering student feedback through surveys or classroom conversations to co-designing lessons with students. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) created a spectrum of student voice which placed most of the common practices within the district toward the left side of the spectrum in the forms of expression, consultation, and partnership. There were instances of student voice in the forms of activism and leadership, but increasing these levels of student participation provided a growth opportunity for teacher practice.

The use of student voice to improve instruction had an overall positive impact on the District. The most identified positive impacts from student voice were improved classroom and campus culture by building stronger relationships, increased student engagement and student agency, and increased teacher efficacy. However, to avoid possible negative impacts to students, educators should have considered the needs of all students to ensure there were appropriate methods for all students to have a voice. Educators and students needed learning opportunities on how to partner together, how to give constructive feedback, and how to use the data gathered from student voice practices to improve the classroom learning.

The goal of the student voice initiative was to have 100% of district educators using student voice to improve instruction during the 2018-2019 school year. The District's leadership saw such success with their initiative because they took the time for District leadership to understand the practice of student voice and provided a definition of what it meant to use student voice. The leadership of the Student Voice Initiative communicated first to early adopters who were able to embrace the transformational practice and integrate it into their teaching practices.

Leadership was intentional in providing learning opportunities for those who were interested in learning more about student voice and then spread the message of the importance of student voice on to all campuses and educators. The District's leadership understood the importance of being patient and supportive during this transformational process. They regularly shared student voice practices through multiple channels in order to hold educators accountable to implementing student voice.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reaffirmed that “people live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others” (p. xxvi). The stories of educators within the District helped to educate those within the District, as they regularly re-defined their student voice practice while also helping others by providing a district-wide model of a student voice initiative focused on using student feedback to improve instruction. It was a joy to learn alongside the educators in the District as they explored and grew their student voice practice and shared their story to support the transformation of the practices of educators throughout the nation.

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Appendix A: Secondary Teacher Focus Group Interview Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and disseminate the school district's student voice initiative. In this study, I will provide a historical narrative of the first three-years of the initiative, highlight successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and make suggestions that may provide support for similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives. From the lessons the school district learned through this initiative, I hope to provide a portrait that will be useful to other districts.

The focus group session will begin by assuring that the participant's identity will remain confidential. The interviewer will inform participants that the session is being audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and can be paused at any time. The interviewer will identify participants by their role and a letter (Teacher A, etc.), the grade-level in which they teach, their years of experience, and the number of years they have been a part of the student voice initiative. However, participants will only be given a letter with which to identify themselves when responding so they can be identified in the transcription process.

Table A1

Demographics of Secondary Teacher Focus Group

| Role | Years in education | Years of district student voice participation |
|-----------|--------------------|---|
| Teacher A | 11 | 2 |
| Teacher B | 6 | 3 |
| Teacher C | 19 | 3 |
| Teacher D | 15 | 2 |

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of teacher practice with student voice:

1. How do you define student voice? (R1)

2. What are some ways you have used student voice in your classroom? (R2)
 - a. How has your implementation changed over time?
 - b. What methods of student voice do you believe had the most impact on your instruction? Why?
 - c. What methods of student voice were the most challenging to implement?
 - d. How do you evaluate and act on the feedback received from students?
 - i. How do you respond to negative feedback?
 - ii. How do you respond to feedback that you believe would not improve instruction?
3. What is a practice that has been part of your student voice implementation that you will carry forward in your teaching practice with or without a district student voice focus? (R2)
4. What classroom level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R2)
5. How do you measure the effectiveness of student voice? (R3)
6. What impact has allowing student voice had on your instruction and the learning in the classroom? (R3)
7. What impact has allowing voice had on your students? This can include any component of the whole child. (R3)
 - a. If negatives are not addressed: What negative student outcomes came from using student voice in the classroom?
8. What advice would you give a teacher considering student voice for the first time? (R4)

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of district and campus level of supports for implementing student voice:

1. How does your district support student voice implementation? At this time, concentrate your responses at the district level. We will discuss campus level in our next question.
(R2)
 - a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
2. How does your campus support student voice implementation? (R2)
 - a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
3. What campus and district level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R3)
4. What is one thing you wished your district level administrators better understood about implementing student voice? (R4)
5. What is one thing you wished your campus level administrators better understood about implementing student voice? (R4)
6. What advice would you give an administrator considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
7. What is the best thing about the school district's student voice initiative that you believe another district would want to know when considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
 - a. What is an issue that you believe another district would want to consider before implementing a student voice initiative?

