FROM LISTENING TO EMPOWERING: A STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT VOICE IN CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

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PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT VOICE IN CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

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The purpose of this exploratory study was to discover the meaning that high school principals ascribe to the phenomenon of student voice and how they perceive its role in transforming instruction. Student voice is the term associated with considering students as active participants in educational decision making and change. Giving students choice and control in their education has been linked to increased motivation, engagement, and student achievement. Therefore, providing opportunities for student voice may be an effective approach to transforming instruction in schools of the 21st century. Contemporary accountability movements often target instruction as a way to improve student achievement, yet studies of the effects of student voice on improving pedagogy are few. A need exists to study student voice by exploring how it is perceived and practiced in high school classrooms.

Eight high school principals located in western Pennsylvania participated in this study. A series of three interviews was used to place the participant's experience in context and provide insight into experiences that may have influenced his or her understanding of student voice. Inductive and deductive methods of data analysis were used to identify themes related to the principals' beliefs about the connection between student voice and effective instruction. The

findings show that principals' understanding of student voice was more complex than the literature indicated. However, a difference was identified between what principals perceived as student voice and how it was practiced. In addition, principals identified that often their "best" teachers do not use student voice practices. Barriers to student voice included accountability movements, fear of vulnerability, and difficulty shifting traditional roles of students and teachers. The need for additional training to increase the presence of student voice was also identified. These findings have notable policy and practice implications. Of most note, is the connection between student voice and Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* (2013) used to evaluate instruction in the *Teacher Effectiveness System* adopted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Ultimately this study found that principals believed student voice was important to effective instruction, but encouraging student voice was often difficult in environments influenced by mandates of current educational policy.

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PREFACE

There are many people who have contributed to the completion of this dissertation and to whom I owe my sincere words of thanks and appreciation. I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Mary Margaret Kerr as well the members of my committee, Dr. R. Gerard Longo, Dr. Michael Gunzenhauser, and Dr. Charlene Trovato for challenging my thinking, offering suggestions and expertise, and supporting my efforts along the way. It was truly an honor to work with this talented group of scholars. I would like to thank my family for believing in me and encouraging me to pursue this degree along with many other important endeavors throughout my life. I would also like to thank the principals who participated in this study. They willingly gave their time at the busiest part of the school year. I was impressed and humbled by each of them. Finally, I would like to thank my friends, colleagues, and mentors for continually inspiring me to persevere throughout this journey.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

My interest in student voice, a term used in educational research to describe the concept of considering students as active participants in the teaching and learning process, began with an experience I had with a student that profoundly changed my philosophy toward teaching and learning. As an assistant high school principal, part of my job was to address discipline issues in the school. My approach to addressing student behavior involved building relationships with students, listening to their stories, and attempting to uncover the motivation for their behaviors. I came to realize that most misbehavior was associated with a deeper issue. What I learned to appreciate was that these conversations connected me to the students, the classrooms, the teachers, and the culture of the school as I listened to the situation from the perspective of the student's own voice. I was amazed at how much I learned from the students and how little some of their teachers knew about how students perceived their classrooms.

What became most noteworthy, yet troubling, was that I often received discipline referrals on students whom I once taught. I was astonished at the behavior of some of the students whom I had known as freshman to be bright students possessing a positive outlook on learning and school. I became curious about how they could have changed so drastically during their high school experience. As juniors and seniors, some of them had transformed into cynical, unmotivated and often disruptive students who were no longer engaged in their learning.

One day I began a conversation with one of these students. I began to question him about what had caused such a drastic change in his behavior at school. What he reported in this talk was that he did not feel connected to his learning or school in any way. He expressed frustration at feeling powerless in the classroom making statements such as, "Teachers have no idea what we think and they don't really care. They don't even realize that half of the class is just going through the motions so that they don't get a bad grade, but no one is really learning anything useful." When I asked him for specific examples of what troubled him, what he would do if he could change it, and how we could make his experience better, I was amazed at his ability to provide some insightful solutions. He spoke passionately about experiences in his classrooms and offered suggestions about improving teaching practices to involve more engaging experiences that were pedagogically sound and creative. It was at that moment, I wondered to myself: *Why don't we collaborate more with students when making decisions about teaching and learning?*

This epiphany led me to begin to explore the idea of schools partnering with students in leadership and decision making. I discovered that this concept, often termed, *student voice*, was a very broad term, referring to a number of different types of activities with varying goals and rationales. As I learned more about this concept, I ultimately decided to study student voice as a way to improve instructional practices in classrooms since this seemed have a profound effect on that student's attitude towards his school experience. As I investigated further, I discovered that this aspect of student voice—teachers collaborating with students to improve instruction—is not widely researched. Therefore, for this study I chose to explore the concept of student voice as a vehicle for improving instructional practices in high school classrooms and how providing

opportunities for student voice and ownership in the educational process may be an effective approach to transforming and reimagining instruction in high schools of the 21st century.

Despite many attempts over the years to involve a variety of stakeholders in school improvement efforts, very little attention has been given to the students as equal stakeholders in this process. (Fullan, 2007; Levin, 2000; Zion, 2009). Students are rarely included in reform efforts yet a growing body of research reveals that including students in this process has the potential to transform education. The concept of including students in reform initiatives has received increased attention in educational research of the past 20 years. *Student voice* is the term most often associated with considering students as active participants in the educational process, and is frequently pursued as a potential strategy for improving the success of school reform by involving students in the process of educational decision making and change (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2004; Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). The movement toward including students assumes that young people have unique and insightful perspectives on teaching and learning that should be heard, and that students should be given opportunities to shape their own education (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2001; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Mitra, 2001). It is also linked to giving students choice and control in their educational experiences, and increasing motivation, engagement, and student achievement (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

1.1   THE ROLE OF STUDENT VOICE IN EDUCATION REFORM

The lives of high school students in the 21st century are complex, and students often carry far more responsibilities, and experience more autonomy in their home lives compared to their lives in school (Rudduck, 2007). Despite numerous reform efforts, high schools have remained

relatively unchanged especially in their traditional views of the power dynamic in schools—teachers possess and disperse the knowledge while students are the passive recipients. Rudduck (2007) attributes this in part to the idea that schools have not changed the "deep structures of schooling that hold habitual ways of seeing in place" (p. 588).

Consequently, in recent years, advocates of educational change have begun to reimagine approaches to educational reform by examining how to shift traditional structures and approach reform as a transformative process where student voice changes the way that teaching and learning are understood and implemented. Creating opportunities for students to shed their traditional roles as passive recipients in favor of a more participatory position that alters the dominant power imbalances between adults and students has emerged as a theme in reform research. Czerniawski and Kidd (2011) summarize the need for student voice as a way to transform schools of the 21st century:

> Education in the 21st century ought to involve active participation rather than passive receipt—active in the sense that knowledge is not simply transmitted to students, but explored, shared, and even produced through an academic apprenticeship. It should also be engaging and challenging, rather than merely satisfying. Learning is often a difficult and frustrating experience and we ought to foster a culture in which students demand an engaging and challenging experience. (p. xxxii-xxxiii)

Researchers are beginning to explore the ways that increasing student voice and allowing students to participate in school decision making can have a positive effect on both the students and the school (Fielding, 2006; Mitra, 2007; Rudduck, 2007; Schultz & Oyler, 2006; Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). Student voice used as a catalyst for school reform has been linked to improvements in instruction and curriculum (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007), teacher-student

relationships (Mitra, 2008a), teacher preparation (Cook-Sather, 2002), and assessment systems (Fielding, 2001).

1.1.1   The need for student voice in school reform

From the Progressive reformers of in the early 1900s to the national curriculum reform initiatives of the 1950s, and the accountability movements of the 1980s and 1990s, there is little proof that any reform movements of the past 100 years have increased student performance in any significant way (Elmore, 1996). When looking at the failures of educational reform, Elmore (1996) raises the question, "Why do good ideas about teaching and learning have so little impact on U.S. educational practice?" (p. 10).

New ideas and innovation in teaching are often evident in isolated classrooms on a small scale throughout the U.S., but a systemic problem exists in the approach to school reform in the U.S. that prevents these practices from ever being adopted on a larger scale (Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 2007; Zion, 2009). Theories of systemic change argue that change must happen across an entire system in order to be sustainable (Bateson, 1999). Joseph and Reigeluth (2010) identify six major aspects that are important for any systemic change process to succeed yet are often neglected in school reform movements: 1) broad stakeholder ownership, 2) learning organization, 3) understanding the systemic change process, 4) evolving mindsets about education, 5) systems view of education, and 6) systems design (p. 99).

Researchers of educational change have begun to embrace these ideas when approaching modern school reform, especially when it comes to creating a shared vision through involving all stakeholders in the change process. Teacher involvement and support has thus become a critical focus in sustaining educational reform. Very little attention, however, has been given to the

students as equal stakeholders (Fullan, 2007; Levin, 2000; Zion, 2009). In response to state and national educational legislation, states have implemented an assortment of initiatives designed to improve student performance and hold schools accountable for student achievement. Yet reform agendas ranging from *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) in the late 1980s to more current movements such as *No Child Left Behind*, (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) fail to consider students as participants in the process of shaping and changing education (Cook-Sather, 2006b; Fullan, 2007; Mitra, 2008). In the fourth edition of his book *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan, (2007) notes, "Little progress has been made since the first edition of this book in 1982 in treating the student as a serious member of the school." (p.171)

1.1.2   Addressing the lack of student voice in reform movements

Although accountability movements dominate educational reform in the 21st century, researchers are beginning to realize that reform must be more than simply mandating a certain policy if the desired result is to bring theory into practice on a large scale:

> It means changing the culture of classrooms, schools, districts, universities.…Neglect of the phenomenology of change—that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended—is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms. (Fullan, 2007, p. 8)

Traditionally educational reform is implemented though either a "top-down" or a "bottom-up" approach (Fullan, 2007). Top down approaches consist of mandates developed by the government or other large agencies and then implemented in smaller settings such as school districts and schools. A bottom-up approach is when individual teachers, schools, or

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departments within the school develop strategies they implement on a small scale with the hopes that others will embrace these approaches and the ideas will become wide-spread. In large-scale reform, a top-down approach is often not effective because it fails to create ownership, commitment, or clarity about the nature of the reforms, yet bottom-up change often does not produce any significant success as it often fails to expand to large-scale implementation (Fullan, 2007). Reformers are beginning to consider the importance of engaging learners and altering the power structures in the schools in order to empower all stakeholders and affect positive long-term changes (Fullan, 2007).

To achieve any significant success, Fullan (2007) suggests that modern educational reform should utilize a top-down and bottom-up strategy described as, "capacity building with a focus on results" and points to partnering with students in the reform process as way to build such capacity. This approach takes into consideration the importance of motivation and relationships that have become key factors in rethinking modern school reform. Accountability systems, however, make this task difficult as they often measure only cognitive achievement without considering how other factors such as engagement, motivation, and relationships positively affect student achievement.

1.1.3 The role of leadership in student voice reform efforts

Few research studies discuss in detail how administrative leadership affects the implementation of student voice initiatives in schools or school systems; however, some studies do speculate that strong leadership has a significant effect on sustaining student voice efforts. Mitra (2007) examined the conditions that enabled and constrained student voice efforts in high schools with such initiatives. The findings of this study indicated that administrators can play important roles

as advocates of student voice in their schools by fostering youth-adult partnerships through school-wide learning communities, buffering the initiatives from administrative bureaucracy, and building partnerships with community organizations. She also asserts that one reason that student voice initiatives thrived at some schools over others that she studied was the presence of a leader in the school who believed in the importance of student voice and encouraged these efforts (Mitra, 2007).

1.2   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Studies of high school students' perceptions about their schooling often reveal feelings of alienation, isolation, powerlessness, and disengagement (Nightingale & Wolverton, 1993; Noddings, 2005; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Disengaged students lack a meaningful connection with adults in the school, and they tend to see little relevance in their educational experiences. This lack of engagement and feeling of powerlessness has been linked to issues with student attendance, self-esteem, and academic achievement in young adults (Fullan, 2007; Rudduck, Chaplain, & Wallace, 1996). Conversely, students who feel valued, cared for, and empowered in their school communities are more likely to be engaged in school, achieve academically, and are less likely to drop out (Smyth, 2006).

Movements to address problems of student achievement have existed for over a century yet there is little proof that any reform movements of the past 100 years have increased student performance in any significant way (Elmore, 1996). Theories of systemic change argue that change must happen across an entire system (Bateson, 1999) and that it must become institutionalized—that innovation becomes integrated into the school's mission and organization

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(Seashore, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999). These concepts are often absent from the design of modern educational reform movements.

Researchers of educational change have thus begun to embrace the idea of creating a shared vision for school reform through involving all stakeholders in the change process. Teacher involvement and support has thus become a critical focus in sustaining educational reform. Very little attention, however, has been given to the students as equal stakeholders (Fullan, 2007; Levin, 2000; Zion, 2009). Students are rarely included in reform efforts yet a growing body of research reveals that including students in this process has the potential to transform education.

Contemporary accountability reform movements often target the teacher's instructional practices as a way to improve student achievement as numerous research studies on student achievement have identified the teacher as one of the most important factors in the success of a student (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Coleman, 1966; Hanushek, 1992). Studies of the effects of student voice on improving pedagogical practices, however, appear so little in the empirical research, that these effects could not be adequately reported in Mager and Nowak's (2012) comprehensive review of the existing research studies on the effects of student voice. How to make changes in the "substantive core of teaching and learning—what teachers actually do in their classrooms" remains a perplexing area in school reform research (Seashore, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999, p. 254).

Incorporating student voice activities and practices into everyday instructional settings has the potential to significantly transform education more systemically and significantly by creating change across the entire system, as classroom instructional practices could potentially influence a student's achievement more than most other aspects of the school environment. A

need exists to study the phenomenon of student voice more qualitatively, exploring how student voice is practiced in high school classrooms and how these practices might contribute to improved pedagogy. As the instructional leaders in the school, principals have an extensive knowledge of the instructional practices that are present in the classrooms in their schools, and they also possess the training and experience to identify and support effective pedagogy. It is therefore necessary to explore the perceptions, knowledge, and expertise that principals possess about student voice to determine their role in positioning student voice efforts in the larger context of transforming pedagogy and improving students' experiences in high school.

1.3   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this exploratory study was to discover meaning that building principals ascribe to the phenomenon of student voice, and how they perceive its role in transforming classroom instructional practices. Exploring their perspectives on student voice and its presence in classrooms at their schools will provide information on the types of student voice practices that principals observe in high school classrooms and how they perceive the relationship between student voice and effective classroom pedagogy. This study will explore the phenomenon of student voice as it is apparent to the principal in his or her observations of instruction, and how it functions in the classrooms in which it is present—what role it plays, who is involved, what level of participation or collaboration is present on the part of the student and teacher, and how it affects the way in which instruction is approached.   Ultimately, this study will add to the limited amount of available research studies on student voice practices in instructional settings, and may inform school leaders about how student voice may be used to increase student engagement in

classrooms. The term *student voice* will be generally defined as: *a construct used to describe a range of activities that provide opportunities for students to express unique ideas and perspectives, collaborate with adults, and participate in the process of improving school experiences and student learning*.

The dearth of research studies exploring the effects of student voice on classroom instructional practices will be explored in Chapter 2. The findings of the literature review support the need for a phenomenological study devoted to understanding principals' lived experiences with student voice practices as instructional leaders in their schools. As exploratory research, this study endeavors to show the readers the types of student voice present in high school instructional settings as described by the principals, and how they understand student voice and its role in instruction.

1.4   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study combines the work of several researchers and theorists as well as the findings from the literature. It is comprised of the following four frameworks from the literature that are combined to create the conceptual model for this study: *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity* (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012), Community of Practice Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), the model of the impact of student voice on classroom life (Rudduck, 2007) and *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2007, 2013). The conceptual framework created for this study is summarized in Figure 1.1 and will be explained in detail in the sections to follow.
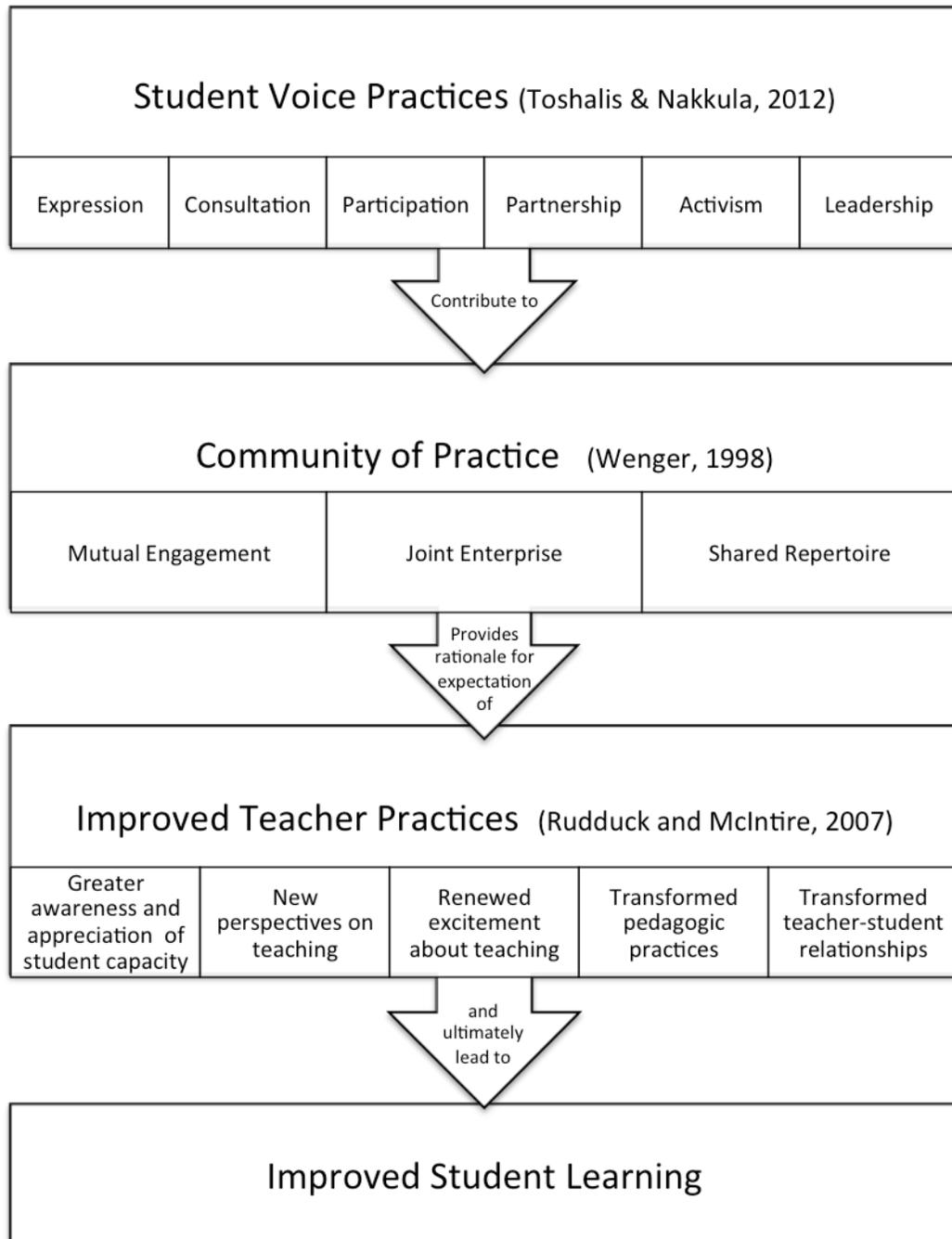
Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework

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1.4.1   Impact of student voice on classroom life and learning

The design of the conceptual framework created for this study originated from a concept asserted by Jean Rudduck and Donald McIntire, two renowned researchers in the field of student voice research. Their theories on the impact of student voice on classroom life and learning provide the lens for narrowing the investigation of student voice practices in this study to instructional settings. Rudduck and McIntire (2007) developed a model proposing the effects of student voice on teachers and students that illustrates the potential impacts that student consultation can have on teachers and how that affects instructional practices. Their model proposes that student consultation results in improved teaching through five areas: teachers' greater awareness of students' capacity, gaining new perspectives on teaching, renewed excitement about teaching, transformed pedagogic practices, and transformed teacher-pupil relationships that support more active and collaborative roles for students (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). The potential impacts were identified as a result of the extensive research that they conducted. The impacts are deemed, "potential" because Rudduck and McIntire concluded that the limited number of schools participating in student consultation would only permit them to discuss the effects as potential until more extensive research was conducted. Rudduck and McIntire identify "improved student learning," as the culminating effect of the improved instructional practices that result from pursuing student voice practices in the classroom. Rudduck and McIntire's model also includes the effects on the students: strengthening self esteem, enhancing attitudes towards school and learning, developing a stronger sense of membership, developing skills for learning, and transforming student-teacher relationships. These affects were not included in the conceptual model for this study as the goal of this study is to explore the effects of student voice on teachers and their instructional practices.

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The framework presented in Rudduck and McIntire's model is used as the basic structure for the conceptual model created for this study as it presents student voice as a vehicle for exploring how *teaching* is specifically improved or transformed when student voice practices are present. This study examines the "potential" effects that they propose in their model. Rudduck and McIntire's model was enhanced for this study by the addition of the three other concepts that will assist in framing the research questions and collecting and analyzing the data.

1.4.2   Spectrum of student voice-oriented activity

The second aspect of the conceptual model designed for this study describes different types of student voice activities. The literature on student voice presents a range of different interpretations of student voice-related activities that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this study. Toshalis, and Nakkula (2012), identify six categories of student voice activities: expression, consultation, participation, partnership, activism, and leadership, presented as *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity.* The six categories for student voice identified by Toshalis and Nakkula and evident throughout the literature on student voice will be used for exploring how building leaders perceive student voice.

The conceptual framework created for this study incorporates their categories because this study will explore how principals define student voice and what types of activities they describe when asked to describe their observations of student voice in classrooms in their school. *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity* will be used to categorize the levels of sophistication related to student voice practices that a principal describes and will help to illuminate the depth of his or her understanding of the concept. It will also help to illustrate how student voice is practiced in classrooms at each of the schools included in the study.

1.4.3 Community of practice theory

The third aspect of the conceptual model for this study involves exploring student voice practices through the lens of the community of practice learning theory. Several student voice practices, especially those defined as *youth-adult partnerships*, have been studied in the literature using Community of Practice theory, a theory that originated from Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, two cognitive anthropologists who studied learning as a social process. This framework, underpinned by social constructivist theories of learning, is useful in examining the ways that people create knowledge through collaborating in a group (Mitra, 2008a).

The term community of practice (CoP) in simple terms, refers to "a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (Wenger, 1998, p. 45). Lave and Wenger first became interested in this concept when they studied the process of learning through apprenticeships. Their early research studied the way in which people new to an established group first enter into an environment that is dominated by practitioners who are already well-trained in the protocols and skills of that particular community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger studied the process by which the novices enter the group, take on small tasks, operate in the periphery but then develop into socially recognized practitioners in the group.

The goal of any CoP is knowledge generation. Learning occurs through active participation in activities within these communities where newcomers are guided by mentors. Participation in these communities is what also defines competence in a given context, which is determined by the members in the group. For example, being a reliable doctor, a gifted musician, or an effective mother are all determined to some degree by the community in which one operates (Wenger, 2000).

A central idea of the community of practice is active participation and learning within the social context of the activity. Understanding of the world comes from a "negotiation of meaning" that occurs in the community and requires participation in the social process (Wenger, 1998). A community of practice is a community where skilled interaction takes place—learning takes place within the context of relationships with people and with people's engagement with the world around them. Members of the community are continually working in collaborative ways, and over time this results in practices that reflect shared efforts. There is a reciprocal process that occurs in the community of practice where learning in the group transforms the individuals, and the individuals transform the social structures in which they operate (Lave and Wegner, 1991).

An important aspect of this theory is the description of a *community* which consists of three elements: joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Table 1.1 summarizes the functions of these elements. Members of the group develop a collective understanding of what the group is about and they hold each other accountable for participating in forwarding their goal, thus creating a *joint enterprise* (Wenger, 1998). To keep learning at the center of its enterprise, communities must recognize needs for additional learning and provide leadership in "maintaining a spirit of inquiry" (Wenger, 2000, p. 230). Members of the group expect that each member will contribute to the enterprise and this is considered, *mutual engagement*, where trusted partnerships are formed. Members of the community "negotiate meaning" through this process and determine competence through their interactions in the group. To develop a sense of mutual engagement, it is necessary for the group members to know each other well and to communicate productively. Trust and a shared sense of mission are important for this component of the community. Finally, communities of practice operate using a *shared*

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repertoire of resources such as language, routines, tools, and stories. Members are expected to understand and use this repertoire in operating within the group, and the community must reflect on the use of this repertoire and how it affects its practice (Wenger, 1999, 2000).

Table 1.1. Elements of Community in a Community of Practice

Element	Description
Joint Enterprise	Developing a collective understanding of the group through negotiating group activities, holding each other accountable, and maintaining a spirit of inquiry
Mutual Engagement	Interacting with each other and establishing roles for the members, norms for the group, shared sense of mission, and trusting relationships that help to build the competence of individuals and the group
Shared Repertoire	Producing routines, tools, protocols, language, and discourse in the group

In an educational setting, the CoP will potentially affect students, teachers, and administrators; however, this study will focus on the effects on teachers, specifically their instructional practices. The CoP theory will be used to understand how student voice could affect the instructional environment in classrooms where the CoP is observed. This approach to teaching represents a radical transformation in the way that traditional classrooms operate as the institutionalized roles of adults and students in schools often contradict the tenants of youth-adult partnership and community of practice concepts. These practices empower students to collaborate with adults and take an active part in the teaching and learning process.

Recent research on CoPs reveals their impact in a variety of educational settings such as classrooms, e-learning, and teacher preparation programs. Impact also extend far beyond the

field of education in settings outside of the educational umbrella such as in the commercial world as part of a distributed team-working strategy (Kimble, Hildreth, & Bourdon, 2008). Most of the research regarding communities of practice in K-12 settings involves communities of adults—teachers, administrators, pre-service teachers. Kimble et al., (2008) extend this idea to students stating

> As well as support for teachers, CoPs have the potential to improve the learning experience for students. To benefit from the tremendous learning energy that comes with social membership, schools need to provide the opportunity for students to form CoPs around subject matter. (p. 37)

However, in reviewing the research on CoPs, studies involving the exploration of CoPs in K-12 education where students and adults work together do exist, but are rare. A few case studies of student voice that evaluate youth-adult partnerships through the lens of the community of practice theory of learning include Flint & O'Hara, 2013; Jones & Yonezawa, 2002; and Mitra, 2008b. Community of practice theory is used in these studies as a lens for viewing how students and adults operate in collaborative settings where the researcher observes the process directly in the learning environment. The current study will not be framed in this way. Instead, it will explore principals' perceptions of how student voice and collaboration has (or has not) created a community of practice in the classroom and how the teachers create (or do not create) communities in the classroom that would be considered communities of practice where student voice transforms the structure of the instructional setting.

The CoP framework lends itself to an examination of how communities of practice might operate when student voice is present in a classroom. It also provides a structure for redefining the roles of students and teachers in instructional settings that can replace the traditional notions

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of these roles that often prevent true participation and collaboration from students. Thus, communities of practice have the potential to transform the way that teaching and learning are perceived and pursued by both adults and students, offering a more collaborative role for students in the process of learning.

1.4.4 Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*

In addition to the three components previously described, the fourth element of my conceptual model is the *Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013). This framework, developed initially in 1996 and revised and expanded in 2007 and 2011 and 2013, identifies "those aspects of a teachers responsibilities that have been documented through empirical studies and theoretical research as promoting improved student learning" (Danielson, 2007). The framework was originally developed by Charlotte Danielson, based on the research conducted for the Praxis III, which was developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). ETS conducted extensive studies on the components of good teaching including extensive analysis of the research literature, consultation with expert practitioners, and job-analysis research. *The Framework for Teaching* derives from the same research base as the criteria for the Praxis III and represents the expected performance of those in the teaching profession (Danielson, 2007).

The Framework for Teaching has been widely adopted in teacher evaluation systems throughout the United States, and was used by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation in their landmark study, *Measures of Effective Teaching* conducted in 2009 (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). The aim of this study was to determine which aspects of a teacher's practice were most highly correlated with significant student learning (Danielson, 2007). The *Framework* identifies four domains associated with teaching: planning and preparation,

classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Each domain consists of five or six components, describing details within each domain, and the framework identifies levels of performance in each domain: *failing, needs improvement, proficient, and distinguished*.

Student voice is clearly present in this framework as is the notion of community of practice, most notably in the descriptions of the *distinguished* teacher, the highest level of proficiency on the framework. The introduction to the framework states

> The hallmark of distinguished-level practice in the *Framework* is that teachers have been able to create a community of learners, in which students assume a large part of the responsibility for the success of a lesson; they make suggestions, initiate improvements, monitor their own learning against clear standards, and serve as resources to one another. (Danielson, 2013, p. 5-6).

This framework is an integral part of the teacher evaluation system that was adopted in 2012 in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania known as the *Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation System* (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). Implicit in the framework is the idea that outstanding or distinguished teachers will create a "community of learners" in their classrooms where students will become partners with teachers in their own learning (Danielson, 2013). This is important because such an approach to instruction is a radical departure from the traditional classroom because adults must relinquish some power in the classroom to collaborate with students. All school districts in Pennsylvania are required to use the *Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation System* (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012) as are many other districts throughout the United States. It is important to recognize that the expectation of teachers as described in the "distinguished" category include repeated descriptions of student consultation, collaboration and partnership between teachers and students in the classroom.

Two important questions are then raised: 1) Are teachers prepared to create learning communities in their classrooms and reframe their pedagogy to include students as active participants in the process of instruction? 2) As instructional leaders in the school, do principals have a thorough knowledge of student voice practices and approaches to creating learning communities that would enable them to provide resources for teachers to achieve the highest levels of expected performance as instructors? *The Framework for Teaching* was used in this study to analyze the data that was collected on student voice perceptions as reported by principals. Since this framework represents what is expected of the best teachers, the current study also investigated whether or not principals recognize the aspects of student voice present in effective teaching as identified in the *Framework* when they are describing best practices of teachers that they have observed.

1.5   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study used three research questions as the basis for investigating the phenomenon of student voice in classroom instruction. These questions are connected to components of the conceptual framework and are grounded in social constructivist theory. They are derived from a central question: *How do high school principals perceive the concept of student voice and its role in transforming instructional practices?* This question explores the nature of how student voice is practiced in high school classrooms from the perspective of the building leader. From this question, the following research questions guided the collection of data in this study:

1. How do principals perceive the concept of student voice and the way that student voice is practiced in classrooms in their school?

- What meaning do principals ascribe to the term *student voice* and what examples of student voice do they identify as present in classrooms in their schools?

- What barriers to student voice do principals perceive? What factors do they feel encourage student voice?

- What aspects of the principals' professional background including training and experience might affect the way that they perceive the presence of student voice in their school?

2. What do principals state or imply about the connection between student voice and effective instructional practices?

    - How do their descriptions of an outstanding teacher reflect the presence of student voice?

    - What tools do principals use to define and document effective instruction in the classroom?

    - How do their responses indicate an understanding of the role of student voice in effective instruction?

3. How do principals view their role in providing leadership to increase the presence of student voice in classroom pedagogy?

Table 1.2 summarizes the three research questions and the related theories from the conceptual framework of this study.

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND DELIMITATIONS

1.6.1 Assumptions

This study has several associated assumptions: First, it assumes that principals operate as instructional leaders in their schools and that effective leaders promote better teaching. This assumption is supported by the job description of a principal that is outlined in the 2008 ISLLC standards for principals ("Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 as Adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration," 2008). These standards articulate the expectations for school leaders. The second standard of this document refers the principal's role as an instructional leader stating that principals will "develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff" (p. 20). Furthermore, the standards state

> ISLLC 2008 reflects the input of over 100 research projects and studies…This research consistently points out that states and districts are right to focus on standards for education leaders. School leaders are critical to helping improve student performance. Research now shows that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that influence student outcomes. (p. 9)

The current study also assumes that exploring principals' accounts of their observations of student voice practices in classroom settings is a valuable way to elicit information on how student voice is practiced in the high school classroom. This is reasonable to assume, as principals are the instructional leaders in the schools who observe classroom practices as a significant part of their work.

Table 1.2. Research Questions, Related Theory, and Propositions

Research Question	Related Theory or Concept from Conceptual Framework	Researcher's Propositions/Assumptions
How do principals perceive the concept of student voice and the way that student voice is practiced in classrooms in their schools?	*Spectrum of Student Voice Related Activity* (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012)	Principals' descriptions of student voice may reflect a limited knowledge of the concept. Examples will describe less participatory types of student voice such as consultation.
	Community of Practice Theory of Learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) Social Constructivist Theory (Prawat & Peterson, 1999)	Examples of Community of Practice concepts will be limited to isolated teachers; CoP will not be reported as a common approach to instruction observed even in the classrooms of well-recognized teachers.
What do principals state or imply about the connection between student voice and distinguished instructional practices?	Student voice to improve teacher practices concept (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007); *Framework For Teaching* (Danielson, 2013)	Principals will report that some of their "best" teachers do not consistently utilize collaborative types of student voice practices described for a "distinguished" teacher in *The Framework For Teaching* (2013); however, principals will acknowledge the importance of student voice in effective pedagogy.
How do principals view their role in providing leadership to increase the presence of student voice in pedagogical practices?	*Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013)	Principals will recognize themselves as resources for providing leadership to teachers but will acknowledge the lack of formal or informal training that would prepare them to do so.

Another assumption is that principals' attitudes towards student voice will be present in the narratives that they recall. Phenomenological research supports such an assumption since phenomenology is "the systematic attempt to uncover and describe structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p.10).

Additionally, this study assumes that the information solicited from principals regarding student voice practices in their classroom will provide valuable information to school leaders who are interested in improving instructional practices in their schools and for assisting them in providing professional development to teachers seeking to attain the highest levels of proficiency.

Finally, this study assumes that the principals selected will be leaders in schools where student voice is present to some degree. This assumption was made because the schools chosen were within school districts identified as innovative and reform-oriented. It is reasonable to assume that schools fostering innovative practices may use student voice more than the average school or school district. The process used for choosing these schools is outlined in Chapter 3.

1.6.1.1 Propositions

Based on the review of the literature as well as my personal experience as a teacher and a principal observing instructional practices in high schools, I have identified the following propositions regarding student voice in instructional settings that will be explored in this research study. These propositions are not intended to operate as hypotheses to be tested and confirmed, but it is necessary to note that they do exist as a possible bias in the mind of the researcher:

- Principals' examples of student voice in classrooms may reflect a limited knowledge of the concept. Examples of student voice will emphasize traditional, less participatory types of student voice such as consultation.

- Examples of Community of Practice concepts will be limited to isolated teachers; CoP will not be reported as a common approach to instruction observed even in the classrooms of well-recognized teachers.

- Principals will report that even their best teachers do not consistently utilize collaborative forms of student voice characteristic of "distinguished" teaching as identified by *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013); however, principals will identify the importance of student voice in effective pedagogy.

- Principals will recognize themselves as resources for providing leadership in fostering student voice in instruction, but will acknowledge the lack of formal or informal training that would prepare them to do so.

1.6.2 Limitations

This study was subject to several limitations. Since I limited the study to schools within western Pennsylvania identified as innovative or reform-oriented, the sample size is small. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalizable to all populations, as student voice may exist much differently in schools with different demographics or leadership. In addition, although the schools identified were slightly diverse in terms of demographic and socioeconomic factors, the sample consists of schools considered suburban schools with fairly low rates of families identified as low in socioeconomic status.

The methodology used also presented some limitations. Principals were asked about their perceptions of student voice as they recalled it from their past observations. It is important to recognize the subjectivity that principals possess when recalling such experiences. This approach will not reveal an objective truth about how student voice is practiced in classrooms

since the accounts were reported as they were perceived by the principal. Additionally, there is a social desirability factor that may have influenced the participants to answer in ways that they perceived would be favorable to me as the researcher, especially considering my job as a principal positions me as a peer to these participants. Furthermore, principals' responses may have been influenced by the time of the year during which the interviews were conducted. Most interviews were conducted in May and June, which are traditionally busy months for high school principals involved with end of the year activities such as graduation, teacher evaluations, and closing the school. Principals may have spent less time contemplating and articulating their responses than they may have if the interviews were conducted at a time of the year when more time was available in their schedules.

1.6.3 Delimitations

I made several decisions regarding the focus of this study that would be viewed as delimitations as they were decisions within the control of the researcher. First, I have studied student voice as utilized in classroom instructional practices. Other types of student voice that may exist in other settings in the school were not included in this study. I made this decision based on the lack of research in this area and my interest in exploring how student voice might have a larger impact on transforming education if it were implemented at the classroom level. Second, I limited the population to schools identified as innovative or reform-oriented within western Pennsylvania for convenience in traveling to conduct the interviews and in order to find places where the phenomenon of student voice is more likely to exist. Finally, the study involved principals' perceptions of student voice as they observed it in their classrooms and recalled it in the

interview instead of interviewing teachers or observing of classroom practice directly. Justification for these decisions is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this document.

1.7   DEFINITION OF TERMS

The term *student voice* as discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this study is a broad term with a variety of definitions associated with it. For the purposes of this study, the term *student voice* is generally defined as: *a construct used to describe a range of activities that provide opportunities for students to express unique ideas and perspectives, collaborate with adults, and participate in the process of improving school experiences and student learning.* I formulated this definition by combining definitions of the term from the literature review to encompass a wide range of activities and rationales associated with it.

The term *community of practice* (CoP), in simple terms, refers to "a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (Wenger, 1998, p. 45).

Finally, it is important to note the distinction between the term *student voice initiatives* and *student voice practices.*   In this study, the term *student voice initiatives* is used when describing a school-wide or district-wide effort to involve students in the decision making or instructional process. The term *student voice practices* is used to describe specific practices that teachers employ that position students as active participants in teaching and learning. It is most often used when describing individual instructional settings where teachers use student voice as part of their regular instructional practice, but it is not necessarily an initiative or mandate set out by the administration of the school.

1.8   SUMMARY

Numerous reform movements that have occurred during the past century have not proven to increase student performance in any significant way (Fullan, 2007) and high schools have remained relatively unchanged especially in their traditional views of the power dynamic in schools.   In recent years, advocates of educational change have begun to reimagine approaches to educational reform by using student voice to change the way that teaching and learning are understood and implemented. Student voice is the term most often associated with considering students as active participants in educational decision making and change.

Few research studies explore how administrative leadership affects the implementation of student voice initiatives in schools or school systems, and the studies of the effects of student voice on improving pedagogical practices are few. It is necessary to explore the perceptions, knowledge, and expertise that principals as instructional leaders possess about student voice to determine their role in positioning student voice efforts in the larger context of transforming pedagogy and improving students' experiences in high school.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to discover the meaning that building principals ascribe to the phenomenon of student voice, and how they perceive its role in transforming classroom instructional practices. Ultimately, this study will add to the limited amount of available research studies on student voice practices in instructional settings, and may inform school leaders about how student voice may be used to increase student engagement in classrooms.

2.0   REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The existing literature on student voice has grown significantly in the past decade.   This theoretical and empirical body of research covers a range of different topics related to the concept of student voice with a variety of intentions and goals.   The current study explores the way in which student voice is practiced in high school classrooms and how principals perceive the role of student voice in effective instruction.   Therefore, this review of the literature on student voice attempts to answer the question: *How can including student voice improve educational practices?*   For the review of literature, I read and annotated approximately 121 peer-reviewed articles, 8 articles that were not peer reviewed, and 25 books.

This review of the literature had several intentions that assisted in framing the need for the current study.   The first goal was to investigate how student voice is defined and described in the literature in order to clarify the abstract nature of the term and explore how multiple meanings often exist based on different perceptions and experiences.   This review also explored the reasons that schools choose to implement student voice initiatives or practices to provide a rationale for the importance of student voice pursuits.   Finally, this review of the literature explored the impacts of student voice efforts by examining the existing research studies on the effects of student voice efforts in high school instruction.

2.1   DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF STUDENT VOICE

The term *student voice* is a construct often used to describe a wide range of activities that provide opportunities for students to participate in school experiences and decision making that affects their lives and the lives of their peers. The concept of voice for some is simply allowing students to express their point of view on a subject, while for others it is more of a participatory act where students and adults collaborate to make changes to their systems (Cook-Sather, 2006b). To fully explore the complex construct of student voice, it is necessary to discuss how researchers and practitioners define and use this term. This will be accomplished in the literature study through 1) tracing the emergence and evolution of the term *student voice,* 2) analyzing the different types of activities or practices commonly associated with student voice, and 3) discussing the pedagogical applications and goals of student voice practices and the related theoretical ideologies behind them.

2.1.1   History of the term *student voice* in the United States

The concept of student voice has always related to the desire to include students in the educational process, although the means and motives for including students have evolved significantly over time. The ways in which student voice practices have changed and evolved can be directly related to the social and political climate of the time (see Figure 2.1).

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Early Movements Pre 1950s

Expose students to the responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society by allowing students to be heard

Late 1970s-1980s

Reverts back to surface-level participation; lack of engagment in formal problem-solving

2001-current

Collaborate with students as active participants in school reform

1960s-mid 1970s

Empower students as active participants with the power to influence outcomes

1990s-2000

Challenge dominant images of students as silent passive recipients

Figure 2.1. Evolution of Student Voice in the U.S.

2.1.1.1 Emergence of the concept of student voice

The concept of student voice relating to school reform traces back to the creation of student government in schools in 1894 at George Junior Republic School in Freeville, NY (Johnson, 1991). The idea of creating student government was to expose students to the responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society. In practice, however, student governments of this type were found to have little real impact and tended to focus more on peripheral topics such as social activities, rarely providing opportunities for students to actively participate in problem-solving related to core educational issues. Even today, the concept of student voice has often become closely associated with student government, which often affords students the opportunity to become involved in democratic and civic activities, but still provides little opportunity for students to become active participants in the process of addressing substantial issues of the school (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1990).

2.1.1.2 Approaches to student voice in the 1960s through 1990s

The approach to student voice practices began to change significantly in the 1960s due to the political and social changes of that time, thus extending the definition of student voice to include a wider range of activities (Johnson, 1991). Beginning in the 1960s the concept of using student voice to create student empowerment began to emerge along with other social issues relating to the "oppressive authority" of schools (Johnson, 1991; Levin, 2000). Before this time most student voice movements focused on opportunities for students to be a presence in the educational process, but not on students as active participants with the power to influence outcomes. In 1970, the National Education Association (NEA) addressed the issue of student voice emphasizing a variety of basic rights of the students including free inquiry and expression and the right to participate in their governance of the school (Johnson, 1991). Student voice thus evolved from a means of allowing students to be heard (a more passive approach) to empowering students to be active participants in school decision making, including students participating on local school boards (Mitra, 2008b).

In the mid to late 1970s, however, as the social and political climates began to change once again, the idea that students had a right to take part in decision making was no longer in the forefront. By the early 1980s, the focus for educational reform was to ensure that American students could compete with students from other countries. In 1983, the National Commission for Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk,* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) that highlighted the failures of the U.S. educational system, calling for higher expectations and standards for students. This report does not mention any student involvement in suggestions for reform, and consequently student voice initiatives reverted back to surface-level participation in student governments where students did not engage in any formal problem-

solving related to the school climate or academic programs (Johnson, 1991). This remained relatively unchanged until the early 1990s.

2.1.1.3 Reemergence of the term in 1990s

A reemergence of the term *student voice* first appeared in the early 1990s as a reform strategy that challenged the dominant images of students as "silent passive recipients" (Cook-Sather, 2006b). Educators and researchers in the U.S., U.K., and Canada began to explore the exclusion of student voices in discussions about teaching and learning (Cook-Sather, 2006b, Levin 2000). Early supporters of student voice posed questions such as, "What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?" (Fullan, 2007, p.170). The motives behind returning to the idea of student voice shifted and the emphasis on student's rights from the 1960s was no longer the primary reason for inclusion. Instead, student voice reemerged at this time grounded in the idea of efficacy—that school reform would be more successful if students were included in the process (Levin, 2000).

Research on educational change and reform asserts that participation and support of all stakeholders is necessary for successful implementation (Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 2007). These early supporters of student voice reinforced the belief that considering the voices of the students was an important aspect of school reform that had been absent from previous discussions. Consequently, definitions of student voice expanded to include ideas like "opinion," "matter," "capable," "listen," and "involve" that reposition students in more active roles than in the past (Cook-Sather, 2006b). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s a growing number of writers have advocated for departures from traditional roles for students in school, calling for adults to partner with students in classroom pedagogy and school leadership (Fielding, 2001; Giroux, 1986; Levin, 2000; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck, Chaplain, & Wallace, 1996).

2.1.2   Current definitions of student voice

Since the 1990s the number of studies on student voice has increased and the concept of consulting young people about their experiences in school has received more attention in recent years (Fullan, 2007; Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). The methodology for exploring the general term *student voice* is also very diverse. The evolution of the term as previously discussed has contributed to current conceptions that form a wide spectrum of student activities ranging from passive consultation to active participation in decision making.

During the late 1990s, however, the term began to imply a cultural shift, extending beyond students simply experiencing meaningful presence to having the power to influence decisions and practices in the school (Cook-Sather, 2006b). This "new wave" of student voice exploration began to represent a range of activities related to student involvement including engagement with social matters such as mentoring, and school councils, through more participatory student-led activities such as student leaders, students as co-researchers, and students providing input into curriculum and teaching evaluations (Mitra, 2004). A modern approach to student voice involves students expressing their opinions, influencing decisions, and actively participating in deliberation about decisions and events (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011).

2.1.3 Misconceptions of student voice

Several student voice researchers have discussed the problematic nature of the term *student voice* because it often limits or fails to represent the complex range of activities and rationales often associated with modern student voice initiatives (Bolstad, 2011; Fielding, 2009; Mitra, 2009).

The traditional underlying power structure between students and adults found in most schools also reinforces a limited perception of what the term encompasses:

> For many of us, the most problematic issue is that "student voice" approaches may not address underlying power differences between young people and adults--particularly in contexts such as schools where adult and youth roles are already tightly framed and the power differentials between adults and young people are deeply embedded." (Bolstad, 2011, p.32)

Most traditional pedagogy views teaching as seeking to change or affect the student through the acquisition of new knowledge that will ultimately change the student's thinking or behavior in some way. Therefore adults may pursue student voice practices where students may express opinions but fail to embrace more advanced approaches to student voice such as the idea of youth-adult partnerships where "both youth and adults have the potential to contribute to decision making processes, to learn from on another, and to promote change" (Bolstad, 2011, p.32). The "deeply embedded ideology" about the roles of students and teachers in the classroom prevents many from imagining student voice beyond its most passive and simplistic form where students are mere consultants in the decision making process. In the New Zealand Council for Educational Research's 2009 National Survey of Secondary Schools (Wylie & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2013), teachers were presented with the statement, "There is too much emphasis on 'student voice' and similar ideas nowadays." Twenty-six percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement; 34 percent were unsure; and 39 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed (Bolstad, 2011, p. 89). In reviewing these findings, Bolstad (2011) asserts a possible link between these divergent opinions and multiple interpretations of the term "student voice."

Alternative terms such as, "consulting young people," and "listening to students" have appeared in the literature, but these terms tend to place students beneath adults in the hierarchy of decision making by implying that students will share their opinions, but that implementation of a desired plan will ultimately be chosen and undertaken by adults (Bolstad, 2011). Most recently, researchers in the field of student voice have explored other terminology to capture the wide range of activities associated with student voice that take into account more active, complex roles for students. Terms such as "youth-adult partnerships" (Mitra, 2008b) "youth leadership," "youth empowerment," and "student participation" (Mager & Nowak, 2012) are beginning to be used to describe the repositioning of students as active participants in the reform process under the larger umbrella of "student voice."

2.2   CONCEPTIONS OF STUDENT VOICE

The literature on student voice presents a range of different interpretations of student voice-related activities. Lensmire (1998) identifies two popular conceptions of student voice that encompass the various activities commonly associated with student voice: voice as individual expression, and voice as participation. *Voice as expression* emphasizes students expressing themselves such as in the teaching of writing where students participate in writing workshops (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1986). *Voice as participation* is associated with advocates of critical theories such as Freire (1970, 1993) and Giroux (1986). These types of student voice are not mutually exclusive, but can be viewed on a continuum where expression is the most basic form of student voice and voice as participation is more complex.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) create a detailed continuum and identify additional categories within the concept of voice as participation in *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity* that was interpreted and presented as a hierarchy in Figure 2.2. Each category represents a different type of student voice activity or approach. Figure 2.2 shows that as the levels move vertically, the degree to which the students are actively involved as stakeholders and collaborators increases; however, as the involvement increases, the practice of that type of activity becomes less common.

In the majority of schools today, most of the student voice activities would fall in the lower levels of one or two on the spectrum (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Roger Hart's "Ladder of Participation" (Hart, 1992) also provides a similar framework for identifying the different types of student participation in decision making and will be discussed in relation to the categories developed by Toshalis and Nakkula.