Conclusion:

1. Is there a student voice practice that you would like to implement but have not had the opportunity to do so? (R4)
2. Is there anything about the use of student voice and the District's goal of 100% of teachers using student voice to improve instruction that you want to share that did not fit within our conversation so far? (R4)

Appendix B: Secondary Administrator Focus Group Interview Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and disseminate the school district's student voice initiative. In this study, I will provide a historical narrative of the first three years of the initiative, highlight successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and make suggestions that may provide support for similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives. From the lessons the school district learned through this initiative, I hope to provide a portrait that will be useful to other districts.

The focus group session will begin by assuring that the participant's identity will remain confidential. The interviewer will inform participants that the session is being audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and can be paused at any time. The interviewer will identify participants by their role and a letter (Teacher A, Administrator B, etc.), the grade-level in which they lead, their years of experience, and the number of years they have been a part of the student voice initiative. However, the interviewer will only give participants a letter with which to identify themselves when responding so they can be identified in the transcription process.

Table B1

Demographics of Secondary Administrator Focus Group

| Role | Years in education | Years of district student voice participation |
|---------|--------------------|---|
| Admin A | 21 | 4 |
| Admin B | 17 | 2 |
| Admin C | 23 | 3 |
| Admin D | 13 | 2 |
| Admin E | 20 | 2 |
| Admin F | 20 | 4 |
| Admin G | 14 | 2 |
| Admin H | 10 | 1 |
| Admin J | 20 | 2 |
| Admin K | 26 | 3 |

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of educator practice with student voice:

1. How do you define student voice? (R1)
2. What are some ways you have used student voice in your leadership? (R2)
3. What methods of student voice do you believe had the most impact on your campus and classroom instruction? Why? (R2)
 - a. What methods of student voice were the most challenging to implement?
 - b. How do you evaluate and act on the feedback received from students?
 - i. How do you respond to negative feedback?
 - ii. How do you respond to feedback that you believe would not improve instruction?
4. What is a practice that has been part of your student voice implementation that you will carry forward in your leadership methods with or without a district student voice focus? (R2)
5. What classroom level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R2)
6. How do you measure the effectiveness of student voice? (R3)
7. What impact has allowing student voice had on your campus? (R3)

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of district and campus level of supports for implementing student voice:

1. How does your district support student voice implementation? At this time, focus your responses at the district level. We will discuss campus level in our next question. (R2)

- a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
2. How does your campus support student voice implementation? (R2)
 - a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
 3. What campus and district level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R4)
 4. What is one thing you wished your district level administrators better understood about implementing student voice? (R4)
 5. What advice would you give an educational leader considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
 6. What is something about the school district's student voice initiative that you believe another district would want to know when considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
 - a. What is an issue that you believe another district would want to consider before implementing a student voice initiative?

Conclusion:

1. What is something you would do differently if starting over leading a student voice initiative on a campus? (R4)

Appendix C: Secondary Curriculum and Instruction Focus Group Interview Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and disseminate the school district's student voice initiative. In this study, I will provide a historical narrative of the first three years of the initiative, highlight successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and make suggestions that may provide support for similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives. From the lessons the school district learned through this initiative, I hope to provide a portrait that will be useful to other districts.

The focus group session will begin by assuring that the participant's identity will remain confidential. The interviewer will inform participants that the session is being audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and can be paused at any time. The interviewer will identify participants by their role and a letter (C&I A, C&I B, etc.) the grade-level in which they lead, their years of experience, and the number of years they have been a part of the student voice initiative.