2.2.1 Expression and consultation

In Level 1 of the spectrum, *expression* (see Figure 2.2), students are provided with opportunities to express themselves through activities such as creating artwork, writing articles in newspapers, and participating in discussions related to their opinions on various topics. At this level, students express their opinions, but there is no formalized method for collecting or analyzing their opinions (Lensmire, 1998; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Level 2, *consultation* involves a slightly more active role where students are asked to express their opinions on certain topics; the adults will use this information to make decisions about further actions. This type of student voice might involve student surveys or focus groups where students provide anonymous course evaluations, give feedback on new curriculum, or comment on school climate.
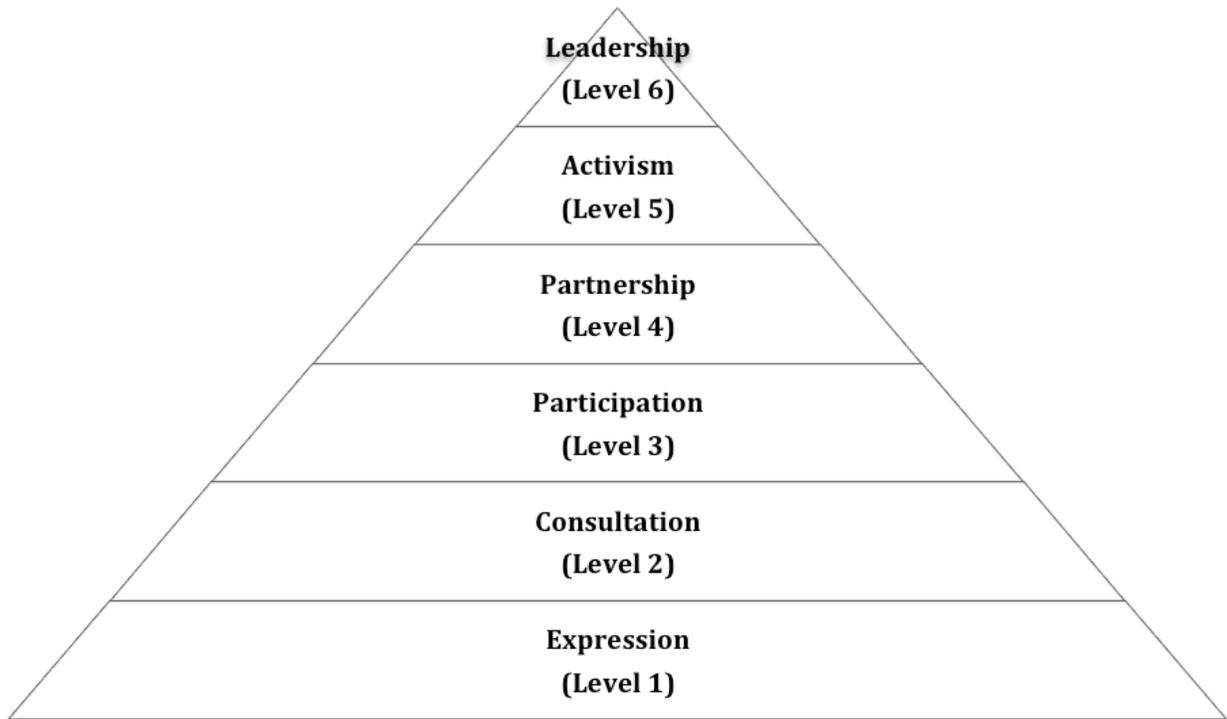
Figure 2.2. Spectrum of Student Voice-Related Activities

This level corresponds with what Hart (1992) terms, *consulted and informed* where students' opinions are seriously collected and considered by adults who will use this information to inform further decisions they will make. Both level one and two consider the voices of the students, however, the ultimate decisions as well as further actions or action plans are decided by the adults, not the students. Adults will guide the activities but students are positioned as valuable members of the team who possess unique perspectives that are integral to the decisions that are shared between the youth and adults (Toshalis, & Nakkula, 2012).

2.2.2 Participation and partnership

As one moves vertically on the spectrum to levels 3 and 4, the role of the student as a stakeholder increases and students are given more power and responsibility. Level 3, *participation* extends beyond merely asking students for their opinions and encourages students to take more active roles often found in district reform efforts where adults will attempt to understand how students perceive what is being studied. For example, students may attend meetings in which the decisions are made or may generate questions to be used in data collection. This type of participation becomes a *partnership* (see level 4 on Figure 2.2) when students are given the power to advocate for what they desire and collaborate with adults to take part in the implementation. Hart (1992) refers to this type of participation as *adult initiated*, *shared decisions with children* (p.12). The Children's Environments Research Group participated in such a project where children were given opportunities to design features of a new park in their community. Children were given opportunities to provide thoughts on the design and adults and children worked together to discuss priorities, debate ideas, and ultimately design the features of the park (Hart, 1992).

Those who are skeptical of these partnerships often assume that students will be given full power to implement changes without input from the adults. It is important to note that at this level of the spectrum, adults often coach youth and that both adults and youth collaborate to develop common goals and visions for their work often known as "youth-adult partnerships" (Mitra, 2005). Beginning in the middle of the spectrum, adults work collaboratively with youth partners and often serve as mentors with the expertise to assist them in their endeavors.

2.2.3 Activism and leadership

The top levels of the spectrum, *activism* and *leadership* involve youth taking the most active roles in implementing change. Activism might involve students forming groups in the community or the school who will seek to change something by identifying the issue, building an action plan, and rallying others to assist in the implementation. These types of activities correlate with Hart's *youth initiated and directed* activities. The top level, *Leadership* or what Hart terms *youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults*, considers youth as the leaders in change where they create ideas, make decisions, direct actions, write proposals, and implement plans. An important distinction at this level is that students are the agents of change working alongside adults, but taking significant responsibility for outcomes (Hart, 1992; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). An excellent example of this type of activity would be in service learning programs where students participate actively in researching, choosing, and planning a service project, and then evaluating, and reflecting on the final product.

2.2.4 School-wide versus classroom-level initiatives

In addition to identifying forms of student voice by the level of student participation, it is also important to understand the distinction between a classroom-level or school-wide initiative. While classroom-level initiatives can vary in scope and definition, Thiessen, (2006) found that three themes emerged related to research on student voice and *classroom-level reform initiatives*: 1) students shaping their own curriculum, teaching, and learning experiences through consultation and negotiation; 2) students teaching other students, and 3) students teaching beginning and experienced teachers.

Much of the previous research on student voice and educational reform consists mainly of classroom-level initiatives implemented by an individual teacher and intended for use in that particular classroom, but only a few examples exist of student voice as a way to influence school-wide change (Mitra, 2008b).

2.2.5   Conceptual and practical problems with student voice

Recent movements towards including student voice have identified a number of problematic issues arising from the term itself as well as practical issues encountered with implementation. Conceptual problems involve using the term "voice" as a unitary noun, which implies that children's voice has a singular unified view. Also, the fact that voice is expressed in words often may limit a child's ability to convey his or her feelings (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011). Practical problems identified by Czerniawski and Kidd (2011) include:

- Student voice in many settings is "tokenistic" where students are seen to be involved in school processes rather than being active participants in change.
- Only some students are selected to participate in forums and focus groups most associated with these activities.
- Traditionally, what students are permitted to discuss is often limited to discussions about fund-raising and social activities often associated with student councils.
- Students are not given adequate training in their participation in governance and often have trouble in this role that is unfamiliar to them.
- There is often little follow-up on opinions expressed by students.

- Governance conversations dominate the student voice activities. Students are rarely involved in conversations about classroom pedagogy and knowledge.

2.3 RATIONALE FOR IMPLEMENTING STUDENT VOICE INITIATIVES

A logical question often raised in the literature is: *Why search out student voices?* The study of the literature tends to show a variety of rationales for supporting student voice. Many studies point to the plethora of positive effects that student voice can have on students, teachers, and the organization, but the predominant rationale for student voice is as a reform strategy for classroom and school improvement (Cook-Sather, 2006b; Fielding, 2006; Mitra, 2004; Mitra, 2008a). Student voice in school reform is either viewed as a means of improving practices *within the existing framework* of education, or improving practices by *shifting* the way schooling is done (Bolstad, 2011).

Perhaps related to recent educational mandates requiring school reform, the past focus on rights and empowerment has been replaced with a focus on the notion that "student outcomes will improve and school reform will be more successful if students actively participate in shaping it" (Mitra, 2004). Effective reform strategies are beginning to consider involving students as "capable persons, capitalizing on their knowledge and interests, and involving them in determining goals and learning methods" (Cook-Sather, 2006b, p. 360).

When looking to answer the question, "Why search out student Voices?" Lincoln (1995) identifies three "lenses" through which one can view the purposes of student voice in education: 1) the *social and legal context* which focuses on the desire to teach students to be good citizens and successors to the future 2) the *scientific context* which utilizes educational researchers such

as Piaget who showed that humans are active participants in learning about and constructing views of the social worlds they encounter and 3*) the political context* which relates to educating students so as to prepare them for participation in the democratic process.   What begins to emerge is the notion that student voice activities and initiatives are implemented and supported for many different reasons, reflecting diverse educational goals and fundamental belief systems.

2.3.1 The scope of student voice related to pedagogy and theory

Considering the implications of each of the frameworks that Lincoln (1995) provides, it becomes clear that different types of student voice are connected to different bodies of theory on thinking and learning, thus providing differing rationales for implementation and use. The principles associated with the term *student voice* are grounded mostly in constructivist theories that see learning as more than receiving and processing information (Cook-Sather, 2006b; Lensmire, 1998). Constructivist theory asserts that significant learning occurs when students are active participants in constructing their own understanding and assessing their own knowledge (Prawat & Peterson, 1999). Student voice ideology is also heavily rooted in critical pedagogy that seeks to redistribute power, in this case between teacher and student, so that students can be active participants in constructing their own meaning, not merely reiterating meaning that is determined by someone perceived as more powerful or influential. (Cook-Sather, 2006b; Lensmire, 1998).

Lensmire (1998) identifies voice as either *individual expression*, or *voice as participation* and investigates the connections to theory that underlie each type. He describes an important contrast between the two approaches to student voice:

For workshop advocates, voice signals the unique expression of the unique individual. Voice serves to distinguish individual writers from other writers. For advocates of

critical pedagogy, voice signals participation, an active part in the social production of meaning. (p. 268)

Considering student voice applications in terms of underlying theoretical belief systems, Hipkins (2010) identifies five different types of pedagogical application associated with student voice activities that are common to much of the literature. Each application connects to a different body of theory that is useful in analyzing the motivations and rationale behind pursuing most student voice initiatives described in the literature. Table 2.1 summarizes Hipkins' evaluation of the different types of student voice-related pedagogy and the associated rationale supporting it. The theoretical underpinnings of each application also serve as a clear way to understand the rational behind each application. It is important to note that although the pedagogical applications are described separately, they do often intersect when activities involve multiple outcomes or goals (Hipkins, 2010).

The most common pedagogical application of student voice identified by Hipkins (2010) is formative assessment. When students voice their opinions about their educational experiences, they are given more control over their learning experiences. The data collected when adults elicit these opinions can be used to guide further actions. Examples of such activities identified in the literature include classroom-level or school-wide initiatives where students are asked to inform teachers or administrators about their opinions on instructional practices and curriculum with the goal of making changes to current practices for consideration in future learning.

This information is also used to identify barriers to learning or why students might struggle in the curriculum (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). The ultimate goal is to improve instructional practices by including feedback from the students who possess a unique perspective.

Table 2.1. Pedagogical Applications of Student Voice-Related Theory and Rationale

Pedagogical Application	Theoretical Underpinning	Description	Rationale for SV Activity
Formative Assessment	Constructivist learning theories	Students actively build their own meanings from their learning; will not necessarily be the meanings intended by the teacher.	When students voice their own views on their learning teachers can identify next learning steps.
Inquiry Learning	Dewey's pragmatic theory of knowledge	Voices of students are elicited to identify and pursue questions that interest them and link to their lives.	Student engagement and motivation in learning helps students to find relevance in what they are doing.
Student Leadership	Sociological ideals about democracy and self-determination within the constraints of existing social structures	Students practice leadership and decision-making skills through participating in school forums and other committees.	Leadership experiences develop citizens who can participate and contribute to a democratic society.
Self-regulation; Learning to Learn	Psychological theories of personal development and metacognition	Students express their voice to increase self-awareness and regulate their own behavior and thinking.	Self-understanding, reflection, and increasing agency and autonomy are important skills in youth-development.
Responding to Diversity	Developmental, democratic, and constructivist ideals as well as anthropological theorizing	Students are encouraged to acknowledge the rights of all students to be engaged regardless of differences.	Building cultural awareness/tolerance, finding common ground, and responding to diversity in the classroom are important practices that students should experience in school to prepare them for in a democratic society.

Student voice as formative assessment might also be implemented in larger school-wide initiatives where students are used to inform decision making at a broader level such as school climate or school governance (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Thorkildsen, Nolen, & Fournier, 1994). This application is rooted in constructivist theory which asserts that significant learning occurs when students are active participants in constructing their own understanding and assessing their own knowledge (Prawat & Peterson, 1999). Student voice activities supported by constructivist ideology focus on active learning and student choice (Levin, 2000) and also involve activating student voice by encouraging students to improve teaching, curriculum, and school culture through better student/teacher communications (Mitra, 2004; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007).

Another type of pedagogical application of student voice identified by Hipkins was inquiry learning. Inquiry learning in K-12 education is most commonly associated with John Dewey in the early years of the 20th century. Dewey believed that students must be actively involved in their education and the construction of objectives for their own learning because personal experience is a fundamental contributor to understanding (Dewey, 1997). His theories about education are also connected to the ideals of democracy, supporting the notion that students should partake in activities that replicate those they will be involved in as adults in a democratic society (Dewey, 1963).

Student voice activities related to this theoretical approach support students identifying and pursuing questions that interest them and making learning relevant to their everyday experiences, often termed *inquiry learning*. Since this type of learning encourages students to find meaning in what they learn, it also supports notions of engaging and motivating students, which is critical to improving student achievement. This theoretical framework also supports an

important rationale for student voice that is related to theories of change. As previously discussed, researchers of educational change argue that involvement and buy-in from all stakeholders is the key to sustaining any type of change (Fullan, 2007). Student voice initiatives are often pursued to include students in the change process so that change can be sustained through the support of all stakeholders, including the students who have traditionally been excluded. Psychological research indicates a connection between autonomy and motivation where a sense of control over ones environment gives them intrinsic motivation to participate (Joseph & Reigeluth, 2010).

The third kind of activity common to the research on student voice and identified by Hipkins (2010) is student leadership. Student voice is often pursued to provide students with opportunities to practice leadership and decision-making skills that will prepare them for their adult lives (Flint & O'Hara, 2013; Jones & Yonezawa, 2002). This interpretation of voice is connected to "sociological ideas about democracy and self-determination within the constructs of existing social structures" (Hipkins, 2010, p. 87). Many of the research studies on student voice explore shifting the power dynamic that exists in schools. Connections to Dewey's (1963) beliefs on the importance of providing democratic experiences for students as well as influences of social constructivist theory are present in this type of student voice.

The concept of metacognition and "learning to learn" is the fourth type of pedagogical application identified by Hipkins (2010). Asking students to reflect on their own thinking and learning is common to student voice activities where students are asked to provide input or partner with teachers in analyzing school or classroom experiences. These activities are underpinned by psychological theories of personal development and metacognition, which support the need to increase students' self-awareness and self-reflection. Studies associated with

this pedagogical application often include discussions of agency, autonomy, and youth development.

Finally, responding to diversity is a pedagogical application that originates in the belief in the rights of all students to express their view and participate in their own education despite individual differences in starting points, learning needs and differing "world views" (Bolstad, 2011; Hipkins, 2010). This approach draws on anthropological theorizing such as working in the "third space" where "different voices come together to seek points of connection and common ground" (Hipkins, p.89). Links to developmental, constructivist, and democratic ideals are also apparent (Hipkins, 2010).

2.4 RESEARCH STUDIES ON THE EFFECTS OF STUDENT VOICE PRACTICES

The research on student voice and student participation in school decision making is relatively limited, although studies have increased significantly in the past decade. While student voice has become an important topic in educational reform research, much of the literature in this area is theoretical and perceptual, often revealing a bias towards the positive potential of student voice. Several authors who reviewed the existing empirical research identify the need for more high quality empirical studies (Davies, Yamashita, & Ko Man-Hin, 2005; Mager & Nowak, 2012).

Mager and Nowak (2012) provide a review of the empirical research on the effects of student participation in school-related decision making which is the only known systematic review of this topic. Two additional sources that offer fairly extensive reports on the effects of student voice are *The International Handbook of Student Experiences,* edited by prominent authors of student voice literature, Dennis Theissen and Alison Cook-Sather (Thiessen & Cook-

Sather, 2007), and *Inspiring Schools: Impact and Outcomes Taking Up the Challenge of Pupil Participation* by Lynn Davies, Christopher Williams, and Hiromi Yamashita from Carnegie Young People Initiative (Davies et al., 2005). These three sources provide a representative view of the important studies that include the impacts of student voice, and were used as a reference for identifying themes in the research and specific research studies. Although Mager and Nowak provide the most extensive review of the empirical studies of the effects of student voice, their review is limited to articles and does not include full-length books; therefore, the additional studies identified were used to extend their work.

The analysis of the effects of student voice as shown in research studies will be discussed in terms of the following categories proposed by Mager and Nowak (2012): 1) effects on the students, 2) effects on the teachers, 3) effects on interactions, and 4) effects on the school as an organization.

2.4.1   Environments for student voice practices

In their review of research studies that explore the effects of student voice, Mager and Nowak (2012) identified 32 publications that fit their criteria and of these 32 publications, 52 "cases" were identified as some of the publications included multiple studies showing differing effects. From these 52 cases, they identified five environments that appear most often in the literature on the effects of student voice. Student voice initiatives occurred either in 1) councils such as school or student councils where select students are involved, 2) temporary working groups such as focus groups where select students and adults are involved, 3) class-related decision making where all students in the class are involved, 4) school-related decision making where all students in the school are involved, or 5) in multiple types of decision making. Figure 2.3 shows the total

number of research studies out of the 52 cases used in their review for each category identified. Councils were by far the environments studied most for student voice activities with 28 of the 52 cases identified in their review falling to this category.
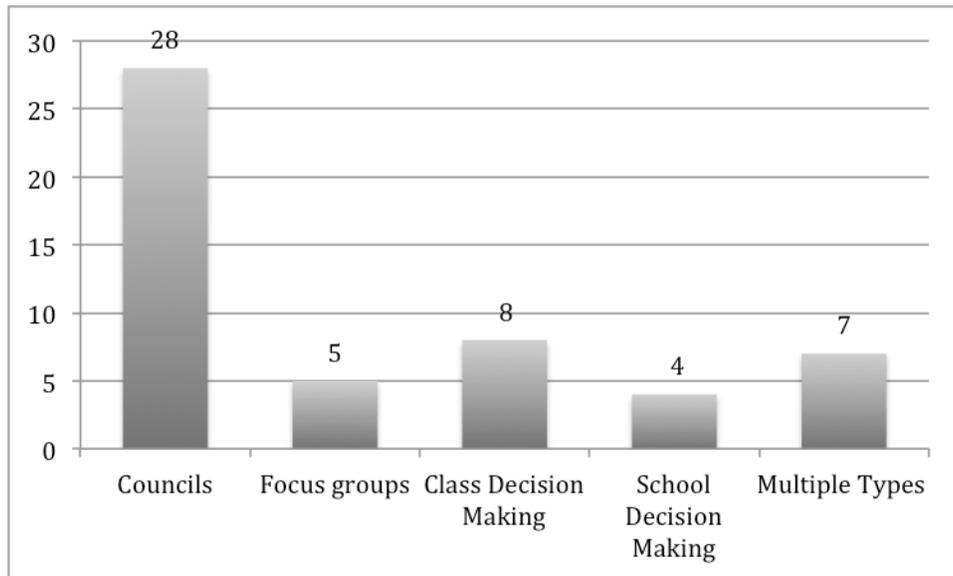
Figure 2.3. Environments for Student Voice Research (N=52)

2.4.2 Types of effects identified

In addition to the different environments, each of the 52 cases identifies effects of student voice initiatives on various groups. Mager and Nowak divided the effects by 1) personal effects on the students, 2) personal effects on teachers, 3) effects on interactions, and 4) effects on the school as an organization. Figure 2.4 shows the number of studies of the 52 that show effects to each of the categories identified. Effects on students and effects on the school as an organization were presented the most in these studies as 44 of the 52 studies show effects on the school as an

organization, and 43 also show effects on the students. The effects on the teachers were studied the least with only six studies mentioning the effects on the teachers. The important findings in each of these categories will be discussed in the following sections.
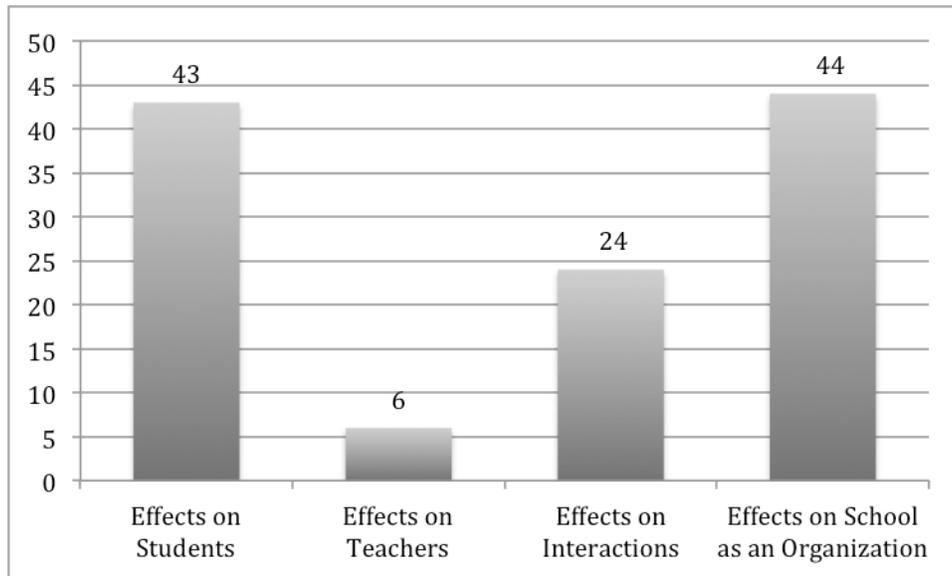
Figure 2.4. Studies of the Effects of Student Voice (N=52)

2.4.3 Effects on students

The effects of student voice initiatives and activities on the students is widely acknowledged in the literature (Davies et al., 2005; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). Mager and Nowak (2012) have identified several categories related to the impact of student voice activities on the students that are common to both the studies that they reviewed as well as the additional studies reviewed in this literature study: increasing students' academic achievement, developing life skills, developing/improving self-esteem and

social status, developing democratic and citizenship skills, and changing attitudes about schooling and learning.

The effects of student voice efforts on students' academic achievement are most often reported in the literature as indirect associations, where increases in areas such as communication skills, efficacy, and self-esteem are indirectly linked to improvements in overall student achievement. Both Mager and Nowak (2012) and Davies et al. (2005) report little direct evidence of effects on students' academic achievement measured by student performance on curriculum-based or standardized assessments.

One pertinent study (Hannam, 2001) claims some direct connections to increased student achievement. In this study, 12 secondary schools in the UK were identified as including student participation more than what is considered ususal. Comparative data found higher than expected levels of attainment and increases in results during the research period on the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), a standardized test given in the UK to high school students. Mager and Nowak noted correlations do not mean causation, however, the findings were noteworthy.

The literature related to the effects on student achievment mainly point to how shifting philosophies and increases in student engagement could be linked to overall increases in student achievment. Generally speaking, the effects on overall academic achievement in the research are not significantly documented in the empirical research (Mager & Nowak, 2012).

Mager and Nowak (2012) also found significant effects on student achievement in the area termed "life skills" (p. 44). This area was reported to be positively affected by student voice practices in more than half of the cases by Mager & Nowak (2012). Davies et al. (2005) also reported similar findings. Significant improvements were documented for students in areas such

as communication skills, developing a sense of agency, social skills, democratic and citizenship skills, developing a sense of responsibility, improving collaboration skills, and developing problem-solving skills (Angell, 1998; Cotmore, 2004; Hannam, 2001; Mitra, 2004; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006). In addition to these life skills, more than one-third of the studies in Mager and Nowak's review reported the development or improvement of self-confidence or self-esteem. This is an area commonly mentioned in the literature, mostly in single-school case studies (Cotmore, 2004; Mitra, 2004; Wilson, 2009).

Specific skills in citizenship are reported in many of the studies found in multiple sources. More than one-third of the studies in Mager and Nowak's review indicated positive effects related to skills in citizenship and democracy, including increased awareness of democratic processes, democratic skills and values such as chairing meetings, elections, and an increase in civic knowledge (Angell, 1998; Osberg et al., 2006; Wilson, 2009).

Student voice activities and initiatives are connected to changes in the attitudes of the students towards learning and their teachers. When students are consulted about teaching and learning, teachers reported increases in student's willingness to learn, attendance in school, and metacognitive skills. Student's perceptions of their teachers were also more positive and empathetic (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Mager and Nowak reported that over half of the cases they reviewed showed improvements in attitudes toward the school and greater enjoyment in school (Cotmore, 2004; Hannam, 2001; Mitra, 2005; Osberg et al., 2006; Schultz & Oyler, 2006).

2.4.4 Effects on teachers

Research in the area of the effects of student voice on teachers is sparse. Mager and Nowak reported low levels of evidence of the effects on teachers, as only five cases mentioned any such influences. Of these five cases, three were considered "poor" in quality. The other two showed positive effects in terms of morale and better learning experiences for staff (Hannam, 2001; Keogh & Whyte, 2005). Davies et al. (2005) did not directly address the effects on teachers.

Two areas reported by Mager and Nowak in different categories should also be considered effects on teachers: Increases in teachers' understanding of student's point of view categorized as of "effects on interactions" and influence on class content/teaching strategies considered under "effects on the school as an organization." These will be discussed in tsections 2.5 and 2.6.

Jean Rudduck, and Donald McIntyre both prominent names in the student voice literature have collected the most significant data on the effects of student voice initiatives on teachers. As part of the Consulting Pupils Project, a major development and research project in the UK, Rudduck and McIntyre compiled findings from many studies on student voice (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). One of the key areas of study in their project was how teachers respond to students ideas on improving teaching and learning, raising the questions: If teachers were offered feedback on their teaching from students in the class, would they find these ideas valuable? Would they change classroom practices both in the short and long term based on this feedback, and would this experience persuade teachers to build student consultation into their regular practice?

In exploring these questions, Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) found that as a result of consulting students about their instructional practices, teachers:

- valued the perceptions of young people's capabilities and attitudes

- developed a capacity to see familiar ideas from a different viewpoint

- articulated a readiness to change based on the perceptions provided to them

- expressed a renewed sense of excitement in teaching

Due to the limited number of studies on the influences of student voice on class content/teaching strategies, Mager and Nowak were unable to find significant data to support effects in the area of class content/teaching strategies. Only eight cases considered the influence on content and teaching strategies or other curricular issues, several of which were considered "poor" in Mager's review. Connections to teachers' attitudes towards changing their instructional practices were reported as positive, but few if any empirical studies exist showing effects on classroom pedagogy and practices.

One important project documented by Cook-Sather (2006a) is the Teaching and Learning Together (TLT) project involving pre-service teachers from Bryn Mawr College and students from a local high school. Pre-service teachers participated in this program as part of their teacher preparation coursework. This program included weekly email exchanges between the students and the pre-service teachers as well as weekly conversations among the students. Teachers also participated in a college-based seminar where they were taught how to dialogue with the students, focusing on improving their listening skills learning to consider the student's viewpoint when planning and implementing instruction. The findings from this project indicated that teachers found this student feedback to be valuable, often prompting them to make

significant changes to planning and instructional practices based on this process (Cook‑ Sather, 2006a).

2.4.5   Effects on interactions

More than one-third of the cases reviewed by Mager and Nowak report improvements related to interactions between students and adults (Mager & Nowak, 2012). These include improvements in relationships between students and teachers (Mitra, 2004; Wilson, 2009) between administration and students (Cotmore, 2004; Inman & Burke, 2002) and improvements in peer to peer relationships (Cotmore, 2004; Taylor & Johnson, 2002).

2.4.6   Effects on school/organization

The area of "school ethos" is described as the climate of the school and the ideals of the school community. This area showed the most significant positive effects upon the school and organization. More than three-quarters of the cases in Mager and Nowak's study included gains in this area. Improvements occurred in school engagement which includes better attitudes in students towards school, greater sense of ownership in the school, and greater student enjoyment, at school (Hannam, 2001; Inman & Burke, 2002; Mitra, 2004; Schultz & Oyler, 2006; Wilson, 2009).   Improvements also occurred in school and classroom climate such as improved discipline, less bullying, less racism, and better compliance with the rules (Cotmore, 2004; Hannam, 2001; Inman & Burke, 2002; Osberg et al., 2006).

2.4.7   Additional findings

In addition to the effects previously explored, there are several other findings related to the effects of student voice that are important to consider: the perceptions that adults often possess of the capacity of students to act as effective evaluators of pedagogy, and the barriers to student voice practices that were revealed in many of the studies of student voice.

The concept of student voice often challenges existing power relations, social and institutional structures, and many common educational practices. Despite efforts to include students in participatory roles in school decision making, schools continue to practice traditional hierarchical patterns related to the roles of students and adults (Levin, 2000; Fullan, 2007; Rudduck et al., 1996). Many adults are skeptical about students' capacity to provide accurate and useful contributions especially when it comes to informing classroom pedagogy and practices, believing that students lack the expertise, sophistication, and training to provide useful feedback on teaching practices (Lee, 1999). However, several studies where students provide feedback about classroom pedagogy indicate that students provide very complex and accurate evaluations of effective pedagogy. Lee (1999) conducted an ethnographic qualitative study of 40 low-achieving students, where aspects of effective teaching articulated by the students included: high expectations, interactive learning, and closer relationships with students. Even young children ages 7-12 were found to be "rational critics of their school experience" (Thorkildsen, Nolan, & Fournier, 1994, p. 485). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also conducted the *Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project* in 2009 where students were asked to report their perceptions of teacher's classrooms "to see if students' perceptions of the learning environment in a teacher's classroom are consistent with the learning gains they experience" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010, p.2). They concluded:

The average student knows effective teaching when he or she experiences it…student feedback need not be a popularity contest.…The most predictive aspects of student perceptions are related to a teacher's ability to control a classroom and to challenge students with rigorous work. (p. 5)

Kushman (1997) also describes the results of a six-year study conducted by the Restructuring Collaborative on students' views on learning in restructuring schools concluding

At all grade levels, we found students aware of what is going on around them in the name of educational reform.…They hear the messages which adults consciously or unconsciously convey, and can have strong opinions about their learning and schooling….Contrary to the stereotype of alienated and aimless youth, we found students deeply interested in their education and future once they are asked for their view. (p. 149-150)

2.4.8   Barriers to implementation

Although the research on student voice and including students in the educational process has increased in the past two decades, there is little evidence that educational change and reform movements have made any significant progress in treating students as legitimate partners in school decision making (Fullan, 2007). One significant reason for this is that adults tend to view students as the recipients of educational change and reform instead of participants in the solution (Fullan, 2007).

Research calls into question existing power relations, social and institutional structures, and educational and research practices (Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). Problems with teacher resistance are likely to occur where "superficial interpretations of the intent of student voice" are

present (Hipkins, 2010, p. 94). Adults must be willing to "hear and honor voices" and teachers must be "committed to sharing the power" (Lincoln, 1995, p. 89). Yet many teachers lack the knowledge about how to elicit student voices, which limits the extent to which the efforts are successful:

> In most teacher education programs, too little emphasis is placed on eliciting and negotiating student contributions to curriculum and on demonstrating how students can help to structure their own learning experiences. Little attention is given to the problem of simply asking the right questions." (Lincoln 1995, p.90)

Constraints coming from the system of the school such as pressures to cover the curriculum, lack of institutional support, and the concentration on cognitive achievement put forth by accountability movements have also been identified by teachers and researchers as significant barriers in addressing student voice in schools (Rudduck, 2007).

2.5   SUMMARY/NEED FOR FURTHER STUDY

The term *student voice* is often used to describe a range of activities that provide opportunities for students to participate in school experiences and decision making. Tracing the history of the term *student voice* is important in understanding how the term has come to have multiple meanings in contemporary research. The concept of student voice has shifted to focus less on students as data sources and more on students as active participants in the process of educational change. This shift, however, has been slow to occur on a larger scale, and many educators are not familiar with the range of conceptions.

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The "deeply embedded ideology" about the roles of students and teachers in the classroom prevents many adults from imagining student voice beyond its most passive and simplistic form where students are mere consultants in the decision making process. Most of the examples of student voice activities and initiatives, therefore, remain in the expression and consultation stages, although recent movements to embrace student voice as a reform strategy have encouraged more sophisticated student voice activities and projects. All forms of student voice, however, from limited input to leadership represent a considerable difference in approaches to education than what is typically present in schools today (Mitra, 2008b).

Formative assessment, inquiring learning, student leadership, learning to learn, and responding to diversity are common student voice practices found in the literature, and the majority of student voice practices fall into one of these five categories. These approaches are supported by several different theories about thinking and learning which assist in understanding why they are utilized for school reform. Knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of each pedagogical application of student voice is useful in comprehending the complexity of the principles behind student-centered learning.

The research studies on student voice, although limited, have increased in scope and quality during the past decade; however, the need for more high-quality empirical research is well documented in the literature by many student voice researchers and advocates. The effects of student voice vary, but are most often reported in terms of effects on students, and effects on the school as an organization. Overall, the effects in these areas were positive, with little evidence of negative effects identified in the review of the empirical studies (Davies et al., 2005; Mager & Nowak, 2012).

School reform often seeks to improve teaching pedagogy and practice in the classroom as many studies have shown that the teacher is one of the most important factors in student achievement (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Coleman 1966; Hanushek, 1992). Studies of the effects on teachers and on classroom practices that result from including student voices, however, appear so little in the empirical studies that these effects could not be adequately reported (Mager & Nowak, 2012). Research that explores the use of student voice in instructional settings as well as the way in which student voice may be linked to improved pedagogy in the classroom may contribute significantly to the current body of research on student voice.

3.0   METHODS

This chapter describes the research methods used in this research study addressing principals'

perceptions of student voice in classroom instruction.   The chapter describes in detail the

research questions examined, the inquiry strategies that were employed, the design of the

research study with related theory, the process by which the framework for inquiry was chosen

and developed, and the process that was used to analyze the data collected.

3.1   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This exploratory study answers three research questions that investigate the phenomenon of

student voice in high school classrooms. These questions are derived from components of the

conceptual framework and are grounded in social constructivist theory.   They are guided by a

central question: *How do high school principals perceive the concept of student voice and its*

role in transforming instructional practices? This question explores how student voice practices

are present in high school classrooms from the perspective of the building instructional leader.

From this question, the following research questions guided the collection of data in this study:

1. How do principals perceive the concept of student voice and the way that student

    voice is practiced in classrooms in their schools?

- What meaning do principals ascribe to the term *student voice* and what examples of student voice do they identify as present in classrooms in their schools?

- What barriers to student voice do principals identify and what factors do they believe encourage student voice?

- What aspects of the principals' professional background including training and experience, could affect the way that they perceive the presence of student voice in their schools?

2) What do principals state or imply about the connection between student voice and effective instructional practices?

- How do their descriptions of a distinguished teacher reflect the presence of student voice?

- What tools do principals use to define and document effective instruction in the classroom?

- How do their responses indicate an understanding of the role of student voice in effective instruction?

3) How do principals view their role in providing leadership to increase the presence of student voice in classroom pedagogy?

These questions were used to develop the inquiry strategies and the interview protocol that appear in the following sections.

3.2   INQUIRY STRATEGIES

Given the range of concepts and activities often associated with the term *student voice* as presented in Chapter 2, it is reasonable to assume that teachers and administrators possess a variety of different perceptions and attitudes towards this concept based on their individual backgrounds and experiences. Therefore, an attempt to study student voice practices in high school classrooms requires a careful selection of inquiry strategies that align with theories of learning that support a belief in the co-construction of meaning. It also requires a methodology that supports the exploration of a concept, not an attempt to find the truth in it.

The review of the literature concluded that many of the research studies on student voice are case studies of student voice initiatives existing as forums or councils. These studies often use direct observation of student voice groups as the basis for data collection in a case study methodology. I approached this study differently, choosing semi-structured interviews with principals instead of observations of classrooms or teachers. I made this decision for several significant reasons. First, the goal of this study is to explore student voice in high school classrooms through the perceptions of the instructional leaders who are responsible for evaluating effective instruction occurring in the classrooms in their buildings. The connection between student voice practices and effective instruction is a central concept in this study. The building principals as the instructional leaders in the school represent the best source of data for this purpose. They regularly observe classrooms as part of their responsibilities as an instructional leader, and should possess a global understanding of instructional practices that exist in classrooms in their schools. Furthermore, discovering what school leaders think and perceive about the value in and/or need for student voice practices in instructional settings may

potentially inform advocates and other student voice researchers seeking to learn how leadership might influence the adoption and sustained implementation of student voice practices.

The purpose of the study is to explore the meaning that principals ascribe to the phenomenon of student voice as they experience it as instructional leaders in their schools. Exploring student voice in high schools through the descriptions of various principals' experiences may uncover a deeper understanding of student voice and how it might affect instructional practices and transform teaching and learning in high schools.

This study used a qualitative approach to inquiry with a social constructivist theoretical framework that includes the community of practice learning theory discussed in Chapter 1. A detailed explanation of these approaches as well as the rationale for these choices appears in the sections that follow.

3.2.1 Qualitative research method and phenomenology

The methodology used in this study was qualitative interviewing informed by phenomenology. I chose phenomenology, a specific approach in qualitative research, for this study for several reasons. Phenomenological studies explore the meaning that individuals describe of their lived experiences with a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning that principals ascribe to the phenomenon of student voice as they experience it as instructional leaders in their schools. By exploring how student voice is practiced in high schools through the descriptions of various principals' experiences, I hoped to uncover the perception of student voice present in these interviews in order to develop a deeper understanding of student voice and how it might affect instructional practices and transform teaching and learning in contemporary high schools.

The review of the literature revealed that despite numerous reform efforts, high schools have remained relatively unchanged especially in their traditional views of the power dynamic in schools— teachers possess the knowledge and students are passive recipients. Rudduck (2007) attributes this in part to the idea that schools have not changed the "deep structures of schooling that hold habitual ways of seeing in place" (p. 588). These structures exist in the minds of the educators who develop their beliefs about teaching and learning from their own experiences. Fullan (2007) also expresses similar beliefs about how an individual's experiences are crucial to understanding his or her willingness to embrace change:

> It means changing the culture of classrooms, schools, districts, universities…Neglect of the phenomenology of change—that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended—is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms. (p. 8)

Using student voice practices in classrooms where students actively participate and collaborate with adults is a radical departure from traditional ways of viewing teaching and learning in secondary education. Therefore, it is important to study how educators create an understanding of the concept of student voice through exploring their descriptions and experiences to see how student voice operates in a school. Moustakas (1994) describes a hermeneutical approach to phenomenology fitting for this study:

> This interrelationship—the direct conscious description of experience and the underlying dynamics or structures that account for the experience—provides a central meaning and unity that enables one to understand the substance and essence of the experience. (Moustakas, 1994, p.9)

In phenomenology, "Perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted. Intentions united with sensations, make up the full concrete act of perception" (Husserl, 2001, p. 608-609). By soliciting principals' descriptions of student voice and their perceptions about how student voice may influence effective instruction, this study will provide an exploration of the meaning and essence of student voice as it exists in contemporary high schools, following the principles of a phenomenological approach.

The method used for designing a phenomenological approach for this study follows Moustakas' (1994) process. First I identified the overarching problem and the central question that I wished to answer: *How do high school principals perceive the concept of student voice and its role in transforming instructional practices?* In phenomenological research, the central question is developed from an intense interest in the subject that the researcher possesses (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, my selection of this particular approach grew out of my experiences as a teacher and principal. I then identified the specific focus for the study of student voice also based on my personal interest and experience as well as the lack of such research found in my review of the literature.

3.2.2 Social constructivist theory and communities of practice framework

The constructivist and social constructivist theories of learning are appropriate frameworks to use in this study as the meaning that principals create for student voice is related to their experiences as educators. Principals construct multiple and inherently unique realities from their past experiences and perspectives. The way in which they operate as school leaders is also dependent upon the meanings that they have constructed of leadership and good instructional practices.

The Constructivist paradigm (Prawat & Peterson, 1999) supports a belief that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through their experiences and subsequent reflections on those experiences. The Social Constructivists operate under the same notion of a constructed reality, but believe that learning is most effective when embedded or situated in a real-world setting in a rich social context (Vygotskiĭ & Cole, 1978). Social constructivism is based on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning that are pertinent to this study such as the nature of reality (Kukla, 2000), the social and cultural influence on the construction of knowledge (Prawat & Peterson, 1999), and the social component of learning (Prawat & Peterson, 1999).

This study also attempts to discover how student voice practices in high schools can transform the way that learning occurs in high school classrooms. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Communities of Practice theory of learning (Wenger, 1998) which finds its roots in social constructivist ideology, is also useful in studying the phenomenon of student in instructional settings in contemporary high schools. The communities of practice that may operate in high school classrooms where student voice is present, create environments for social constructivist learning where students are active participants in creating meaning.

Furthermore, the data collection protocol used for the interviews in the current study reflects constructivist theories as it attempts to uncover the principals' perceptions about student voice and investigate how building leaders construct their understanding of student voice and its importance in the classroom. *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013), is also rooted in constructivist theories of learning and was used to analyze the ways in which teachers identified as "distinguished" include (or do not include) student voice and the constructivist notion of students as active participants in the learning process in their instructional practices.

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3.3   SETTINGS AND PARTICIPANTS

This study focused on high school instructional settings; therefore, the data collection occurred in the principals' schools, the setting in which the phenomenon was observed. To determine the schools for the study, I used a number of data sources. A sampling approach (Maxwell, 2005) was used to limit the study to the high schools that are located in western Pennsylvania, that would be within a reasonable distance for travel.   Since the study requires travel to the sites on multiple occasions, it was necessary to limit the geographic locations to those that could be conveniently visited several times within a limited timeframe. I then used a purposeful selection process to limit the study to schools determined to be innovative or reform-oriented.

The rationale behind the decision to choose schools identified as innovative or reform-oriented, was that student voice practices were more likely to occur in schools where innovative practices are embraced and strong instructional practices are likely present. By exploring the connection between student voice practices and effective classroom pedagogy that would lead to high achievement, this study would potentially add value to the body of available literature on the subject of student voice.

3.3.1   School selection

Twelve schools representing 14 principals were identified for participation in this study. The Executive Director of the Western Pennsylvania Forum for School Superintendents identified 13 school districts characterized as innovative and reform-oriented. One school was eliminated from the study due to its location, which was in the eastern part of the state. I contacted 14 high school principals from the 12 school districts identified (two school districts had two principals due to

the large size of those districts), and eight high school principals agreed to participate in the study, resulting in a participation rate of 57%. These eight principals all worked in different high schools, however, two of the principals worked in the same school district. These eight principals were interviewed using the three-part protocol described later in this chapter.

Table 3.1 lists the size of the district and school for each participant using pseudonyms for all participants, districts, and schools. School districts with fewer than 2000 students were considered small; those with 2000-4000 were considered medium; 4000-6000 were considered large; and 6000 and above were considered very large. Therefore, there is diversity in the size of the school districts and the number of students that they serve.

All of the high schools were located in suburban areas in western Pennsylvania. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students in each school is listed in the column labeled "ED." This data was obtained from the Pennsylvania School Performance Profile for each school (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014.) Economically disadvantaged in Pennsylvania is "calculated by using poverty data sources such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cases, census poor, Medicaid, children living in institutions that are neglected or delinquent, those supported in foster homes or free/reduced price lunch eligibility" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014). Although there is some diversity in socioeconomics indicated by this percentage, none of these schools would be considered to be in any significant economic distress.

Table 3.1. Demographics Associated with each Participant

Participant	District	School	District Size	School Size	ED
Doug	Washington SD	Washington HS	M	M	10%
Bill	Adams SD	Adams HS	L	L	17%
Luke	Jefferson SD	Jefferson SHS	VL	L	14%
James	Van Buren SD	Van Buren HS	L	VL	20%
Anthony	Jackson SD	Jackson HS	L	L	27%
Brandon	Monroe SD	Monroe HS	S	S	16%
Robert	Madison SD	Madison HS	S	S	12%
Amy	Jefferson SD	Jefferson HIS	VL	L	16%

Note. SD= School District, HS= High School, S=Small, M=Medium, L=Large, VL= Very Large, ED=Economically Disadvantaged

3.3.2   Selecting principal interview sample

In order to achieve a range of data on the phenomenon that would be valuable, I determined that interviewing principals from different schools would produce the most thorough exploration of the phenomenon; however, in larger schools where two principals are present, I deemed it appropriate to interview both principals in order to collect an accurate depiction of the school as a whole. Of the eleven schools that were identified, two of the schools have two co-principals, while the other nine have only one. I requested participation from all 13 principals.

Another consideration for this study was sample size. It is necessary to include a large enough sample that the exploration of the phenomenon will be valid, yet not so large that it

would be unmanageable to complete by one person. Creswell (2007) explains that sample size often varies greatly in phenomenological studies, but points to several sources that suggest anywhere from 3-10 subjects as a suitable sample size.

I chose to conduct multiple interviews with each participant, to request permission from all 13 principals, and to interview approximately six to eight principals depending on the number of principals giving permission to interview and the availability of these principals to participate in the necessary timeframe. Of the 13 principals contacted, eight agreed to participation and all eight were included in this study.

3.4   RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

3.4.1 In-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing

According to Seidman (2006), phenomenological studies often use multiple data sources such as documents, observations, explorations of history, experimentation, surveys, and reviews of existing literature; however, interviews alone can serve as a thorough approach for certain types of studies: "If the researcher's goal is to understand the meaning people make of their experience then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry" (p. 11). Accordingly, I designed an interview protocol for this study to elicit the principals' perceptions about student voice practices in classrooms in their schools using a questioning strategy that permits participants to describe freely their experience on their own terms. Seidman (2006), describes an approach to interviewing that he terms *in-depth phenomenologically based interviewing* which combines life-history interviewing and in-depth interviewing informed by

assumptions from phenomenology. In this approach, interviewers use primarily open-ended questions and build upon and explore participants' responses. The goal is for the participant to reconstruct his or her experience for the interviewer (Seidman, 2006).

Often the best way to get to the heart of the phenomenon is to ask broad or open-ended questions that will lead to rich descriptions. Moustakas (1994) suggests asking two broad questions: "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" and "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" I integrated these concepts into the questions of my interview protocol.

Van Manen (1990) describes several ways to collect experiential material from others, one of which is the interview which serves two very specific purposes. First, it may be used to gather narrative material that can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and second, it can be used to develop a conversation with the participant about the meaning of the experience. I utilized both of these approaches in my interview protocol, which includes open-ended questions designed to elicit a narrative description of an experience with an outstanding teacher, and more specific questions about the phenomenon of student voice designed to determine how the participants create meaning and understanding of the concept.

3.4.1.1 Three interview series

The choice to use the phenomenologically based interviewing approach was made in part because this model involves a thorough interviewing process that allows for the phenomenon to be studied completely and also allows for internal validity checks. The model suggests conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant and is based on the work of Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982) who designed the series of three interviews. The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience.

The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience, and the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience (Seidman, 2006).

The first interview uses questions that will place the participant's experience in context and provide insight into experiences that might have influenced his or her understanding of the phenomenon. For this study, the first interview established the background of the principal. This interview provided valuable information about the participant's philosophies toward teaching and learning that may affect the way in which he or she perceives the meaning and importance of student voice in instructional settings. Following Seidman's model, during the second interview, I attempted to elicit concrete details of the participant's experience with the phenomenon—student voice practices in instructional settings. Principals were not asked for opinions, but rather the details of their experience upon which their opinions may be built (Seidman, 2006). The third interview asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience—the intellectual and emotional connections between the participant's work and life. They were asked to reflect on the first two interviews and to explore how the past events led them to their present understanding. This is critical to the current study as one of the propositions is that a principal's past experiences as an instructional leader, teacher and learner will affect the way in which he or she views the meaning and importance of student voice in instructional settings.

Seidman (2006) stresses the importance of adhering to the three-interview structure and focusing only on the task of that particular interview as it takes place, so even though the inquiry may be open-ended, it does have an objective at each step. This is important because each interview provides a foundation of detail for the next interview. Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982) suggest using a 90-minute format for each interview, although Seidman points out that "there is nothing magical or absolute about this timeframe," suggesting that the

interviewer leave enough time for the interviewee to be able to reconstruct the events in enough detail to be sufficient.

The three-interview structure works best when the researcher can space out each interview from 3 days to a week apart allowing time for the participant to think about the preceding interview but not enough time to lose connection between the two interviews (Seidman, 2006). The three-interview structure also allows the interviewer to establish a substantial relationship with the participants over time (Seidman, 2006), which is useful in obtaining accurate data where trust is established. Seidman recognizes that the structure of the interview protocol may need to be adjusted depending on the nature of the study and the availability of the participants. He acknowledges combining two interviews into one or choosing a different amount of time between each interview and asserts that accommodations such as these are acceptable and have been successful, "as long as the structure is maintained that allows participants to reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives" (p. 21).

Given the limitations of the schedules of many building principals and the desire to obtain permission from as many as possible, it was not feasible to request that a principal devote 90 minutes to three separate interviews on three different days. Most principals would find it difficult to devote more than 60 minutes on any given day. For this reason, I chose to schedule one sixty-minute interview combining both parts one and two and a thirty-minute interview for part three. I conducted interviews one and two in person with all participants. Participants were given the choice of either a face-to-face or phone interview for part three. All participants chose the phone interview. I attempted to schedule these interviews 3-7 days apart, however, the schedules of the participants dictated when the interviews were able to occur.

Most interviews were conducted within the 3-7 day range, but in several cases, the follow-up interview was not able to occur until 10-15 days after the initial interview.

3.4.2 Development of the research protocol

I developed a protocol with pertinent questions that were used in the interviews. This protocol was developed by creating questions that would address each of the research questions and the related components of each research question as well as my propositions (see Table 3.2 for an explanation of my propositions). Appendix A lists each research question and the associated interview questions that I used in the interview protocol.