Table C1

Secondary Curriculum and Instruction Focus Group

| Role | Years in education | Years of district student voice participation |
|-------|--------------------|---|
| C&I A | 11 | 2 |
| C&I B | 18 | 3 |
| C&I C | 10 | 3 |
| C&I D | 15 | 2 |
| C&I E | 16 | 2 |
| C&I F | 18 | 3 |

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of educator practice with student voice:

1. How do you define student voice? (R1)

2. What sparked your initial interest in student voice? (R2)
3. What are some ways you see student voice used in the classrooms on your campus? (R2)
4. What are some ways you have used student voice in your leadership? (R2)
5. What methods of student voice do you believe had the most impact on your campus and classroom instruction? Why? (R2)
 - a. What methods of student voice were the most challenging to implement?
 - b. How do you evaluate and act on the feedback received from students?
 - i. How do you respond to negative feedback?
 - ii. How do you respond to feedback that you believe would not improve instruction?
6. What is a practice that has been part of your student voice implementation that you will carry forward in your leadership methods with or without a district student voice focus? (R2)
7. What classroom level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R2)
8. How do you measure the effectiveness of student voice? (R3)
9. What impact has allowing student voice had on your campus? (R3)

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of district and campus level of supports for implementing student voice:

1. How does your district support student voice implementation? At this time, focus your responses at the district level. We will discuss campus level in our next question. (R2)

- a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
2. How does your campus support student voice implementation? (R2)
 - a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
3. What campus and district level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R4)
4. What is one thing you wished your district level administrators better understood about implementing student voice? (R4)
5. What advice would you give an educational leader considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
6. What is something about the school district's student voice initiative that you believe another district would want to know when considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
 - a. What is an issue that you believe another district would want to consider before implementing a student voice initiative?

Conclusion:

1. What is something you would do differently if starting over leading a student voice initiative on a campus? (R4)
2. Is there anything about the use of student voice and the District's goal of 100% of teachers using student voice to improve instruction that you want to share that did not fit within our conversation so far? If so, what? (R4)

Appendix D: Narrative Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and disseminate the school district's student voice initiative. In this study, I will provide a historical narrative of the first three years of the initiative, highlight successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and make suggestions that may provide support for similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives. From the lessons the school district learned through this initiative, I hope to provide a portrait that will be useful to other districts.

The narrative session will begin by assuring that the participant's identity will remain confidential. The interviewer will inform participants that the session is being audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and can be paused at any time. The interviewer will identify participants by a role and number, the grade-level in which they work, the number of years of experience in education, and the number of years they have participated in the student voice initiative. For the narrative interview, the interviewer will give the educators a prompt. Upon hearing the prompt, participants may ask clarifying questions before beginning, however, the interviewer will not ask any questions during the narrative.

Table D1

Demographics of Narrative Interview Participants

| Role | Years in education | Years of district student voice participation |
|-----------------|--------------------|---|
| Teacher 1 | 17 | 3 |
| Teacher 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Teacher 3 | 7 | 3 |
| Teacher 4 | 7 | 3 |
| Teacher 5 | 1 | 1 |
| C&I 1 | 7 | 3 |
| C&I 2 | 11 | 3 |
| Admin 1 | 15 | 3 |
| Admin 2 | 12 | 3 |
| Central Admin 1 | 21 | 4 |
| Superintendent | 34 | 4 |

Narrative Prompt: Tell the story of your experience within your current school district of using student voice as a tool to improve instruction. Include from the time you first used student voice to where you are now. Feel free to share specific experiences, both positive and negative.

Appendix E: Secondary Teacher Individual Interview Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and disseminate the school district's student voice initiative. In this study, I will provide a historical narrative of the first three years of the initiative, highlight successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and make suggestions that may provide support for similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives. From the lessons the school district learned through this initiative, I hope to provide a portrait that will be useful to other districts.