The order of the questions in the protocol is also important. Principals were first asked general questions designed to elicit their perceptions of distinguished instruction prior to any discussion about student voice. I decided to approach the questions this way to determine if the principal made connections between student voice practices and distinguished instruction before being exposed to the concept of student voice so that I would elicit a more accurate view of their perception of this connection. Also, I asked principals to explain their understanding of student voice prior to our discussions of student voice, or providing them with a definition of student voice for the same reason.

3.4.3 Pilot study

Many experts in qualitative study strongly suggest using a pilot study to test the interviewing design with a small number of participants. I conducted a pilot study with one participant who was a high school assistant principal. I used the interview protocol for this pilot interview to test

its reliability, recording and transcribing the interview. Formal data analysis was not completed for the pilot study; however, I reviewed the data and made minor changes to the interview questions based on this experience.

3.4.4 Triangulation

Subjectivity in phenomenological qualitative research is embraced in an effort to understand how interpretations may be influencing what is observed. For validity purposes, however, it is important to recognize propositions and assumptions that the researcher may bring to the process. The propositions regarding the research questions are summarized in Table 3.2.

A method of triangulation also often used in phenomenological research is *bracketing*, a term referring to "the process of temporarily suspending any consideration of the facts in order to uncover the essential principle of an experience" (Dukes, 1984, p. 199). Recognizing the assumptions that a researcher has towards the research questions and making a clear effort to suspend such assumptions during the process of data collection and analysis serves as a way to produce internal validity.

Conducting multiple interviews over time is also a way to assist with the process of bracketing as participants' responses can be compared and validated during multiple interviews (Dukes, 1984). Therefore, both identifying the underlying propositions and participating in the process of bracketing, as well as conducting multiple interviews that provided internal validity when comparing the responses of the first two interviews with the reflective comments of the third interview, were the methods used to validate the data collected.

I also conducted a member check by providing participants with a transcript of each interview after it was conducted. They were advised to review this before the data was analyzed.

Furthermore, I acknowledge the possibility of response effect bias—the possibility that respondents modify their answers to be more socially acceptable or provide a response that they believe the interviewer wants to hear (Butin, 2010). I attempted to minimize this effect by choosing careful wording of the interview questions to avoid any implications that might indicate my own bias or might imply that the participant is being evaluated in any way. Furthermore, the three-tiered approach created a relationship between the researcher and the participant that encouraged more accurate responses.

Table 3.2. Research Questions and Associated Propositions

Research Question	Researcher's Propositions
How do principals perceive the concept of student voice and the way that student voice is practiced in classrooms in their schools?	Principals' descriptions of student voice may reflect a limited knowledge of the concept. Examples will describe traditional, less participatory types of student voice such as consultation. Examples of community of practice concepts will be limited to isolated teachers and will not be reported as an integral observation even in the classrooms of well-recognized teachers.
What do principals state or imply about the connection between student voice and effective instructional practices?	Principals will report that even their "best" teachers do not consistently utilize collaborative types of student voice practices identified by *The Framework for Teaching* as characteristic of "distinguished" teachers; however, they will acknowledge the importance of student voice in effective pedagogy.
How do principals view their role in providing leadership to increase the presence of student voice in pedagogical practices?	Principals will recognize themselves as resources for providing leadership to teachers around concepts of student voice to improve instruction, but will acknowledge the lack of formal or informal training that would prepare them to do so.

The interview protocol for this study (see Appendix B) attempted to develop a relationship with the participant through the three-interview format that assisted in creating a climate in which the participant felt comfortable using a less public voice (Seidman, 2006). I acknowledged the necessity to be cognizant of this during the interviews and asked clarifying questions as needed.

3.5   DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

This study used both inductive and deductive methods of data analysis to explore thoroughly all of the concepts identified in the three research questions. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix B) when conducting interviews with the participants. I then transcribed the interviews using a word processing program, and applied a coding process to the data in the transcripts. During the first cycle of analysis, I read the transcripts (Seidman, 2006) and established themes. I chose to use the selective approach where sentences and phrases that seem to be especially revealing about the experience are identified and highlighted (Van Manen, 1990) as it best fits the process of exploring principals' perceptions of the phenomenon.

After I identified the major themes, I conducted the second cycle of analysis, coding. I used In vivo coding (Saldana, 2009) to mark excerpts spoken by the participants that address each of the research questions.   I then sorted the data and grouped it using the codes identified. These codes were also assigned to a particular research question as suggested by Rubin (2005) to assist in connecting the themes with the questions of the study.

Rubin (2005) describes the importance of differentiating between organizational, substantive and theoretical categories when coding. *Organizational* categories are broad areas

that the researcher identifies prior to the interviews. These are general topics that have been derived from the literature. These categories function as "bins" for organizing the information in a very general way, and are best used as chapter or section headings. *The Spectrum of Student Voice Related Activities,* a typology discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 of this document was applied in this way to categorize the types of student voice activities described by the principals.

Maxwell (2005) describes the *substantive categories* as those that provide insight into the phenomenon and how it functions. For the purpose of this study, I used an emic approach in creating substantive categories, and codes were created using descriptions of the concepts taken directly from the participants own words. Such categories were used in this study, especially when considering the research questions that address the perceptions of the principals towards student voice and its connection to effective instruction. The use of this emic approach also assisted in maintaining the subjective nature of the data that is important to a phenomenological study.

Theoretical categories, which are more general and abstract, were also used to code the data. Since this study is linked to a conceptual framework that includes existing theory, etic categories related to conceptions of effective instruction derived from the *Framework for Teaching* as well as characteristics of community of practice learning theories were applied.

In addition to coding, several other analytic options were utilized in this study. Maxwell (2005) explains the importance of informal types of analysis often utilized by researchers, but not often described as part of their data analysis:

> Reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observation notes, writing memos, and developing and coding categories, and applying these to your data and analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships are *all* important types of data

analysis. Their use needs to be planned (and carried out) in order to answer your research

questions and address validity threats. (p. 96)

Following this advice, I wrote field notes during interviews, and created analytic memos while

conducting the data analysis to capture thinking about the data. I also chose to transcribe all of

the data myself which provided another layer of analysis that occurred when listening to the

interview and transcribing it. Furthermore, I also used connecting strategies to look for

relationships that connect each of the principals' descriptions of student voice and the attitudes

expressed towards it. For example, certain patterns in responses occurred depending on

principals' background information that is similar or different. The final synthesis of the data

examined the way in which the idea of student voice operates overall in the setting of high

school classrooms.

4.0   FINDINGS

The current study elicited several important findings that will be discussed in this chapter. It is significant to note that the methodology used for the data collection was informed by a phenomenological approach, but the data analysis and presentation of the findings would not be described as purely phenomenological.   As explained in Chapter 3 of this document, phenomenological studies explore the meaning that individuals describe of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). By exploring how student voice is practiced in high schools through the descriptions of various principals' experiences, I hoped to uncover the perception of student voice present in these interviews in order to develop a deeper understanding of how student voice exists in classrooms and how it might affect instructional practices and transform teaching and learning in contemporary high schools.

My initial intention was to conduct a phenomenological study of the principals' experiences with the concept of student voice. The interview protocol was designed using a phenomenological process. However, the extensive interviews with the principals ultimately did not reveal a strong presence of the phenomenon. Therefore, the principals' experiences with student voice was limited and could not result in the creation of a "universal essence" related to the phenomenon as is the goal of most phenomenological studies. The interviews, however, did provide insightful findings related to the principals' *perceptions* of student voice and how it exists in classrooms that could inform policy and practice and lead to further research in this

area.   Consequently, the methodology is described as qualitative interviewing with phenomenological elements.

The research findings are described in this chapter and are organized into sections following the concepts outlined in the research questions: 1) perceptions of the concept of student voice, 2) descriptions of student voice practices observed classrooms, 3) beliefs about the connection between student voice and effective instructional practices, and 4) beliefs about the role of leadership in supporting student voice.

The findings in each section are presented in relationship to the interview question that elicited the response. I chose this approach to show the progression in the manner in which the participants were influenced by exposure to the concept since this exposure proved to be significant to the development of their ultimate understanding of the phenomenon. Prior to any discussion about student voice, principals were first asked to describe effective teaching. As the interview progressed, the principals were exposed to the concept through definitions and discussions that ultimately influenced their perception of the concept. In order to illustrate this process, the findings are presented in an attempt to recreate the process for the reader.

The findings are also presented in a less thematic way than in a purely phenomenological study. Data are often presented to represent patterns in the responses of the participants that led to discussions and implications about the findings presented in Chapter 5. Each section begins with a short description of the significance of the findings in that section so that the reader may glean the overall impression of each finding. Detailed data to support the findings follow in each section for readers interested in more specific data.

4.1 FINDINGS: HOW DO PRINCIPALS PERCEIVE THE CONCEPT OF STUDENT VOICE?

The way in which principals perceived the concept of student voice was determined by 1) the meaning that they ascribed to the term, *student voice*, both during the initial interview and during the follow-up interview, 2) the student voice practices they identified as present in their classrooms, 3) the conditions that they believed promoted student voice, and 4) the barriers to implementing student voice that they described. Findings related to each of these areas are described in the sections that follow.

4.1.1 Principals' initial definition of student voice

Overall, the definitions of student voice presented by the principals were more complex than what I expected to find. Principals described student voice in a variety of environments representing a range of activities from expression through participation. This finding was unexpected as the literature indicated a common understanding of student voice that was much less complex and often limited to less participatory forms of student voice. Since principals for this study were chosen because they worked in school districts identified as innovative and reform-oriented, it is possible that working in settings where innovative practices are fostered provided them with a more complex understanding of the phenomenon. Principals' descriptions also indicated a much stronger emphasis on student voice as it exists in classroom settings, which revealed a common perception that the principals shared: that student voice practices were connected to effective instruction.

To determine the meaning that principals initially ascribed to the concept of student voice, principals were asked: *The term student voice is interpreted in many different ways by educators. Please describe for me what you think student voice is. The Spectrum of Student Voice Related Activities* (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012) discussed in Chapter 2, was used to categorize the types of student voice practices that were present in the principals' descriptions. Table 4.1 summarizes the types of student voice that were described by each participant in his or her definition of student voice. The table also indicates the environment(s) in which the practices that the principals describe occurred. The environments for student voice were described as either school-wide environments or classroom instructional environments.

Table 4.1. Types of Student Voice Principals Describe When Defining Student Voice

Participant	School-wide or Classroom	Expression	Consultation	Participation	Partnership	Activism	Leadership
Amy	Both	X	X				
Robert	Both	X	X	X	X		
Bill	Both	X	X	X	X		
James	School	X	X				
Anthony	School	X	X				
Luke	Both	X	X	X			
Doug	Both	X	X	X	X		X
Brandon	Both	X					

Table 4.1 shows that most principals describe student voice as something that exists in both school-wide environments as well as classrooms. When principals described the classroom approaches to student voice, they were always related to instructional practices. Robert's description of student voice captured the two environments for student voice that were described in the literature, and appeared most often in the interviews:

> In my experience, student voice has many different meanings but in my mind there are almost two categories. So one category of student voice is what I would call sort of participation in instruction…if the teacher sets a targeted learning objective, the student gets to decide how they're going to meet that objective… I would call student voice sort of voice in the classroom instructional practice, and having some input into assessment and learning. There is the other part of student voice, which to me is sort of like students having input into the school environment and school culture. So having a voice in what kinds of clubs and activities exist within a school, having a voice in how the school is going to operate in terms of social functions.

This description mentioned the presence of two different settings for student voice: school-wide and classroom, which were also discussed in Chapter 2 of this document. Since much of the research on student voice is described as school-wide initiatives not necessarily associated with classroom instruction, I assumed that the majority of the principals' descriptions of student voice would focus on student voice as a school-wide concept as opposed to student voice as an instructional approach or classroom practice. However, only two participants described student voice in terms of school-wide initiatives only, while the other six mentioned both school-wide and classroom approaches to student voice similar to what Robert described above.

Furthermore, the majority of the principals specifically mentioned student voice as it relates to instructional practices in the classroom.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) identified six types of student voice as presented in Chapter 2 of this document. These six types can be grouped into in three main categories: Expression and Consultation, Participation and Partnership, and Activism and Leadership. The spectrum shown previously in Figure 2.2 shows that as the levels increase vertically, the degree to which the students are actively involved as stakeholders and collaborators increases; however, as the involvement increases, the practice of that type of activity becomes less common. In most schools today, the majority of student voice activities would fall in the lower levels of one or two on the spectrum (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

When analyzing the principals' responses in terms of these categories, the findings of the current study were somewhat consistent with the findings indicated in the literature review. Half of the principals described student voice as students expressing ideas and adults listening and consulting with them; however, the other half of the participants described student voice in more complex terms, focusing more on levels 3 and 4 (participation and partnership).

Half of the principals described student voice mostly in terms of levels one and two (expression and consultation) on Toshalis and Nakkula's spectrum. They used terms like "input," "listening to students," and "validation of students' thoughts and perspectives," and their responses reflected an emphasis on students expressing their opinions to adults. Brandon, for example described student voice: "It makes me think of that there is input from students. They're not just passive learners. They have input."

Although these responses did describe student voice opportunities, they are examples of more passive approaches that are most commonly described by educators. The students have

opportunities to express their opinions and this information may be used to make decisions about further actions, however, it is the adults who ultimately have the power to make the decisions and implement changes.

Descriptions of student voice from the other four principals focused more on the third and fourth levels of student voice identified by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012): participation and partnership. In these levels, students are given more power and responsibility in the process beyond merely providing their opinions. In the *participation* category, students may be encouraged to take more active roles such as attending meetings in which the decisions are made or generating questions to be used in data collection. This type of participation becomes a *partnership* when students are given the power to advocate for what they desire and collaborate with adults to take part in implementation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Principals who described student voice with examples from these categories used terms such as "participating in instruction," "input has a direct impact on outcomes," and "seeing their ideas come to fruition," which all imply a more participatory and collaborative approach to student voice as Bill described:

Well, I mean, student voice depends on the context, whether it is in the classroom, or the school itself, or in the home…I guess I would look at it from a classroom perspective meaning that the students' thoughts and ideas are valued and validated. That they are worthwhile and that input also has a direct impact on the outcome of the learning and the classroom environment. And I would say that even from a more global perspective in a school is that if they do have thoughts and ideas and opinions, and seeing those come to fruition is what student voice would mean to me.

Doug, like several others, also described student voice as a more participatory process:

>That students have the capacity to make contributions to whatever you want to talk about—the quality of the school as a whole, the social dynamic of the school, the academic program or planning of the school, right down to the influence of the daily lesson's growth. When students have contribution potential and they recognize that it's valued…so they are encouraged to contribute.

None of the principals gave explicit descriptions of student voice that would be considered *activism* and *leadership*, the fifth and sixth levels of Toshalis and Nakkula's spectrum. This involves youth taking the most active roles in implementing change that might involve students forming groups in the community or school, seeking to change something and then creating an action plan that they will implement. One principal, however, did give a description that approaches levels five and six by describing students as leading the change process:

>One of the words I'm leaning towards its ownership…One thing I'd add is that if students are asked to make a contribution and it's not valued and it demonstrates no effect, I call it student noise….So the way I think is that it has to have the connotation of ownership and influence. (Doug)

Doug's use of the words, "ownership" and "influence" implies taking student voice a step further and empowering students to have ownership in the educational process, thus becoming leaders in implementing their thoughts and ideas.

4.1.2 Expanded definitions of student voice

The findings from the current study indicate that participatory forms of student voice are becoming more commonly identified and that in some cases, student voice is moving towards positioning students in more participatory roles in approaches to instruction. This finding represents a possible departure from the findings in the literature that indicated that student voice is most commonly described in less participatory forms such as expression and consultation, and that the movement towards students influencing decisions and actively participating in deliberations is much less common.

The current study also found that exposure to the concept through the interview process resulted in an expanded understanding of the concept over time. After contemplating the concept of student voice as presented in the first interview, the principals' notions of the presence of student voice practices in classrooms often expanded. About half of the participants described more participatory forms of student voice practices and gave additional examples of student voice practices in the classroom. Furthermore, when participants were provided with a coherent definition of student voice that focused on more participatory forms, their understanding expanded and additional examples were also recalled.

In the first part of the interview with the participants, I intended to elicit principals' perceptions of student voice prior to any exposure to the idea through the interview process. After they provided their initial descriptions of their understanding of student voice, in the second part of the interview, I then shared the following definition, crafted from different definitions of student voice identified in the literature: *a construct used to describe a range of activities that provide opportunities for students to express unique ideas and perspectives, collaborate with adults, and participate in the process of improving school experiences and*

student learning. Principals were then asked: *How does this definition change or confirm the original perception that you previously described? Are there any other examples of student voice in your school that you want to add after reading this definition?*

Four principals confirmed that this definition was similar to what they had imagined when they gave their own definition. They did not add any further examples or expand their responses. This finding was of interest because the initial definitions of student voice that these four principals provided, unlike the other four principals, included ideas fitting higher levels of *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Related Activities* (as seen in Figure 2.2). These principals perceived student voice as a more multifaceted concept.

The other four principals mentioned that the definition provided to them "validated" or "confirmed" their understanding of student voice, but that it also changed or made them think about the definition of student voice in a different way. Both Amy and Anthony mentioned that their initial perception of student voice was tied to school-wide activities such as student council where students would be given opportunities to voice their opinions about changing the procedures in or environment of the school. After reading this definition, they expressed how the definition expanded their understanding to include instructional practices in the classroom, which they did not necessarily consider before. Brandon also shared this experience, and provided an example of student voice related to project-based learning:

> I think it's what I said [in his previous description], but looking at this [the definition provided], to me it's project-based learning—kids are working with adults as part of their learning process, and also some other additional experiences…we just completed a project like that…and so I think a lot of it to me speaks of project-based learning opportunities.

Principals in this group described a similar change in their perception of the meaning of student voice after being exposed to the definition. With limited exposure to the concept, some of the principals appeared to develop a more complex understanding of the concept. This indicated that the definition of student voice that I provided created a disruption in their thinking about the concept, allowing them to consider it in more complex ways.

4.2   FINDINGS: WHAT TYPES OF STUDENT VOICE PRACTICES DO PRINCIPALS OBSERVE IN THEIR CLASSROOMS?

When asked to define student voice, principals were able to identify a variety of different types of student voice representing a range of activities involving somewhat sophisticated examples of student voice practices. However, when asked to provide specific examples of these practices in the classrooms in their schools, the responses, overall, were much more vague representing more passive types of student voice such as expression and consultation. Also, although some of the examples provided touched upon more participatory forms of student voice, these examples were still often limited, existing only in isolated classrooms in the schools. There was no evidence in the principals' accounts that indicated a comprehensive presence of participatory forms of student voice existing in the classrooms of the schools studied. This finding implies a difference between what the principals perceive as student voice and how it actually exists in classrooms in the school, indicating a disconnect between vision and practice.

Principals were asked the following question prior to any exposure to student voice concepts: *Based on your understanding of student voice, please think of a classroom where you would say that student voice practices are a part of this teacher's pedagogy. What it is like to be*

in this classroom? Descriptions of student voice practices that they identified are summarized in Table 4.2.

Only a few of the principals were able to identify specific classrooms or teachers and types of student voice activities from the higher levels of *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Related Activities.* Many of the other descriptions included a discussion of primarily one student voice example that represented more passive forms of student voice such as expression and consultation and often included examples of effective teaching practices that were not necessarily examples of student voice practices.

Principals' descriptions often included a general example of a student voice practice with no reference to a specific teacher or a description of a particular classroom in the school where those types of practices are used. The type of student voice described also often represented a more passive form of student voice.

Several of the participants used educational terminology such as "differentiated instruction," "21st century student," and "tiering lessons" when responding to this question. This type of language was not present in other parts of the interview. This departure from a conversational tone to a more formal tone seemed to indicate a change in the principals' comfort level when replying to this question, possibly because they struggled to identify specific student voice practices in their classrooms.

Table 4.2. Principals' Descriptions of Student Voice Practices in Classrooms in their Schools

Characteristic Described	Number of Participants (out of 8) who Described this Characteristic	Names of the Participants	Type of Student Voice Described
Students have choice in activities/assessments	5	Doug, James, Anthony, Brandon, Amy	Level 1: Expression
Teacher uses differentiated instruction	1	Brandon	Level 1: Expression
Students collaborate in discussions/activities	2	Doug, Robert	Levels 1 and 2: Expression/Consultation
Students generate questions/focus of the lesson	1	Doug	Level 3: Participation
Teacher operates as a facilitator	2	Brandon	Level 3: Participation
Students have ownership in the learning	2	Doug, Robert	Levels 4, and 5: Partnership/Leadership
Teacher creates a classroom learning community	2	Doug, Robert	Levels 3 and 4: Participation/Partnership
Students have leadership opportunities as part of the school or classroom	1	Luke	Level 6: Leadership
Students participate in project-based learning	1	Brandon	Levels 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6: Expression, Consultation Participation, Partnership, and Leadership

A few principals provided descriptions that were specific in terms of identifying the teacher and also identifying examples of student voice that represented participatory forms of student voice practices. For example, Robert described a classroom environment where student voice is present:

> I can think of one teacher in particular. What makes her classroom different from any other that I have seen is the level of community created within the classroom. Every day starts off with a classroom meeting so students are in a circle, they are contributing something to the morning meeting or the afternoon meeting depending on when they have class, to talk about what's going on in the class. They talk about the class accomplishments, they talk about their own individual accomplishments, they applaud for one another, they provide reinforcement, they provide support. So in this particular classroom the teacher creates a sense of community that I've never ever seen in another high school teacher.

Robert related student voice to the concept of creating a "community" in the classroom that is similar to the idea of the Community of Practice theory (Wenger, 1998) described in Chapter 2 of this document. Wenger's community of practice refers to a "kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (Wenger, 1998, p.45). This connection will be analyzed later in this chapter.

Doug also provided a concrete example of student voice practices in the classroom where students took on active roles in the learning process similar to what Robert described:

> I will give you an example of a recent observation that I did…as soon as kids would walk in, they started to do something. A side auxiliary whiteboard is over there. Written across the top was the frame of the evenings assignment in math, and the first couple kids

that walked in walked over to the board, picked up a marker, and started to write down some questions and particular numbers underneath that and then went and sat down and some more kids came in….I watched them do this without any direction, and when the bell rang, the teacher said that she was giving one more minute for students to pose their input on review of the assignment. She then looked at it and noted where there seemed to be more volume, gave them one minute to talk amongst themselves…that they couldn't go through everything but what seemed to be the most necessary to review and discuss as a class and review the assignment. The kids came to consensus in very little time. They picked two targets…They did their homework review as a collaborative team. That is…an excellent example of ownership and student voice in the process.

Doug's example described a participatory form of student voice where students take on active roles of participation in shaping the type of activities that take place in the lesson. The way that the lesson progressed in this example depended upon what topics the students chose to discuss. Students worked collaboratively to accomplish a common goal, and experienced, "ownership" of their learning.

4.2.1   The presence of learning communities/communities of practice

This study revealed that the presence of learning communities in high school classrooms was fairly uncommon. More participatory forms of student voice such as "community of learners" and students "assuming a large part of the responsibility for the success of a lesson," as described in Danielson's introduction to *The Framework For Teaching* (2013), and which relate to the Community of Practice Theory, were not a significant presence most schools. Data to support this conclusion was derived from the principals' accounts of these practices. An additional

notable finding was that principals often recognized that a learning community approach to teaching was an effective way to engage students in the learning, but that some of their "best" teachers do not use this approach in their classrooms. This finding indicates a possible conflict between elements that Danielson (2013) identifies as characteristics of a distinguished teacher, and the common perception of the practices of a distinguished teacher that many educators may possess.

Although not common to all interviews, the idea of building a community of learners in the classroom was a theme that did emerge in a few of the interviews, even before this concept was formally discussed with the participants. Several of the principals mentioned such learning communities when describing the characteristics of their best teacher. For example, Robert spoke about, a classroom where students, "provide reinforcement, they provide support," (mutual engagement) and "the teacher creates a sense of community" (joint enterprise). The concept of a community of learners coincides with the community of practice theory that is part of the theoretical framework of this study. This theory examines the ways in which people create knowledge through collaborating in a group in a "kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (Wenger, 1998, p. 45). Learning occurs through active participation within these communities and consists of three elements: joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998).

The introduction to *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson 2013), describes distinguished-level teaching practices that connect closely to the ideas of the Community of Practice explored by Lave and Wenger. Table 4.3 summarizes the elements of the *Framework* that include a strong focus on characteristics of student voice and also elements of the Community of Practice Theory. As previously discussed, *The Framework for Teaching*

(Danielson, 2013) contains four domains and 22 components. Only the domains and components with a strong reference to student voice practices were included in this table. This table also indicates which participants defined and provided examples of student voice fitting each of the categories.

The analysis of the components from *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013) indicated that a strong presence of student voice was evident, especially in Domain 2— Classroom Environment, and Domain 3—Instruction. Principals most often provided examples of student voice fitting with the components of 2a: Creating an environment of respect and rapport, 2b: Establishing a culture for learning, and 3c: Engaging students in the learning. Furthermore, all three components of the Community of Practice (joint enterprise, shared repertoire, and mutual engagement) were present in the principals' descriptions and examples of student voice overall.

After reflecting on their reactions to the introduction to the *Framework* and the types of student voice practices identified there, principals were asked, *Where do you see the classrooms in this school in relationship to what is described here?* Principals were asked to think about the ideas of the "community of learners" described in the introduction as well as the idea that students "assume a large part of the responsibility for the success of the lesson" (Danielson, 2013).

Overall, the principals' responses to this question were divided into two groups. The first group, consisting of half of the principals, described their staff in similar ways. They believed that about one-third of the staff would be considered teachers who regularly use the participatory approach to student voice described, including the community of learning and student ownership in the learning process.

Table 4.3. Danielson Domain Identified by the Respondent with Related CoP Element

Domain/ Component	Danielson Description	CoP Element	Respondents Who Provided Examples of this Practice
2a: Creating an environment of respect and rapport	Classroom *interactions among the teacher and individual students are highly respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and caring and sensitivity to the students'* cultures and levels of development. *Students themselves ensure high levels of civility* among members of the class. Evidence that the teacher places a high priority on appropriate and respectful behavior and interaction and behavioral standards are clear and consistent.	Mutual Engagement	Doug Robert Amy Anthony James Bill
2b: Establishing a culture for learning	Evidence of high levels of *student energy and teacher passion for the subject that create a culture for learning in which everyone shares a belief in the importance of the subject. All students hold themselves to high standards of performance* for example, by initiating improvements to their work.	Joint enterprise	Doug Robert Amy Bill Luke
2c: Managing classroom procedures	*Students contribute to the seamless operation of classroom routines* and procedures for transitions, handling of supplies, and the performance of non-instructional duties. Evidence of a community that takes pride in their classroom operations	Mutual engagement	Robert Doug
2d: Managing student behavior	Standards of conduct are clear, with *evidence of student participation in setting and maintain them*. The teacher's monitoring of student behavior is subtle and preventive and the teacher's response to student misbehavior is sensitive to individual student needs. *Students take an active role in monitoring the standards of behavior*.	Mutual engagement Shared Repertoire	Robert

Table 4.3. (continued)

Domain/ Component	Danielson Description	CoP Element	Respondents Who Provided Examples of this Practice
2e: Organizing physical space	The classroom is safe and the physical environment ensures that learning of all students, including those with special needs. Opportunities are available to all learning styles. *Students contribute to the use or adaption of the physical environment* to advance learning. Technology is used skillfully as appropriate to the lesson.	Shared Repertoire	
3b: Using questioning and discussion techniques	Questions reflect high expectations and are culturally and developmentally appropriate. *Students formulate many of the high-level questions and ensure that all voices are heard.*	Joint enterprise	Doug Robert
3c: Engaging students in the learning	Students are highly intellectually *engaged throughout the lesson in significant learning and make relevant and substantive contributions to the activities, student groupings, and materials.* The lesson is *adapted to the needs of individuals,* and the structure and pacing allow for student reflection and closure	Joint enterprise	Doug Robert Bill Anthony Amy Luke James Brandon
3d: Using assessment in instruction	Assessment is used in a sophisticated manner in instruction *through student involvement in establishing the assessment criteria, self-assessment by students, and monitoring of progress by both students and teacher,* and high quality feedback to students from a variety of sources.	Joint enterprise	Doug Anthony

Table 4.3. (continued)

Domain/ Component	Danielson Description	CoP Element	Respondents Who Provided Examples of this Practice
3e: Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness	Teacher seizes an opportunity to enhance learning, *building on a spontaneous event or expression of student interest.* Teacher ensures the success of all students, using an extensive repertoire of instructional strategies and shows evidence of actively seeking new strategies.		Anthony Doug Amy
4b: System for managing students' data	Teacher's information management system for student completion of assignments, progress in learning and not-instructional activities is fully effective and is used frequently to guide planning. *Students contribute to the maintenance and/or interpretation of the information.*	Shared Repertoire	
4c: Communicating with families	Teacher provides frequent, culturally-appropriate information to families *with student input;* successful efforts are made to engage families in the instructional program to enhance student learning.		

Another third of the teachers were described as those who include some level of student voice, but not on a regular basis. These teachers are described as using more basic forms of student voice such as expression and consultation. The other third would be described as teachers who do not include student voice on any significant level. When describing how he sees the teachers in his school in comparison to the descriptions of student voice provided in the *Framework*, Bill replied:

I would say twenty-five to thirty percent of our teachers would consistently, not every day [fit that description]. That does not mean that the other fifty percent are bad, but I think about ten percent would really struggle with that. The rest of them have it at times, but some of the things that you are talking about… twenty-five percent use it a lot. The others, I think I would categorize as great educators, but don't approach teaching and learning through that capacity as for what the Danielson Framework does. It does not mean that it does not invoke thought, or introspection. It is just that maybe they approach it a little bit differently from that, and I can think of a class that is different from that, but he is touted as one of the teachers that students say is a hard class, but one of the best educators I [the student] have ever had.

Many of the principals expressed an idea similar to Bill's when he mentioned that many of his "best" teachers do not display the characteristics related to student voice in the classroom that the *Framework* describes of a distinguished teacher. This group of principals implied in their responses, a significant emphasis on student voice in their classrooms, yet admitted that the kind of active student voice described in the *Framework* was uncommon. This finding indicates a possible conflict between elements that Danielson (2013) identifies as characteristics of a distinguished teacher, and the common perception of the practices of a distinguished teacher that many educators may possess. It also may show that most principals, even those who recognize the merits of more participatory forms of teaching and learning, have not yet made the paradigm shift related to positioning students differently and may still retain beliefs about teaching that position teachers as the experts and the students as the recipients. Fullan (2007) states that despite numerous reform efforts, high schools have remained relatively unchanged especially in their traditional views of the power dynamic in schools— teachers possess and disperse the

knowledge while students are the passive recipients. Rudduck (2007) attributes this in part to the idea that schools have not changed the "deep structures of schooling that hold habitual ways of seeing in place" (p. 588). Principals' statements that many of their best teachers would not include participatory forms of student voice regularly in their classroom practice may support this notion that a shift in perceptions about schooling have not occurred or are not fully realized.

The second group of principals described the frequency in which these approaches to teaching occur in their classrooms as "very few," "very small if not prompted," and "a work in progress." Two of these principals mentioned that although it is not common practice in the school at this time, due to some of the professional development opportunities that the district administration has been providing, they are seeing an increase in the use of student voice practices in the classroom:

> If I prompt them with more metacognitive questions about their class, about their kids thinking, yes, otherwise, no. It is still basic response. We have coached them. We have a program…which is more about metacognition in the classroom. And the teachers are starting to see the importance of metacognition, but there is a strong hesitation and the paradigm shift is very slow. (Luke)

Several of the principals in this group expressed ideas similar to what Luke described. They also discussed the importance of leadership that encourages teachers to integrate student voice practices as outlined in the *Framework* in order to move teachers towards this type of thinking and learning.

4.2.2 Expanded perceptions of the presence of student voice

This study found that principals' perceptions of the concept of student voice were notably influenced by exposure to the concept as part of the interview process. This exposure resulted in a clearer understanding of the concept as expressed by the participants as well as an expanded understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon from their point of view. The conversations about student voice that occurred in the interviews introduced a disruption in their thinking which may have resulted in a deeper understanding of the concept over time.

As part of the follow-up interview, in an attempt to determine if the principals' perceptions of the presence of student voice in classrooms had changed after exposure to the concept and time to reflect on those practices, principals were asked the following question: *Thinking about the different types of student voice that we discussed: students **expressing** unique ideas and perspectives, **collaborating** with adults, and **participating** in the process of improving school experiences and student learning, how would you describe the presence of student voice that exists in classrooms in your school?* Responses are summarized in table 4.4. This table indicates the presence described in the follow-up interview in terms of the types of student voice described in *The Spectrum of Student Voice-related Activities*, (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012) as well as the presence of communities of learning they perceived as present in the classrooms.

When analyzing these results, the principals were grouped into two separate groups based on their responses: the first group of principals (representing half of the participants) described a more significant presence of student voice in classrooms. These principals believed that almost all of their teachers were utilizing at least the lowest two levels (expression and collaboration). Of these teachers, about half of them were described as also extending their practices to include participation and partnership as described by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012). Overall, these

principals also believed that a small number of teachers regularly utilized practices that reached the most participatory forms of student voice (activism and leadership).

Table 4.4. Presence of Types of Student Voice in Classrooms After Reflection

Participant	Expression	Collaboration	Participation	Presence of CoP
Robert	4	3	2	2
Amy	4	2	1	1
Anthony	4	2	1	1
James	4	2	1	1
Bill	4	3	1	2
Luke	4	2	1	1
Brandon	4	3	2	2
Doug	4	3	2	2

Note. 4= present in almost every classroom; 3= present in most classrooms; 2= present in some classrooms; 1= present in few if any classrooms; CoP=community of practice

This is best summarized by Robert's response:

> I think in probably ninety-plus percent of our classrooms you will see students able to express their ideas. I think probably in at least sixty-five to seventy-five percent of the classrooms you would see that second level of participation and collaboration, but in terms of that highest level, I would say that is pretty special and that is maybe twenty-five percent at the most.

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All four principals in this group shared the common perception that almost all of the teachers regularly engage students in expressing their views, listening to the students, and then acting independently on the information that was provided by the students. They also expressed that more than half of their teachers have extended beyond this category and employ practices where students have more ownership in the learning through inquiry learning, project-based learning, choices in assessments, student-designed assessments, and learning communities in the classroom that allow students and teachers to collaborate and learn from each other.

The second group of principals described their classrooms as less involved in student voice practices overall. They said that the majority of their teachers were on the lower end of the spectrum, utilizing forms of student voice with less active forms such as expression and consultation. They identified a small number of teachers who would regularly use student voice practices that would be described as "participation" and "partnership" and very few, if any who would reach the levels of "activism" and "leadership" as a consistent approach to teaching and learning. Anthony explained:

> What we currently see today, I think would lie mainly towards the entry phase of expression and in some cases slowly starting to approach the collaboration where you have the teacher who engages in that conversation with the class. Honestly, I don't see too much where there is active participation. There is a little bit of it. The only example that I can see is where kids start to go out on their own and do some independent projects that would extend the curriculum… it is not that typical.

Amy added that with the adoption of *The Framework for Teaching*, teachers are beginning to shift:

I think that as we continue to increase our expectations on teacher reflection, and on the learning process…on the delivery mode of instruction and asking kids to give feedback on a project and using student work to evidence that, I think it would naturally increase on that spectrum, but I don't think it is there yet…the requirements of the Charlotte Danielson Framework…as we continue to use that as our framework…I think naturally that will shift our emphasis on student voice.

4.3   FINDINGS: WHAT CONDITIONS DO PRINCIPALS PERCEIVE TO PROMOTE AND IMPEDE STUDENT VOICE?

4.3.1   Conditions believed to promote student voice

The factor that principals perceived as most important in supporting student voice practices in the classroom was the concept of creating positive relationships with students and establishing a culture of rapport in the classroom. Principals believed that without these relationships where a culture of trust, support, and genuine interest in the well-being of the students was present, student voice would not be sustained. Teacher modeling and explicit teaching of student voice practices to the students, and creating a classroom culture where contributions are validated and valued were also identified as important characteristics to increasing the presence of student voice in the classroom. Furthermore, principals believed that providing leadership that supports positive risk-taking and a philosophy towards teaching that supports significant learning not merely content coverage, would encourage teachers to implement student voice in their instructional practices.

After identifying specific examples of student voice practices in classrooms in their schools, principals were asked: *How did the teacher create an environment that supported and respected student voice?* Only a few principals were able to a respond clearly to this question. Most were unable to provide well-defined responses to this question because they did not identify a specific teacher and/or classroom where student voice was prevalent. Robert and Bill both spoke about the importance of explicit teaching of the ways in which students could use their voices in the classroom. They believed that when students were taught how to effectively work in a learning community, the likelihood of sustaining a classroom culture where student voice would influence teaching and learning would be greater. They expressed the need for teachers to model the process for voicing opinions, working together, and creating a sense of community in the classroom by explicitly showing and practicing with the students what effective collaboration and participation would look like. Robert described a teacher who uses this approach in her classroom:

> I think the most important thing that the teacher does is she teaches and sets expectations for how the structures of her classrooms are going to work…what my [the teacher's] expectations are for how I want you to participate, my expectations for how you can share ideas, my expectations around how you will support one another…I think what separates her room from others that have even tried this concept is she understands that you still have to teach these concepts to students you don't just do them and expect it to work. (Robert)

Several principals also mentioned the concept of validating student contributions as a way to encourage and support student voice practices:

Well, that environment is not created overnight. It is one of respect and rapport. I think that stems from valuing the students' opinions. It is kind of the way that you conduct yourself, the way that you carry yourself with them. (Bill)

Showing the students that their contribution is recognized, encouraging the students to contribute, and creating a positive rapport with the students and among the students, were all ways that the principals felt that teachers fostered student voice the in classroom. Teaching students how to effectively express their opinions through modeling this behavior in "the way that you conduct yourself, the way that you carry yourself with them (Bill), and "sett[ing] expectations for how the structures of her classrooms are going to work," were also important concepts related to fostering student voice practices expressed by the participants.

4.3.2 Perceived barriers to implementing student voice

Several themes emerged when principals were asked to identify barriers to implementing student voice in the classroom. Principals identified mandates of accountability movements that appear to support content acquisition over active and relevant learning experiences as the most prominent barrier to implementing student voice. They also identified fear of vulnerability and the difficulty in shifting the traditional roles of students and teachers as additional major barriers to implementing student voice. Several principals identified leadership as a barrier if the leadership in the school does not have a clear focus on the importance of student involvement in learning that encourages teachers to take risks and try new approaches. These findings are consistent with the literature that identifies pressure to cover the curriculum, lack of institutional support, and the concentration on cognitive achievement put forth by accountability movements as significant barriers to addressing student voice in schools (Rudduck, 2007). The "deeply

embedded ideology" about the roles of students and teachers in the classroom was also a barrier identified in the literature (Fullan, 2007, Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). This barrier was consistent to what the principals identified as a fear of giving up control in the classroom and fear of the unknown.

The most significant barrier to the implementation of student voice practices in the classroom that was identified was the influence of accountability movements and finding time to "cover the content" so that students would be successful on standardized tests such as SATs, and Keystone examinations, subject area tests required by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Principals repeatedly stated that teachers may be hesitant to embrace inquiry approaches involving student collaboration and participation in fear that it would be too time consuming and that not enough of the core content would be "covered," leading to a decrease in test scores. James identified this as a major barrier:

> I think it's important [student voice practices], but considering we are strapped with the Keystones and there is a defined content that we have to cover, and now that we have to make sure kids are able to be proficient on them, I'm not sure how much room there is for student voice in those classrooms.

James continued by also linking the covering of the content to concerns that teachers may have related to the *Teacher Effectiveness System* (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012) of teacher evaluation recently adopted in Pennsylvania that considers how students in an individual teacher's classroom perform on standardized tests as a major part of the evaluation process.

> And now their evaluation depends on it with the new model. How the kids do on those standardized tests in the content area, affects them in the new teacher evaluation tool. It

is still a piece of the pie, even if you are an art teacher, so I think the standardized testing is a barrier.

Doug and Robert also identified accountability movements and associated student performance on standardized tests as a significant barrier to the implementation of student voice practices in the classroom. They both took this a step further by stating that leadership can assist in eliminating this barrier. For example, Doug stated

> I think it's our [educational leaders] fault educationally. My interest isn't what they knew while they were here, it is what they know after they go. So I have to shift. I have to allow some content frame to orchestrate some direction of the curriculum, but I have to put the accountability not on content but on quality of retention…I want retention of conceptual understanding for high-end applications.

Robert shared Doug's belief in the importance of strong educational leadership in shifting the focus from content coverage to lasting understanding:

> I think leadership is a barrier. I think if the leadership doesn't set this as part of the agenda as important and leadership doesn't see these types of skills and types of practices as improving instruction, that's going to be a barrier.

Both Robert and Doug also implied a shift in the way that educators view learning as necessary for support of student voice practices and the importance of leadership in fostering this paradigm shift. This finding is worthy of additional discussion because it implies that leadership is an important part of fostering student voice in classrooms, and that the leadership must encourage teachers to think about teaching in terms of engaging students in relevant learning experiences, not merely acquiring content knowledge. This notion is often in conflict with accountability movements and assessment models that tend to primarily measure content acquisition.

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Another theme that emerged in the discussion about barriers to the implementation of student voice was related to the concept of fear. The word "fear" was mentioned by most of the principals when describing their perceived barriers. Two themes emerged related to fear as a barrier: fear of the unknown, and fear of vulnerability.

Several of the principals explained that many teachers become "complacent" and reluctant to change, even fearful of taking risks, or trying new approaches. Some of this was attributed to a general complacency and belief that there was no reason to change when current practices were perceived as successful:

> I think there's a couple of barriers, one of them is complacency—it's not broken so don't fix it mentality…for some it's that my model has worked for so long and my data, arguably points to success…that there is a lack of belief that significant change is necessary. If I know what I do can keep this train on the tracks, then why take the risks of letting kids voices derail it too much. (Doug)

Doug's comment also addressed the issue of accountability systems that evaluate teaching practices through students' performance on standardized tests. The data produced from these assessments is derived mainly from the students' ability to acquire content knowledge, supporting a traditional style of teaching that is often void of student engagement or participation in the learning process. In an era of accountability, teachers may be fearful of change when their current practices produce data that shows positive student achievement based on these measures.

The second type of fear that emerged as a theme related to barriers was a fear of being vulnerable or being challenged by students in the classroom: "It is the fear that students might take me to a place where I won't appear to be masterful.   It's a fear that kids might ask me questions I can't answer" (Doug).

The fear of being challenged by the students was identified by most of the principals who also described teachers' reluctance to shift the power structure in the classroom, which was a third theme that emerged when analyzing the barriers to the implementation of student voice. Almost all of the principals expressed that shifting the traditional roles of students and teachers was necessary for student voice practices to be sustained, but that the resulting shift in power dynamics represents a significant paradigm shift. Five of the eight principals spoke about this concept as a prominent barrier, specifically mentioning words, such as "control," "dictate," and "power." "Teachers by nature want to be able to dictate what is going to happen next and not being able to do that can be scary for them, so I think that is a barrier" (Bill). Several of the other principals shared this belief mentioning the difficulty in shifting these ingrained belief systems:

> You are soliciting the feedback of a student. Teachers are semi-comfortable, not all of them are entirely comfortable, getting the input of the supervisor being in there and providing them with feedback…There is resistance there, so it is the risk level and the confidence level to say, wait a minute, I am asking a kid to give me [the teacher] an evaluation of what I am doing. And that is a risk. It is entirely different than what we are doing. We evaluate kids; we don't let them evaluate us. (Anthony)

Anthony's account also mentioned the idea of "confidence" that the teacher must possess in being able to relinquish some of the power in the classroom. Similarly, Robert pointed to a belief system that some teachers do not possess that disables them from embracing a different power dynamic in the classroom:

> Other barriers are teacher comfort level giving away some power and control in the classroom to students. I think people who just don't have a belief system that students

have knowledge and experience that can be important and think as though they're just kids, or the teacher's the expert, what do these kids know anyway kind of thing… I think that's a barrier. (Robert)

Several principals expressed the importance of leadership in facing these barriers, specifically creating a school culture where the focus is on student engagement and lasting learning, not content coverage. Their belief was that leaders should encourage positive risk-taking so that instruction is driven by the belief systems of the school or district, not standardized testing.

4.4 FINDINGS: HOW DO PRINCIPALS PERCEIVE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN STUDENT VOICE AND INSTRUCTION?

This section reports the relevant findings to answer the research question: *What do principals state or imply about the connection between student voice and effective instructional practices?* These findings are organized into four sections: 1) instruments and processes used to evaluate instructional practices, 2) descriptions of effective teaching, 3) evaluation of the community of learning concept, and 4) expressed impact of student voice practices on classroom instruction

4.4.1 Instruments and processes principals use to evaluate instructional practices

This study explored the connection between student voice and effective instructional practices in the classroom as perceived by the principals. In order to determine the ways in which principals evaluate effective instruction, the principals were asked about their teacher evaluation process.

All of the principals reported to have direct responsibility for evaluating teachers in their school. They also reported to have knowledge of the instructional practices of every classroom through formal and informal types of evaluation such as clinical observations, and classroom "walkthroughs" where the principal informally observes classrooms for a 10-20 minute period.

There were no considerable connections between the types of tools used or the process for evaluation and the responses that principals provided regarding their perceptions of the connection between student voice and effective instruction. I presumed that teachers using the *Teacher Effectiveness System* would be more likely to describe student voice in more sophisticated terms since the *Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013) used in this system contains many descriptions of student voice in instructional practices. This assumption was not found to be true. In actuality, only one of the principals who provided a more comprehensive example of student voice was using it. However, it is important to note that of the principals who used the *Teacher Effectiveness System,* all four were only in their first year of implementation, so their familiarity with the tool was also somewhat limited.

4.4.2   Principals' descriptions of a distinguished teacher

Before participants were asked to contemplate the phenomenon of student voice, they were asked two questions designed to elicit general information on their beliefs about what characteristics they perceived were most important for an outstanding teacher to possess, and what effective instruction looks like in the classroom. These questions were designed not only to develop a baseline of characteristics of outstanding instruction, but also to determine if the participants would mention any aspects of student voice as part of their perception of effective instruction prior to discussion of the concept in the interview.

Principals' descriptions of their best teachers were dominated by descriptions related to Domain 2 (Classroom environment) and Domain 3 (Instruction). Most prevalent in these descriptions was references to a teacher who builds positive relationships, creates a positive classroom culture characterized by high expectations and mutual respect, shows passion for his/her subject, and values the thoughts and opinions of the students, and engages students in the learning. These findings are worthy of discussion because many of the components mentioned most frequently illustrate concepts of student voice that will be analyzed later in this section. Although the principals were not directly asked about the concept of student voice prior to being asked to describe their best teacher, their responses indicated their belief in a strong connection between the presence of student voice and distinguished instructional practices.

Participants were first asked the question: *Please think about one of the best teachers that you have ever observed or worked with in your professional experience. Describe for me what it is like to be in this person's classroom. What makes this person stand out to you in comparison to other teachers you have encountered?*

When asked to describe the best teacher that they have ever encountered, two of the four domains of *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013) were most often represented: Classroom Environment, and Instruction. Within these domains, there were five components that were mentioned most often. A summary of these findings is contained in table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Descriptions of Best Teacher Compared to *The Framework for Teaching*

Framework Domain and Component	Framework's Description of the Component	Principals' Descriptions of Best Teacher
Domain 2: Classroom Environment *2a:* *Creating an environment of respect and rapport*	An essential skill of teaching is that of managing relationships with students and ensuring that relationships among students are positive and supportive. Teachers create an environment of respect and rapport in their classrooms...they encourage and cultivate [this] among students. An important aspect of respect and rapport relates to how the teacher responds to students and how students are permitted to treat one another…In a respectful environment, all students feel valued, safe, and comfortable taking intellectual risks. (p. 41)	Relationships Respect Rapport Students feel valued
2b: *Establishing a culture for learning*	The atmosphere in the classroom that reflects the educational importance of the work undertaken by both students and teacher…The classroom is characterized by high cognitive energy, a sense that what is happening is important, and by a shared belief that it is essential, and rewarding, to get it right…the classroom is a place where the teacher and students value learning and hard work…Students are, by their nature, intellectually curious, and…one of the many challenges of teaching is to direct the students' natural energy toward the content of the curriculum (p. 37)	High expectations High cognitive energy Makes students think Passion
Domain 3: Instruction *3c:* *Student engagement*	Students are intellectually active in learning important and challenging content. Indicators of student engagement: • Student enthusiasm, interest, thinking, problem solving • Learning tasks that require high-level student thinking and invite students to explain their thinking • Students highly motivated to work on all tasks and persistent even when the tasks are challenging • Students actively "working," rather than watching while their teacher "works" (p. 67)	Makes learning fun Facilitator Real world experiences Active learning
3e: *Flexibility and responsiveness*	Refers to a teacher's skill in making adjustments in a lesson to respond to changing conditions… Furthermore, teachers who are committed to the learning of all students persist in their attempts to engage them in learning, even when confronted with initial setbacks (p. 77).	Willing to take risks Flexible Differentiates

When participants were asked to describe their "best teacher," the characteristics that were described most frequently related to the domain of classroom environment. All eight respondents provided descriptions of outstanding teachers that included components of this category. The most common components within this domain as described by Danielson were: *creating an environment of respect and rapport* (component 2a) and *establishing a culture of learning* (component 2b).

The most common theme that emerged from the analysis of their responses was "relationships" as expressed by most of the participants. Doug described his beliefs about how his best teachers utilize relationships in the classroom and the significance of that:

> In the classroom, these are the relationships …it's not always just the favorite teacher, a nice teacher… it's the teacher that makes me [the student] feel like a lot is expected of me and I'm valued. I'm seen...I can see clearly and I realize that I am seen clearly. And the relationship allows kids to see that the teachers look at them in depth…all parts matter, so the relationship is huge.