The individual interview will be given to the same participants who participated in the narrative interview. Interview questions may be removed and/or additional questions may be further developed as a result of the participants' narratives. The interview session will begin by assuring the participant that his/her identity will remain confidential. The interviewer will inform the participant that the session is being audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and can be paused at any time. The interviewer will identify the participant by the same method used in the narrative interview.

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of teacher practice with student voice:

1. How do you define student voice? (R1)
2. What are some ways you have used student voice in your classroom? (R2)
 - a. How has your implementation changed over time?
 - b. What methods of student voice do you believe had the most impact on your instruction? Why?
 - c. What methods of student voice were the most challenging to implement?
 - d. How do you evaluate and act on the feedback received from students?

- i. How do you respond to negative feedback?
 - ii. How do you respond to feedback that you believe would not improve instruction?
3. What is a practice that has been part of your student voice implementation that you will carry forward in your teaching practice with or without a district student voice focus?
(R2)
4. How do you measure the effectiveness of student voice? (R3)
5. What classroom level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R2)
6. What impact has allowing student voice had on your instruction and the learning in the classroom? (R3)
7. What impact has allowing voice had on your students? This can include any component of the whole child. (R3)
 - a. If negatives are not addressed: What negative student outcomes came from using student voice in the classroom?
8. What advice would you give a teacher considering student voice for the first time? (R4)

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of district and campus level of supports for implementing student voice:

1. How does your district support student voice implementation? At this time, concentrate your responses at the district level. We will discuss campus level in our next question.
(R2)

- a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
2. How does your campus support student voice implementation? (R2)
 - a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
3. What campus and district level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R4)
4. What is one thing you wished your district level administrators better understood about implementing student voice? (R4)
5. What is one thing you wished your campus level administrators better understood about implementing student voice? (R4)
6. What advice would you give an administrator considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
7. What is the best thing about the school district's student voice initiative that you believe another district would want to know when considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
 - a. What is an issue that you believe another district would want to consider before implementing a student voice initiative?

Concluding Questions:

1. Is there a student voice practice that you would like to implement but have not had the opportunity to do so? (R4)

2. Is there anything about the use of student voice and the District's goal of 100% of teachers using student voice to improve instruction that you want to share that did not fit within our conversation so far? (R4)

Appendix F: Secondary Administrator Individual Interview Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and disseminate the school district's student voice initiative. In this study, I will provide a historical narrative of the first three years of the initiative, highlight successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and make suggestions that may provide support for similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives. From the lessons the school district learned through this initiative, I hope to provide a portrait that will be useful to other districts.

The individual interview will be given to same participants who participated in the narrative interview. Interview questions may be removed and/or additional questions may be further developed as a result of the participants' narratives. The interview session will begin by assuring the participant that his/her identity will remain confidential. The interviewer will inform the participant that the session is being audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and can be paused at any time. The interviewer will identify the participant by the same method used in the narrative interview.

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of administrator practice with student voice:

1. How do you define student voice? (R1)
2. What are some ways you have used student voice in your leadership? (R2)
 - a. What methods of student voice do you believe had the most impact on your campus and classroom instruction? Why?
 - b. What methods of student voice were the most challenging to implement?
3. What is a practice that has been part of your student voice implementation that you will carry forward in your practice with or without a district student voice initiative? (R2)

4. What classroom level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R2)
5. How do you measure the effectiveness of student voice? (R3)
6. What impact has allowing student voice had on your campus? (R3)

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of district and campus level of supports for implementing student voice:

1. How does your district support student voice implementation? (R2)
 - a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
2. What campus and district level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R4)
3. What is one thing you wished your district level administrators better understood about implementing student voice? (R4)
4. What advice would you give an educational leader considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
5. What is the best thing about the school district's student voice initiative that you believe another district would want to know when considering a student voice initiative? (R4)
 - a. What is something that you believe another district would want to consider before implementing a student voice initiative? (R4)

Conclusion:

1. What is something you would do differently if starting over leading a student voice initiative on a campus? (R4)
2. Is there anything about the use of student voice and the District's goal of 100% of teachers using student voice to improve instruction that you want to share that did not fit within our conversation so far? If so, what? (R4)

Appendix G: Centrally-Deployed Educator Individual Interview Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and disseminate the school district's student voice initiative. In this study, I will provide a historical narrative of the first three years of the initiative, highlight successes and issues inherent in the implementation, and make suggestions that may provide support for similar contexts wishing to implement student voice initiatives. From the lessons the school district learned through this initiative, I hope to provide a portrait that will be useful to other districts.

The individual interview will be given to same participants who participated in the narrative interview. Interview questions may be removed and/or additional questions may be further developed as a result of the participants' narratives. The interview session will begin by assuring the participant that his/her identity will remain confidential. The interviewer will inform the participant that the session is being audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and can be paused at any time. The interviewer will identify the participant by the same method used in the narrative interview.

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of centrally deployed educators' practice with student voice:

1. How do you define student voice? (R1)
2. What are some ways you have used student voice in your role? (R2)
 - a. What methods of student voice do you believe had the most impact on instruction? Why?
 - b. What methods of student voice were the most challenging to implement?
 - c. How do you evaluate and act on the feedback received from students?
 - i. How do you respond to negative feedback?

- ii. How do you respond to feedback that you believe would not improve instruction?
- 3. What is a practice that has been part of your student voice implementation that you will carry forward in your work with or without a district student voice focus? (R2)
- 4. How do you measure the effectiveness of student voice? (R3)
- 5. What constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R2)
- 6. What impact has allowing student voice had on your practice? (R3)
- 7. What impact has allowing voice had on the students you worked alongside? This can include any component of the whole child. (R3)
 - a. If negatives are not addressed: What negative student outcomes came from using student voice in the classroom?

The intent of the following questions is to gain a better understanding of the school district's level of support for implementing student voice:

- 1. How does your district support student voice implementation? (R2)
 - a. If professional development is not addressed: What learning opportunities were provided at the district level to help you grow your student voice understanding and practice?
- 2. What campus and district level constraints hinder student voice from being as effective as it could be in improving classroom instruction? (R2)
- 3. What advice would you give an administrator considering a student voice initiative? (R3)
- 4. What is the best thing about the school district's student voice initiative that you believe another district would want to know when considering a student voice initiative? (R3)

- a. What is an issue that you believe another district would want to consider before implementing a student voice initiative?

Conclusion:

1. Is there a student voice practice that you would like to implement but have not had the opportunity to do so, and if so, what? (R4)
2. What is something you would do differently if starting over with the student voice initiative? (R4)
3. Is there anything about the use of student voice and the District's goal of 100% of teachers using student voice to improve instruction that you want to share that did not fit within our conversation so far? If so, what? (R4)

Appendix H: Internal Review Board Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



February 1, 2018

Suzanne Barker

Department of Educational Leadership

Dear Suzanne,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled Student Voice to Improve Instruction: Leading Transformation of a School System

was approved by expedited review (46.110(b)(1) category 6&) on 02/01/2018 for a period of N/A (IRB # 17-114). The expiration date for this study is N/A . If you intend to continue the study beyond this date, please submit the [Continuing Review Form](#) at least 30 days, but no more than 45 days, prior to the expiration date. Upon completion of this study, please submit the [Inactivation Request Form](#) within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the [Study Amendment Request Form](#).

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the [Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form](#).

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix I: Student Voice Survey Instrument

The following questions were sent via email to all secondary educators using a Google Form to collect the data. This survey was sent from a member of the central administration and is included as archival data.