Other responses attributed to this category of creating an environment of respect and rapport included "student feeling valued," "listens to kids," "welcoming and calm environment," and "understanding kids and what motivates them."

A second theme that emerged in describing the best teacher that fit into the category of creating an environment of respect and rapport was "respect" that was expressed by half of the respondents. Principals described teachers who valued students' input and a mutual respect between teacher and student as well as student to student.

A third theme that was identified was "risk-taking," a component described by Danielson (2013) as a way to build respect and rapport, being a component of good teaching:

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I think you have to be the teacher that is willing to take a risk, willing to fall flat on your

face and say that this didn't work.   And to pick up the pieces and move on to something

else. (Amy)

While describing the concept of relationship-building as a key quality that their best

teachers possess, several principals took this a step further to include how the teacher would

create a sense of "community" in the classroom by fostering relationships between the student in

the class.   This concept relates to Danielson's component 2b, "Establishing a culture of

learning" that is a component of the classroom environment domain. Bill described a sense of

community when describing the outstanding teacher and how the students and teachers share in

the learning:

They find a way to build relationships. Not only teacher to student, but student to

student. They have a common respect and a common goal and I guess I really enjoy

seeing that done well.

This touches upon Danielson's idea of "a sense of what is happening is important, and a shared

belief that it is essential" (Danielson, 2013, p.37).

Principals also specifically either mentioned the word, "culture" when describing the

classroom of the outstanding teacher, or gave descriptions that related to the concept of a

"culture for learning" identified by Danielson. One aspect of a culture for learning that several

of the principals described was the concept of having high expectations for the students,

described by Danielson as "the value of hard work, " and "high cognitive energy" (Danielson,

2013, p. 37). Bill stated, "And then they make students think. They [the students] have to do

the mental sweat." Doug described the same concept speaking from the student's point of view:

"It's the teacher that makes me feel like a lot is expected of me."

Another theme that emerged fitting with the culture for learning would be "passion." Passion for their subject, for learning, and for the students was described by five of the seven principals. In fact, four of these principals mentioned the word "passion" when describing this distinguished teacher. Danielson describes this as, and intellectual curiosity on the part of the teacher, and the ability to "direct the students' natural energy toward the content of the curriculum" (Danielson, 2013, p. 37). Robert explains

> And the other thing is the passion that the teacher has for the subject matter and for
> learning is completely… what's the word I'm searching for… contagious. The students
> pick it up and they become deeply passionate about the work they're doing, the speeches
> they write, the papers they write, the books they read, the characters they study. And this
> teacher probably has the best rapport and relationships with students that I've ever seen.

When analyzing the principals' descriptions of their best teacher, the second domain that was addressed frequently although not as prevalent to classroom environment was instruction, Domain 3 in Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013). Descriptions that were related to Domain 3 were most closely associated with two components: *engaging students in the learning*, and *demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness.*

The theme of student engagement emerged as an important component of instruction and was expressed by all of the principals when asked to describe their best teacher. Brandon's entire response to this question focused almost solely on the concept of student engagement:

> The strengths…that I find from their instruction is their role as more of facilitator and
> really working with the application piece, so the kids can understand why are we doing
> this, what's the connection, things that are engaging and fun, and bring in the real world

experiences….So I think it is a lot of those qualities… those teachers who really work with the relevant skills and make learning fun, but also purposeful.

Brandon's account focused on the concepts of higher-level thinking, student enthusiasm, and students actively working as mentioned in Danielson's description of student engagement (Danielson, 2013). Other characteristics mentioned that fit with Danielson's description of student engagement include managing multiple activities, teacher as facilitator, and utilizing time well with pacing of the lesson, and relating work to real-world experiences.

The other component of instruction described in *The Framework for Teaching* that principals identified as a characteristic of their best teacher was flexibility and responsiveness. "Risk-taking" emerged as a recurrent theme as several of the principals describe teachers who were willing to take some risk in terms of trying something new or to adapt their instructional practices or amend their plans. These descriptions related to Danielson's descriptions of making adjustments, responding to changing conditions, and "persist[ing] in their attempts to engage them [students] in learning, even when confronted with initial setbacks" (Danielson, 2013, p. 77).

As a way to identify consistency in the responses about the principals' perceptions of an outstanding teacher, participants were asked to describe a teacher who was the opposite of the "best" teacher that they just described. Consistent with earlier findings, the majority of the descriptions of the weak teacher fell into the domains of Classroom Environment and Instruction. Descriptions of the weak teacher focused primarily on components of classroom environment such as relationships, risk-taking, and a culture of learning that were absent in the weak teacher's classroom. The concept of risk-taking mentioned by several of the principals when describing their strongest teacher was also discussed by several of the principals when describing their

weakest teacher. They described the lack of confidence that the teacher displays and his or her resistance to taking risks and trying something new or admitting to mistakes or being flexible in the classroom, all leading to issues with classroom culture.

In addition to the domain of classroom environment, all eight of the principals mentioned aspects of the domain of instruction when describing the weak teacher, similar to the pattern that emerged in the descriptions of the strong teacher. Doug described the approach to instruction that these teachers possess as "dehumanized" and Robert described the teacher as "completely out of touch with how they are being perceived by students and that there is no sense of unity or community in the classroom."

Most of the principals specifically mentioned the students' experience in the classroom when describing the instructional practices of the weak teacher and how the students are affected by the lack of engaging practices such as the description that Anthony provided:

Some times during the observation process you are just absolutely bored and you can see that boredom look on kids' faces. You truly do get a sense of kids and their reactions to when the dog and pony show is starting. You will hear it after class, kids will come up, Mr. so and so, he is never like that…things were different in there today…and they will tell you…they are insightful, they know what good instruction is, they know what bad instruction is, they know who is just showing videos so that they can grade papers or just sit and get some other stuff done.

Anthony's account also introduced the idea of the students' ability to identify effective teaching. This concept relates to the concept of student voice that is later discussed in the principal interview. It is interesting to note that Anthony confirmed the assumption that students do have the ability to identify effective instruction.

4.4.3   Principals' attitudes towards the community of learning concept

The introduction to *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013) explains the goal of the framework and describes many components of distinguished teaching that are examples of the inclusion of student voice. One of the most prominent examples is in the description of component *2b: Establishes a culture of learning* (see table 4.2). This component describes many of the concepts identified in Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) described in chapter two of this study. This connection will be explored later in this chapter.

In order to determine how principals perceived the idea of creating communities of practice in the classroom, participants were asked to contemplate the following:

> *The new teacher evaluation tool in the state of Pennsylvania based on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching embraces the use of student voice as a way to improve instructional practices. The introduction to this framework states: "The hallmark of distinguished level practice in the framework is that teachers have been able to create a community of learners in which students assume a large part of the responsibility for the success of a lesson. They make suggestions, initiate improvements, monitor their own learning against clear standards, and serve as resources to one another." What are your thoughts on that statement?*

Analysis of the participants' responses to this question indicated a clear split between the attitudes towards student voice implied by the participants. One group would be described as clear advocates for participatory forms of student voice. These principals expressed support for changing the traditional structure of teaching in the classroom by stating a strong agreement with the concepts presented in this statement.   These principals responded to this question using

terms like, "It is ideal," and "I think it is fantastic." They also follow up with comments that indicate a strong support in the belief that creating "community of learners," and shifting the classroom structure to allow students to "assume a large part of the responsibility for the success of a lesson," are critical to distinguished level teaching and should be encouraged for all teachers. Robert, for example, expressed such beliefs:

> I think it's fantastic. I think that the very best teachers by their very nature are always motivated. Students want to participate whether we call it engagement or whatever we've called it…and I think that because it's going to be a more systematic approach where everybody's going to be using the same terminology and language around the tool, I think it's a positive step and it will improve student learning and student engagement to an extent, but it all depends on what the expectation is of the evaluator and what the experience and belief system is of the teacher.

Here Robert explained the connection between student voice and student engagement, and views the goal of the *Framework* as described in the introduction as something that is positive and worth pursuing. Similarly, Brandon described his reaction to the introduction to the *Framework* that indicates a belief in the importance of moving towards more active student participation in the classroom:

> I think it's ideal. The more that they're there involved, the more that they have ownership… and I think it's true of anything… the more engaging it is, the more success you have. I think that in our classrooms, I think it's happening in some and not in others and to some extent some teachers are doing it, but maybe not totally as pedagogical approaches, but it's happening more and more.

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Doug also described a strong positive reaction to the description provided in the introduction to the Danielson *Framework*, focusing his response on the importance of engaging students in the process of data-driven decision making that is so common in high schools in the accountability age, and the importance of student engagement that is encouraged through student voice practices:

> But we often don't include in our comprehensive data set the idea of hearing the student try to articulate to where they are, what they need where they are and where they are headed… so what I think is worth noting is that if you're going to be student centered, they [students] have to be a part of the process because you're preparing them for a day when you're not a part of that process.

The responses of these three principals indicated their belief in a strong connection between the use of student voice practices in instructional settings and distinguished-level teaching. They also spoke about the existence of learning communities and Communities of Practice as a presence in their schools in multiple classrooms. This is an important finding because I assumed, based on the literature and my own experiences as a principal that this type of approach to teaching would be much less prevalent than what was reported.

The other principals, representing a majority, all had what could be described as neutral reactions to the descriptions of student voice practices identified in the introduction to the *Framework*. They responded with short reactions similar to James' that seemed minimally affected by the description, while still maintaining an overall supportive tone:

> I'm not surprised by it. I think if we look at what is going on in the field of education right now with STEM academies, I think student voice is a big part of where students get

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to choose their direction, their path of learning. It is not dictated by a solid course of studies where you have to go step one, step two, step three. I am not surprised by it.

Several principals voiced similar neutral reactions to the description, also mentioning challenges in relation to it and a sense of skepticism towards the practicality of student involvement to this degree. For example, Anthony explained

Being a goal, I think it's good to have that where students are able to provide input into the learning process as far as different types of activities or any kind of feedback, so I think the goal there is good…And what this statement alludes to is now they are going to also assess the lesson itself and how we were exposed to the content and provide the teacher with feedback, which is a good goal. I think it's very difficult to achieve for a classroom teacher to get distinguished and have it observed in a classroom observation because when I walk into a classroom it may not lend itself… you may not be able to see it, so that's the part that's difficult.

Anthony's comment illustrates a recurring idea from the interviews: that the vision of the concept of student voice is often stronger than the actual implementation. It also speaks to a possible conflict between distinguished practices as described in *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013) and the expectations of accountability movements. It is possible that this difference relates to the conditions within schools created by policies that limit the principals from encouraging student voice practices that may be in conflict with these policies. This will be discussed further in this chapter and in Chapter 5 of this document.

The concept of a paradigm shift that needs to take place to accomplish the goals for student voice described in the introduction to the *Framework* was expressed by several of the principals who describe how student voice skills must be explicitly taught to the students in order

to be effectively implemented. Doug explained, "if you don't want to give them a frivolous voice where it is just student noise, then you have to help orchestrate what you're calling on their voice to do."

Amy described a similar reaction:

> Well at this level, how do you, how do we teach kids to be learners, to challenge themselves and engage themselves in the process of learning versus sitting and receiving, and I find it very difficult… So to me, that's a really difficult shift and it's something we have to embrace beyond these the walls of the school.

She, like several of the other principals in this category, described this shift as important, but "difficult" to accomplish due to the ingrained thoughts about traditional teaching and learning where the teacher controls the process and the student is the passive recipient of knowledge.

4.4.4   Expressed impact of student voice practices on classroom instruction

The impact that principals believed student voice practices would have on classroom instruction was described as considerable by most of the participants. During the follow-up interview, after participants had time to contemplate the ideas presented and discussed in the first interview, they were asked the question: *Given what you have said about your past experiences as a teacher and an administrator as well as the examples of student voice that you have recalled from your observations, how do you understand student voice and its impact on instruction?* This question was designed to check for consistency in their responses, but to also determine if their perceptions of student voice had changed after exposure to the concepts in the first interview.

In the follow-up interview, about one-third of the principals expressed a stronger belief in the importance of student voice in instructional settings and the impact that it would have on

instruction than expressed in the previous interview. The other principals remained consistent in their beliefs from the first to the second interview. This finding is worthy of discussion because it could imply a connection between exposure to the concept and beliefs about the impacts that student voice can have on instruction and ultimately student achievement. This finding implies that exposure to the concept may result in an increase in understanding of the phenomenon, and therefore, simply exposing principals to the complexity of student voice including different types as described in the literature as well as the pedagogical applications of student voice could increase advocacy for its implementation.

Most of the principals described the impact on instruction as considerable, either through explicit statements or implied examples leading to this designation. Principals in this category used terms such as "major impact" "critical" and "significantly important" when describing the impact of student voice on instructional practices. Their descriptions of their understanding of student voice were also more elaborate than respondents from the other group, mentioning a variety of different types of student voice, many of which focused on the higher levels of *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Related Activities* (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012), such as participation, ownership, and leadership. Brandon states

> Well, I think it has a major impact. I think it is all related to feedback, and ultimately student engagement. If they [students] are not involved and have ownership in what they are doing then there is not a whole lot of value in it [the instruction].

Doug described the significance that he sees of student voice in the classroom relating to basic human nature and motivation:

> Human nature, not just for students, is that we are social creatures and we want to be a part of things and we want to be recognized and included, and we want our interests to be

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fulfilled to a degree. But mostly people want to be validated and know that they are an

important part of whatever they are in…The other side is that students have a voice and

they have a presence, and they contribute to the learning, guided by us as educators, but

as educators who are influenced by what we have learned from them. So I think it affects

instruction at school by creating a culture that people feel confident to speak because they

know that they will be heard, and that they will influence the class...there is no group in

the school community that is a greater population than the kids.

Doug's statement, "they contribute to the learning, guided by us as educators, but as educators

who are influenced by what we have learned from them," addressed the concept of a community

of learning where adults and students learn collaboratively from each other, and share in the

ownership of the learning, a more sophisticated form of student voice.

Both Brandon and Robert expressed a belief in the importance of student voice in

classroom instruction if student engagement and "deep learning" is the goal:

I think it is significantly important for learning with regard to whether or not students

become engaged with the material and whether or not the experiences in the classroom

and the experiences they have in their learning end up in their long-term memory, so to

speak…then the voice factor and the relationship part and the fact that they had a say-so

and some choice and buy-in, I think that those sorts of things that create excitement or

create interest or create passion, those are the things… that stay with students, so I think

for a deep level of learning, it is very important. (Robert)

Descriptions of student voice from this group of principals who perceived the impact of student

voice on instruction as significant included common terms such as, "contribution," "influence"

"ownership," "buy-in," "decision making power," "excitement," and "deep learning."   All of

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these terms represent higher levels of student voice involving more student participation and empowerment.

A few principals described the impact of student voice on classroom instruction as moderate. Although none explicitly used that term, their descriptions of their understanding of student voice used examples that were less participatory forms of student voice:

> I think student voice does have an impact on classroom instruction. But the most important part is that the teacher listens and actively participates when hearing the student voice as far as that feedback and is able to make changes in instruction based on that student's feedback or groups of students if it is a consistent message that they receive from the students. (Anthony)

The responses of principals in this group were dominated by terms such as "feedback," "expressing," and "listening," representing less active forms of student voice indicating a belief in a more moderate impact on instruction.

One principal described the impact of student voice on instruction as limited:

> I don't think student voice has a huge impact unless it is valued by those that understand it. Ninety-nine percent of the time, instruction is dictated by curriculum and the autonomy of the teacher and sometimes just variables that are outside of the control of the student, but I don't think that student voice has a huge impact. I think that it has a very negotiable impact, but nothing that is substantial. (Luke)

Luke's description implied an inherent belief that student voice practices would affect classroom instruction minimally for the majority of classrooms.

4.5   FINDINGS: WHAT DO PRINCIPALS BELIEVE ABOUT THE ROLE OF

LEADERSHIP IN SUPPORTING STUDENT VOICE?

The findings in this section relate to the research question: How do principals view their role in providing leadership to increase the presence of student voice in the classroom? These findings are organized into four categories: 1) qualities of the participant that may contribute to their perceptions of the role of leadership in student voice, 2) perceptions about the principals' impact on instructional practices, 3) professional development/training reported by the principals, and 4) confidence level that principals express in leading teachers to incorporate student voice.

4.5.1   Qualities of the participants that may contribute to their perceptions

Since I wished to uncover principals' perceptions about providing leadership to increase the presence of student voice, it was necessary to establish a general idea of how each participant viewed leadership and also their position as an educational leader in the school. In establishing possible connections between the principals and their perceptions of student voice, I wanted to determine if there were any commonalities in personal qualities of the participants that might influence their perceptions. Principals were asked to describe 1) why they chose to become a teacher and then an administrator, 2) their job as the building principal, and 3) their philosophy or approach towards leadership.

The descriptions of the principals' background and personal philosophies towards leadership revealed four important ideas: First, the responses of the principals indicated an overwhelming belief in the importance of collaboration and shared leadership opportunities. Second, these responses clearly focused on students and the importance of considering students

as stakeholders in their roles as leaders. Third, the idea of empowering others was shared by all of the participants who believed that this was important to leading both teachers and students. Finally, a majority of the principals described the importance of supporting a culture of change in their buildings. Since incorporating student voice practices in the classroom is a radical change in traditional pedagogy, it is important to note that many principals viewed themselves as influential change agents. Also, their collaborative approach towards leadership may have notable impacts on their perceptions of the importance of student voice and positioning students in collaborative decision-making roles.

The focus on students as a driving force to become a teacher or administrator was present in many of the principals' responses. Several of the principals mentioned enjoying working with children and "watching kids grow" or "excel" as reasons for becoming teachers. Also, although the principals did express a variety of reasons for becoming educational leaders, six of the eight principals interviewed mentioned the word "students" or "kids" and their desire to make a more significant impact on students as a major factor in why they made the move to administration. For example, James explains, "You can affect more kids in that role other than just the kids you have in the classroom." When asked about their decision to move from teaching into administration, a common response expressed by all of the principals was to affect change on a larger scale and to be able to have a more "global perspective" or "influence on systems." This focus on students may influence the importance that they place on including students actively in instructional practices.

In order to better understand the way in which each principal perceived the significance of his or her position, the principals were asked to describe their jobs as building principals, identifying those aspects of the job they saw as most significant. This question was also

designed to validate the researcher's assumption that the principals of these schools would perceive themselves and act as educational leaders in the school, and that they would be familiar with the instructional practices in the school and capable of evaluating the effectiveness of instruction that takes place in the classrooms in their school. Five themes emerged from this discussion. Principals described their jobs as 1) empowering others, 2) building relationships, 3) removing barriers, 4) supporting a culture of growth and change, and 5) supporting the teachers and the students.

The most prevalent theme emerging from this question was the idea of empowering others through collaboration, relationship building, and involvement of all stakeholders in the process of teaching, learning, and leading. All of the principals perceived the idea of empowering others as a major part of what they do as building principals as expressed by Brandon:

It's not just me…I think it is the general nature of how things have changed, to be more collaborative. And I like that piece. Instead of being talked down to like how I grew up as an educator and a teacher. So I like the collaboration piece…a lot of it is empowering folks in identifying teacher leaders and trying to nurture that.

Another common response to the question asking principals to describe their job was the concept of building relationships. Most of the participants either explicitly mentioned or alluded to the importance of building relationships with various stakeholders (teachers, students, parents) as an important part of this shared leadership concept similar to what James shares:

I am usually here prior to six. I'm with the students. I go to breakfast every morning, just to meander through the cafeteria, talk to kids, connect with kids, and build those

relationships...You never know when you need them, so a lot of time is spent on teachers and kids.

When principals were asked to describe their job as the principal, there was also a consistent belief expressed by most of the principals that their job is always changing and evolving. Three of the principals explicitly stated that their job continually changes and evolves. Along with this idea comes the notion expressed by several principals that an important part of their job is to cultivate what Doug described as a "culture of growth" in their schools:

I would describe an evolution in my role that being in a place here today where the culture of the school and community is very empowering to the capacity to be an educational leader… to keep the focus on a culture of growth…I want to be a leader that causes people to feel confident to where they are, and never lose sight of the drive to keep moving forward. That doesn't always mean running. It does mean moving and forward.

Several others described a similar focus on a culture of growth and mentioned the importance of looking at "what you want to move your building", and focusing on the importance of "growing students" and teachers.

The principals' descriptions of their jobs as high school principals also indicated a clear focus on supporting the students and the teachers. Seven of the eight principals referenced working with students in some capacity as one of the most important aspects of their job, referring to students as "stakeholders," using phrases such as empowering students to "have ownership in their education pathway," building relationships with kids," "providing students with what they need," and "growing kids."

Similarly, almost every principal mentioned supporting the teachers as an important aspect of his or her job. It is interesting to note that none of the principals used the word "supervise"

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which may imply a hierarchical relationship between the principal and the teacher. Their work with teachers is described as more collaborative and supportive, focusing on observations or walkthroughs more as a way to support the teacher than to hold them accountable for their deficiencies. The tone of the comments from all of the principals when responding to this question was overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic, expressing a genuine passion for what they do and implying a belief that what they do is important.

The third component of the principals' personal experience that was explored was the participants' philosophy or approach towards leadership in their current position. This question was intended to elicit information about how that leader perceives leading others in order to determine if these perceptions might influence the way that they approach the concept of student voice in their school. Since this question would elicit only a small amount of information on a principal's leadership style, it was not deemed appropriate to attempt to strictly categorize the leader as a specific type based on such limited information. However, in analyzing the data related to their responses to this question, there were several themes related to certain theories on leadership styles. The responses of all of the principals appeared to fit into two categories of leadership styles that evolved: situational leadership, and democratic or participatory leadership.

Several of the principals described their approach towards leadership with examples characteristic of a situational leadership style. Situational leadership theory proposes that effective leaders will adapt their leadership style to the audience and the context of the situation. The situational leadership style is often collaborative where the leader acts as a coach or facilitator (Blanken, 2013). Principals in this category described their leadership style with characteristics of situational leadership including linking behavior with group readiness, being supportive, empowering others, and coaching (Blanken, 2013). Several principals such as James

described characteristics of this style when they identified their approach towards leading as always changing or adapting to the person or situation in which they are leading:

> I think it's a multiple-type approach. I have people that I don't have to babysit…and they pretty much lead themselves. I have the people in the middle where I kind of have to twist arms every once in a while, but they'll do what I ask and they're very loyal people, they just need to be asked to do something…so you have those all types of people you have to deal with. (James)

Robert also described characteristics of situational leadership related to linking behavior with group readiness, and supporting, empowering, and coaching others:

> My philosophy on leadership is if you've ever seen theory of management styles there's what they call X leaders and Y leaders… the Y style leaders…that theory basically says that people are intrinsically motivated, people want to do their very best and if you give them the freedom and put support structures in place they always will, and you actually only have to spend a significant amount of time doing heavy supervision and evaluation on a select few who really need it… and my theory is more that of the Y leader. I feel like if you hire the right people from the get-go, they don't necessarily require motivation and constant supervision.

The participatory and the situational approach overlap, sharing similar qualities such as the leader as a facilitator and the focus on empowering others. Participatory leaders discuss ideas openly, and decisions are made based on the input of all stakeholders. They believe that human relationships are critical to leadership (Hoyle, 2012). The participatory leader encourages others to express their opinions and then synthesizes the information when making the ultimate decision. Principals who were identified as operating primarily under a participatory leadership

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style discussed the importance of building relationships, empowering others, building trust, and working collaboratively:

> It has changed and evolved.   It's not just me…I think it is the general nature of how things have changed, to be more collaborative.   And I like that piece.   Instead of being talked down to like how I grew up as an educator and a teacher.   So I like the collaboration piece, and we do a lot of empowering folks in identifying teacher leaders and trying to nurture that, so I think collaboration is an important part of it. (Brandon)

4.5.2   Principals' perceptions about their impact on instructional practices

All of the respondents expressed a belief that they had a significant impact on the instructional practices in the school, and three of the respondents explicitly described it as "huge," "the largest impact," and "a direct impact." Two main themes emerged as principals described the impact that they perceived they had on the instructional practices at the school. Principals explained that by driving or facilitating professional development, and observing instructional practices in the classroom, they were able to support best instructional practices and support teachers in continually growing.

In exploring the concept of the role of leadership in increasing the presence of student voice, it was important to determine how the principals perceived themselves as being able to impact instruction and the ways in which they think that happens. Principals were therefore asked: *Describe the impact that you have as the building principal on the instructional practices in your school.* This question was designed to elicit information on how the principals operated as instructional leaders. Principals' responses to this question also served to show consistency in their response to the previous question about their philosophy toward leadership.

The most prominent way that the principals perceived their ability to influence instruction was through professional development. Almost every participant mentioned the words "professional development" when responding to this question, and it was usually the first item mentioned. They referenced their role with professional development as the person who "sets the agenda" for professional development, identifies the needs and then facilitates professional development, or facilitates the professional development set out by the district's initiatives. When describing their approach to professional development, it was notable that all of the respondents spoke of it in terms of a collaborative approach. This sense of professional development as a collaborative effort that is driven by the individual needs of the teachers who would take part in identifying their needs was expressed by many of the principals. Several of the principals mentioned that they share in the professional development by learning along with the teachers. Similarly, some of the principals discussed how the professional development was something that they saw as a collaborative process where teachers would share in deciding what professional development was necessary based on the needs that they and the principal identified.