- How do you define student voice? (R1)
- What are some ways you have used student voice in the classroom? (R2)
- Of the following three levels of student voice participation, which do you use most often? (R2)
 - Students being heard
 - Students collaborating with adults
 - Students building capacity for leadership
- When it comes to listening to students' perspectives,
 - I think that my experience is the most critical factor in determining student learning and work.
 - I occasionally ask what students think, but I have the final say in the classroom learning and work.
 - I frequently ask for students' perspectives, and I often utilize the feedback they provide.
 - Students and I work together regularly to design classroom learning. (R2)
- What impact has the use of student voice had on your instruction? (R3)
- What impact has the use of student voice had on your students? (R3)
- I believe that implementing student voice initiatives takes a reasonable amount of time in comparison to the benefit derived from the practice. (1. Strongly Agree, 2. Agree, 3. Neutral, 4. Disagree, 5. Strongly Disagree)
- What are some issues/concerns you have with student voice? (R4)
- I have had enough professional development to implement student voice to improve instruction. (1. Strongly Agree, 2. Agree, 3. Neutral, 4. Disagree, 5. Strongly Disagree)
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us as it pertains to student voice? (R4)

Appendix J: Priori Code Book

Theory of Student Voice (Why)

- Decision-making (normative)
- Developmental (becoming adults)
- Student centered (educational)
- Relevancy (relevance)
- Social/emotional

Methods of Student Voice Participation (How)

- Survey
- Conversation
- Feedback
- Focus Group
- Collaboration (co-)
- Follow through

Outcomes of Student Voice (What)

- Agency (is the action from empowerment)
- Empower (political) (the feeling that could lead to agency)
- Choice
- Ownership
- Engagement
- Relationship
- Leadership (students developing)
- Culture
- Improved Instruction
- Teacher Engagement

Learning About Student Voice

- Book Study
- Instructional Coaching
- Teacher to Teacher Modeling/Collaborating
- Cohort of teachers
- Campus Based Professional Development

Leadership

- Shared
- Transformational
- Supportive
- Modeling

Issues of Student Voice

- Misconceptions
 - Students have control

- Voice is always welcome
- Surveys only
- Expression only
- choice=voice
- Takes a lot of time
- Fear
- Mindset
- External Constraints
 - Time
 - Curriculum
- Teacher Lack of understanding
- Student Lack of understanding
- Giving up levels of control

Next Steps of Student Voice

- Need for Learning
- Teacher support
- Higher on Continuum
- Menu of Options
- Communication
- Late adopters
- Full buy-in for adopters

Appendix K: Campus Inventory of Student Voice Practices

Student Voice - Inventory of Campus Practices

Please list the name and grade level of teachers on your campus who are participating in a variety of student voice opportunities.

| <u>Student Surveys</u> | <u>Student Lesson Design</u> | <u>Student Advisory Panels</u> | <u>ePortfolio/PLPs</u> | <u>Student Voice Book Study</u> | <u>Other Student Voice tools used on campus</u> |
|--|---|---|--|---|--|
| <p>Teachers are collecting student voice using student surveys in some format at multiple intervals throughout the year.</p> <p>List the names of teachers who are using this practice at least 2x per year.</p> | <p>Teachers are collaborating with students to analyze TEKS and plans for instruction.</p> <p>List the names of teachers who are using this practice.</p> | <p>Campus staff members are meeting with groups of students to collect input about problems, issues, and or enhancements to the campus.</p> <p>List the types of panels being used and the person/s responsible for them.</p> | <p>Teachers use students' Personalized Learning Plan goals as a source of student voice insights.</p> <p>List the names of teachers who are actively using this information to derive insights from students</p> | <p>Teachers are participating in a book study of Student Voice on your campus.</p> <p>List the names of teachers who are reading <i>Student Voice: The Instrument of Change</i> together.</p> | <p>List any other examples of student voice being utilized to guide decision making on campus.</p> |

Appendix L: Permission to Use Spectrum of Student Voice Figure



Suzanne Barker

Spectrum of Student Voice

Eric Toshalis <[redacted]>
To: Suzanne Barker <[redacted]>

Fri, Jun 22, 2018 at 10:09 PM

Hi Suzanne —

Thanks for reaching out, and also thank you for using the spectrum. We're always delighted to see it used/applied/adapted. Please feel free to use whatever image you would like from the resources we've provided online and cite it as you normally would in an academic publication.

Many thanks,

— Eric

Eric Toshalis

Research Director

[Student-Centered Learning](#)[Research Collaborative](#)[Jobs for the Future](#)

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