> So a lot of professional development I don't just do myself. I get teachers who are interested, I give them resources to be able to do it. I will send them to other schools to check out a program and see if it's something that will match here. And I think it's much more powerful for teachers to buy into something if their colleagues and their peers are passionate about something. (Brandon)

This focus on a shared process was also very evident in the second major theme that emerged from this question. When principals were asked to describe the impact that they thought they had on instructional practices in the school, in addition to professional

development, many of them also mentioned the process of observing teacher practice through walkthroughs and formal observations. Notably, only one of the eight principals referred to this process as "supervision." Providing instructional leadership through observing teaching and learning was described by many of the principals as a collaborative process that focused on "building capacity" in the teaching faculty.

You get the professional capacity built within your staff, so that they can deliver what you need to deliver and then the follow-up with that…you have to be able to get into the classroom yourself, firsthand knowledge of how this is working, and then sit down and have good conversations with teachers. (Anthony)

One principal, Doug, approached this question much differently than the other principals. His response could be categorized as utilizing his personal passion and enthusiasm to motivate others and in turn affect instruction by spreading this passion to others:

I think the principal's position has the potential to have a huge impact, arguably one of the largest impacts. And because the principal is not the one to do everything that's necessary to impact instruction or quality of learning, but the principal has the capacity through one: the authority, and two: the opportunity, to facilitate the growth of a culture… to do just that… to impact the quality of learning. And the principal's the person who's put in the position both by authority and opportunity to deeply explore the best practices in their system and then to grow those practices.

Doug's response, unlike all of the others, never specifically names professional development or classroom observation as the way that the principal impacts instruction, although these concepts are implied in more general terms such as "facilitate the growth of a culture," "explore the best practices in their system and then to grow those practices."

4.5.3 Professional development/training on student voice as reported by the principals

The majority of the principals interviewed reported little if any formal training, and some informal training or experiences related to student voice or student voice-related practices. The majority of the principals gave examples of informal experiences such as participation with student leadership groups, listening to students, and discussing student voice concepts with colleagues and reading articles related to student voice practices. Overall, the majority of the principals perceived the impact of student voice on classroom instruction as significant, supporting the belief that effective instruction must involve a focus on student voice practices that empower the students to have more ownership in their learning.

In order to determine if principals' perceptions of student voice were influenced by their training (both formal and informal) or their experiences with student voice initiatives, principals were asked, *In your career as an educator, have you participated in any specialized training around the concept of student voice or the idea of involving students in the educational process (course work, conferences, in-service)? Have you had any experiences that influence your perceptions about its role in classrooms?*

Only one of the eight principals described receiving formal training. He described training from his teacher preparation courses and professional development that he received on the Socratic method as well as inquiry learning as it applied to his previous job as a teacher. Speaking about the professional development opportunities related to student voice Luke added:

> It's available there, but it is not overt. You have to be intentional about teaching it or finding it, or it is mixed in as an experience somewhere, whether it was a one day lesson in one of your classes in college. I do not know of any collegiate or IU courses that would be just for student voice.

The examples of formal training provided by this principal were not specific trainings on student voice, but were related to student voice activities through other types of instructional practices such as inquiry learning and Socratic method that are practices that support student voice.

When asked about informal training or experiences that might affect their perception of student voice, the majority of the principals were able to identify such experiences. These included a focus on student leadership in the school, informal discussions with colleagues, articles, and the experience of listening to students and participating in that practice in both their experiences as a teacher and as an administrator.

4.5.4   Principals' confidence in leading teachers to incorporate student voice practices

As previously mentioned, *The Teacher Effectiveness System (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012)* recently adopted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, includes *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013) as an evaluation tool for classroom observations. A notable finding in the current study was that many of the components of this framework include the incorporation of student voice practices, especially in the descriptions of the distinguished-level teacher. In their previous responses, several of the principals indicated that many of their best teachers would not be rated distinguished on the Danielson rubric owing to the lack of student voice practices in their classrooms. This implies a need for professional development to train teachers in these practices. Therefore, it was important to explore the principals' confidence level in providing such professional development to the teachers, since principals (in a previous question) identified providing professional development as one of the most important ways that they can impact instruction.

The current study found that overall, principals' confidence levels in providing professional development to their teachers to assist them in incorporating the forms of student voice described in the *Framework* was identified as moderate to low. This finding has important implications. At first it may appear that the lower confidence levels that principals report could be related to a limited understanding of these concepts; however, when considering their low confidence level in conjunction with their responses to previous questions that indicated a fairly thorough understanding of the concept by many of the principals, this finding may be interpreted differently. Perhaps principals' lack of confidence in providing this professional development may be due to a *thorough* understanding of the complexity of the concept and the challenges that would arise from integrating student voice practices into classrooms given an educational system that is often perceived to be in direct conflict with these practices. Therefore, their perception of their ability to address the complex professional development needs may be low due to their understanding of the complexity of the professional development that would be required. These findings have implications for needs for professional development that will be discussed in Chapter 5 of this document.

Principals were asked the following question that attempted to determine their comfort level in providing leadership and professional development to assist teachers in making this shift from proficient to distinguished: *Reflecting on the type of instructional approaches that were described in Danielson's Framework for Teaching, how do you feel about providing leadership to assist teachers in creating learning communities in the classroom and increasing student voice practices?* Responses from the principals fell into three categories: higher levels of confidence, moderate levels of confidence and lower levels of confidence in their ability to provide leadership in this area. Two principals' descriptions would be defined as high levels of

confidence. Their responses indicate their belief in their ability to guide teachers into including student voice practices as described in the Danielson *Framework* and to coach teachers on moving from proficient to distinguished in these areas with little or no additional professional development or training:

> I think I would be pretty capable of doing that and I think that going through the process with the new teacher evaluation…and the Danielson model has been there, but it hasn't been as in depth as with all of those domains until this past year. But I think most folks would be comfortable being able to do that, but it is getting the teacher to focus and buy-in on that. So I think the answer to your question is yes, I would be comfortable in being able to provide resources and professional development for them to be able to do that.
>
> (Brandon)

Brandon added that his confidence in doing so comes in part from the fact that due to the current focus on project-based learning at his school, he and the teachers have been exposed to many strategies that would be applicable to student voice practices.

Doug described a confidence in providing leadership in this area that comes from his experiences creating learning communities for the teachers:

> I feel capable in that role in my position as the building principal. You mentioned how to help teachers build those learning communities amongst their students and I think you have to walk the talk…I had eight specific learning communities in my faculty at the high school last year…I bring that up with my ability to support teachers and doing that for students...It's transferring that to empowering kids to make decisions and be influential….It's how do you transfer that from the culture of when I am in professional development to the culture of when I am in my isolated classroom. How do I create it

with kids. So modeling I think is a great tool [for showing] teachers how to build communities amongst their kids.

Here Doug described how principal leaders can encourage and support learning communities in the classroom through linking to the learning communities that are created amongst the teachers. By participating in their own learning communities, Doug believed that teachers can learn the effectiveness of this model and hopefully, with the guidance of the principal, transfer this knowledge and experience to creating these communities in the classrooms with students. The two principals, Doug and Brandon, who had the highest levels of confidence, also described their staff (in previous questions) as more adept at using student voice practices, which may have influenced their confidence in providing professional development in this area.

The majority of the principals described their level of confidence in providing professional development for supporting student voice in the classrooms as moderate to low. They expressed some confidence in speaking generally about the concept and using the Danielson rubric as a way to evaluate it, but they expressed the need for additional professional development, as Robert states below, in order to sustain it:

I would say I am comfortable to the extent that I can discuss ideal things and examples, but in terms of strategies and really teaching teachers to do it and training them to do it, I would think I would need more significant training.

4.5.5 Summary

The current study revealed several important findings related to the principals' perceptions of student voice. First, principals' understanding of the concept was more complex than expected and principals were able to identify a variety of different types of student voice representing

various levels of student involvement. Principals' understanding of the concept was also notably expanded when they were provided with a clear definition of student voice and also when they were exposed to the concept during the interview process. Second, although student voice appears to exist in less participatory forms such as expression and consultation in many classrooms in the schools studied, more participatory forms of student voice practices as perceived by these principals are fairly limited to a few isolated classrooms. Third, student voice was perceived as an important part of effective instruction, and principals' descriptions of an outstanding teacher included many concepts associated with student voice practices. Overall, student voice was perceived as having the potential to significantly impact instruction in a positive way. Fourth, principals believed that leadership was a crucial component to implementing and sustaining student voice, yet most of the principals expressed moderate to low levels of confidence in providing this leadership through professional development. Principals recognized that including student voices often involves a shift in the power structure between teachers and students and that teachers must actively prepare students for assuming this new role in a participatory classroom. Finally, current accountability movements are perceived to be in direct opposition to many of the principles of student voice as these movements often focus on knowledge acquisition over other types of participatory learning most commonly associated with student voice practices.

5.0   DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research study was guided by a central question: *How do high school principals perceive the concept of student voice and its role in transforming instructional practices*? The three research questions that guided this investigation attempted to explore the way that student voice was perceived as a concept including the connection between student voice and effective instruction, how it was practiced in high school classrooms, and how leadership might influence the presence of student voice in instruction. A three-part interview with eight high school principals was used to collect data that resulted in the findings presented in Chapter 4. These findings have several important implications worthy of further discussion. This chapter includes a discussion of the major research findings, implications for further research, and implications for policy and practice.

5.1   THE NEED TO OPERATIONALIZE THE TERM *STUDENT VOICE*

The evolution of the term *student voice* has contributed to current conceptions of student voice that describe a range of different concepts. Several student voice researchers have discussed the problematic nature of the term because it often limits or fails to represent the complex range of activities and rationales often associated with contemporary student voice initiatives (Bolstad, 2011; Fielding, 2009; Mitra, 2009). When I analyzed principals' definitions of student voice,

however, these definitions often included concepts associated with more participatory forms of student voice than the research suggested would be present. The majority of the principals in this study also described student voice in both school-wide and instructional settings implying a more complex understanding of this concept than previously predicted.

My findings also indicated some variety in the way that principals initially described student voice (as presented in table 4.1) and the way in which they perceived it after being presented with a precise definition of student voice that included the range of activities from expression to collaboration and participation. Since half of the principals expanded their definition of student voice to include a much larger range of activities after being presented with the definition, this may indicate the possibility of ambiguity associated with the term *student voice*, implying that the term is narrowly defined, thus confirming what was previously presented in the literature. The change in perceptions may be connected to the clear and encompassing definition, which allowed them to understand student voice in more complex ways. The definition that I crafted by combining several definitions presented in the literature on student voice, proved to be useful in facilitating the principals' greater understanding of the complexity of the term and assisting them in making the connection between student voice and effective instruction. Therefore, if student voice practices are viewed as important to effective classroom pedagogy as implied in Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013), a need exists to operationalize the term to include the complex range of activities associated with the term. It is also necessary to communicate that understanding to practitioners such as principals and other school administrators who may serve as advocates for the implementation of student voice practices in the classroom.

The literature on student voice suggested that the ambiguous nature of the term, *student voice* is also problematic because it reinforces a limited perception of student voice practices that "may not address the underlying power differences between young people and adults" (Bolstad, 20011). The deeply embedded ideology about the roles of students and teachers in the classroom limits many to identifying student voice in its least participatory forms, where students are mere consultants in the decision making process (Bolstad, 2011). The definition of student voice used in this current study proved to be effective in addressing the ideology about power and the roles of students and teachers in the classroom. Although some of the principals did initially perceive student voice in limited terms, after they were presented with the definition mentioned previously, over half of the principals possessed an understanding of the term that was more complex, offering examples of participatory activities that positioned students in more influential roles than indicated in the literature. Most of the principals recognized that these practices involved a shift in the roles of teacher and student, and many mentioned the necessity for the teachers to relinquish some power and control in order to fully realize these practices. Their emphasis on the need to shift these roles could be interpreted as an understanding on their part of a systemic change that would need to take place in the classrooms to effectively implement student voice, but also an acknowledgement that this shift would be advantageous to both students and teachers.

It was clear that the exposure to the concept that occurred through the interview process created a disruption in the principals' thinking about student voice that allowed for a more complex understanding of the phenomenon than initially indicated. Those interested in pursuing a greater presence of student voice in instruction could capitalize on this finding by utilizing

professional development designed to introduce, clarify, and reinforce the complex ways in which student voice may have a positive impact on instruction and ultimately student achievement.

5.2   THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Although principals support the idea of collaborative learning environments between teachers and students and voiced support for student voice practices that could exist in classrooms, a limited amount of these practices were actually occurring in the classrooms in their schools, and the focus of these practices was often on expression and consultation. This finding corresponds with my propositions and the findings of the published research that indicate a movement towards more participatory forms of student voice, but a focus that remains on less participatory forms. Since many of the principals were unable to give specific examples of student voice practices in their classrooms, and they also admitted that many of their best teachers would not use these practices, this may indicate a disconnect between belief in the idea of student voice and the reality of the practice.

Student voice practices in the classroom seem to be limited due to factors other than a lack of understanding on the part of the school leadership, pointing more to a lack of implementation on the part of the teacher, possibly related to the lack of strong leadership that promotes its implementation. This could be due to a variety of reasons discussed later in this chapter as barriers to implementation that would be appropriate for further study. It may also indicate that school leaders who may recognize the merits of student voice, may not present it as a goal or priority as instructional leaders. Since some principals were able to identify examples

of student voice in their classrooms, but these descriptions were limited to one or two classrooms in the school, this may indicate the possibility that a strong emphasis on more participatory forms of teaching and learning were not a focused goal in these buildings or that goals to include student voice were not fully implemented. Theory often precedes practice; this study indicated that these principals possessed a fairly complex understanding of the concept. Therefore, if principals position student voice in instruction as a priority, they could use their leadership efforts to increase teachers' knowledge of student voice practices and influence positive attitudes towards student voice as an effective instructional practice. This could result in an increase in the adoption of student voice practices in classrooms in their schools.

Two principals in this study provided more detailed examples of participatory forms of student voice as observed in classrooms in their schools. These examples represented students possessing a significant amount of control and ownership in the classroom activities and practices. This was an important finding because it illustrated the ways that student voice practices and communities of learning could be performed, and confirmed that the theory could be realized effectively and put into practice in high school classrooms. Since the two principals also described the impact of student voice as vital to instruction, their leadership may be a major factor in why student voice was more complex in their classrooms than in others in the study.

Several principals also stated that many of the school's "best" teachers would not regularly engage in the more participatory forms of student voice such as "community of learners" and students "assuming a large part of the responsibility for the success of a lesson," as described in Danielson's evaluation of distinguished level teaching (Danielson, 2013). This finding also presents a disconnect between theory and practice. *The Educator Effectiveness System* (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012) adopted in 2012 in the Commonwealth of

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Pennsylvania utilizes Danielson's *Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument* (Danielson, 2013) as the evaluation tool for classroom observations. This framework as well as the principals' own descriptions of an outstanding teacher present aspects of student voice as critical to distinguished-level practice. *The Framework For Teaching* was developed through extensive research on effective instructional practices, which the principals readily identify and support. However, principals indicated that only a small number of teachers in their school regularly use more participatory and collaborative approaches to student learning, and often their best teachers often do not approach teaching in this way. *The Framework for Teaching* as well as the Community of Practice theory, along with student voice practices all require a shift to a more social constructivist approach to teaching and learning. The disconnect between principals' beliefs about effective teaching and how that is actually practiced in classrooms could relate in part to a lack of understanding or support for constructivist and social constructivist theories about learning. Furthermore, accountability movements that do not favor such approaches to learning may also contribute to this issue. Possible effects of accountability movements on perceptions about student voice practices will be discussed in the following section.

5.3 THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING AND ACCOUNTABILITY MOVEMENTS

The theme that was expressed most often by the principals when asked to identify barriers to the implementation of student voice was concerns about covering the content in an era of accountability. This reflected a larger issue related to the effects on curriculum and instruction of the accountability movements. "Covering the content" was identified as the most common

barrier, yet the idea of content knowledge or the ability of a teacher to cover the content in his or her classroom was not identified as an important trait of an effective educator by these principals. Skills such as building positive relationships with the students and engaging students in rigorous and relevant learning experiences were viewed as much more important aspects of effective teaching. This implies a tension between the principals' core beliefs about teaching and learning and the type of teaching and learning that they are ultimately able to support.

Principals' descriptions of a distinguished teacher almost always included the teacher's ability to actively engage students in the learning process, similar to Dewey's theories on inquiry learning where personal experience with the learning is a fundamental contributor to understanding (Dewey, 1997). This approach may be viewed as contradictory to the approach to teaching and learning put forth by accountability movements that emphasize knowledge acquisition that is measured by standardized tests. The current study revealed an important finding related to a conflict between the philosophies towards effective instruction implied by the *Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013), the tool principals are required to use when evaluating teachers, and the approaches towards teaching and learning as evaluated in current accountability movements.

The Framework for Teaching clearly highlights constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. Content acquisition is a minimal component in the *Framework*. Lasting learning experiences, problem-solving, and inquiry-based approaches to learning are highlighted in the *Framework* as ways to maximize retention of the learning through direct experiences by the learner. Leaders wishing to implement student voice practices must create a clear vision of the purpose of instruction in their schools and address the shift from covering the content to *engaging* students in relevant learning experiences, the type of learning that all of these

principals identified as important. This type of learning requires a culture where teachers are encouraged to take risks, try new approaches, and reimagine the roles of students and teachers in the classroom. Such a paradigm shift requires leadership that supports these efforts as well as a belief in social constructivist approaches to teaching and learning that support positioning students as active participants in the learning process. What is problematic is that even principals such as those in the current study who fundamentally believe in these approaches are operating in a system that evaluates the success of teachers primarily on the performance of students on minimum competency standardized tests designed to evaluate knowledge acquisition. Ultimately this study found that the principals supported the need to include student voice in instructional practices, but were often unable to do so given the environment, created by educational policy, in which they are operating.

Principals recognized that student voice practices involve a shift in the roles of teacher and student. Shifting traditional roles of student/teacher power dynamics also represents a significant paradigm shift. The "deeply embedded ideology" about the roles of students and teachers in the classroom was also a barrier identified in the literature (Fullan, 2007, Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). This barrier was consistent with what the principals identified as a fear of giving up control in the classroom and fear of the unknown. Many principals mentioned the necessity for the teacher to relinquish some power and control to fully realize these practices. They also acknowledged that students do not traditionally function in collaborative ways with their teachers, therefore, they often lack the skills associated with effective communication and collaboration. Again, the barrier to implementation related to shifting these power dynamics did not seem to be connected to the principals' lack of belief in such a shift, but more in their inability to support this given the pressures of evaluation models put forth by accountability

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movements that focus on knowledge acquisition as a major means for evaluating the success of a teacher and a school. Shifting to more constructivist approaches to teaching and learning may be threatening to teachers and school leaders who fear that time spent building collaborative learning communities with teacher as the facilitator would not allow time to cover all of the content required by the state assessments.

5.4   CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PRINCIPALS' BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND PERCEPTIONS EXPRESSED

Although causal connections between the background information on the principals and their schools cannot be made, some trends did emerge that could indicate a connection between the principals' experiences and the perceptions expressed that may be useful for those seeking to pursue student voice efforts. The principals in this study would be considered supporters of student voice practices in the classroom based on their responses to the interview questions overall. Three of the principals, however, emerged as strong advocates for student voice, possessing a more thorough understanding of the complexity of student voice and expressing a strong explicit belief that student voice is a fundamental component of effective teaching that they try to encourage and support in their schools. They were also the participants who were able to provide extended and specific examples of student voice practices representing a range of student voice activities involving active participation by the students.

There were three factors that emerged as similar for the principals in this group that may be important to understanding the way in which they perceived student voice and that may ultimately have further implications for research studies: the demographics of the schools in

which they work, the amount of time they have spent as principals in their current buildings, and their approaches to leadership as explicitly stated or implied.

The demographics of the school districts in which these three principals work have some commonalities. Two of the three principals work at school districts identified as small (2000 students or less) and one was identified as medium sized (2000-4000). Two of these principals mentioned that the size of their school enables them to offer more individualized learning opportunities for the students. The smaller sizes of these districts may also enable the teachers to more easily build relationships with students, an important part of the culture in which student voice may thrive. A possible connection between these factors and increased opportunities for student voice in the classroom is an area for future studies.

These three principals also shared characteristics related to their time as principals. They all spent almost their entire administrative career in the buildings in which they are currently employed. They also worked between eight and thirteen years as principals in their current buildings which is significantly more than the average tenure rate of three to four years (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). Research also shows that it takes approximately five years to fully implement policies and practices that will positively impact the school's performance (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010), so perhaps the extended length of time working in their schools has enabled them to institutionalize certain student voice practices to a greater degree than in schools where the principal has not been afforded the time to fully implement student voice-related practices.

Principals in this group also shared common approaches to leadership as expressed in their interviews. All of the participants described their approach to leadership with a collaborative component, capitalizing on the belief in empowering their teachers and giving them a voice in decision making. A connection can be made between their collaborative leadership

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styles and the collaborative approaches to teaching and learning that support student voice. It is possible that a connection exists between leaders who model collaborative approaches to leadership and the collaborative approaches to teaching and learning that exist in the classrooms in their schools. This was a concept explicitly mentioned by Doug and implied by several of the other principals. By modeling collaborative approaches that empower others, these principals may have inspired their teachers to try this approach with classroom instruction.

The principals in this group also revealed that they see themselves as change agents in the school. They expressed a belief in the importance of continual growth and change. This approach to leadership might influence the culture of the school, which encourages positive risk-taking and innovative approaches that would support the incorporation of student voice and the necessary paradigm shifts that are associated with its implementation. School leaders interested in implementing student voice practices in their schools may choose to use collaborative approaches to leadership and encourage the use of professional learning communities that would model the idea of empowering others. This has the potential to transfer to the teachers who in turn may use these practices to create communities of practice in the classroom.

5.5   THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT VOICE IN EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

Although the literature on the effects of student voice on instructional practice is very limited several studies present connections between student voice practices and effective instruction (Cook-Sather, 2006a, Mager & Nowak, 2012, Rudduck & McIntire, 2007). Overall, the majority of the principals who participated in the current study perceived the impact of student voice on

classroom instruction as significant, supporting the belief that effective instruction must involve at least some focus on student voice practices that empower the students to have more ownership in their learning. Impacts on classroom pedagogy identified by the principals included increased use of formative assessment leading to more differentiated instruction, more student engagement in the learning leading to "deep learning," and an improved classroom culture that focuses on the importance of collaboration and learning from others.

A key finding of this study was that principals perceived that the importance of student voice in instruction depends largely upon the goal for learning that is desired. As Robert mentioned in his interview

> I think it [student voice] is significantly important for learning with regard to whether or not students become engaged with the material and whether or not the experiences in the classroom and the experiences they have in their learning end up in their long-term memory so to speak. So I don't think you need much engagement for very low-level learning where a student has to remember content for a short period of time but if you want the learning to be something that stays with somebody, then the voice factor and the relationship part and the fact that they had a say-so and some choice and buy-in…I think for a deep level of learning, it is very important.

This comment represents an implied belief by many of the principals that the lack of student voice that may exist in a classroom does not mean that effective teaching is not taking place. Principals seemed to view the incorporation of student voice into the classroom as vital for *distinguished-level* practice—it was the inclusion of student voice components that were viewed as the difference between a teacher who is effective and one who is distinguished. Principals' descriptions of an outstanding teacher focused almost completely on characteristics

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that were connected to student voice practices and approaches indicating a belief by these instructional leaders that pedagogy is enhanced when student voice is present. A complete shift to a more constructivist or inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning, however, does not appear to have occurred for the majority of principals in this study, as many of them expressed a belief that student voice would differentiate a distinguished teacher from a proficient teacher, but that it was not always necessary to effective instruction. Less participatory approaches that resulted in positive outcomes such as high scores on standardized assessments were often deemed effective and appropriate even though principals expressed a connection between their best teachers and these practices.

5.6   SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING THE PRESENCE OF STUDENT VOICE THROUGH LEADERSHIP

Few research studies exist on the connection between leadership and the implementation of student voice initiatives in schools; however, some studies do speculate that strong leadership has a significant effect on sustaining student voice efforts. Mitra (2007) found that administrators could play important roles as advocates of student voice in their schools through school-wide learning communities. She also asserts that one reason student voice initiatives thrived at some schools over others that she studied was the presence of a leader in the school who believed in the importance of student voice and encouraged these efforts.

Principals interviewed for this study work in school districts identified as innovative and reform-oriented, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the presence of student voice in these schools may be higher than in other high schools. This presence may be influenced by beliefs of

the school leaders since there is a connection in the literature between leadership and the sustained practice of student voice. It is therefore useful to discuss how leadership, based on the perceptions of these principals, might contribute to the presence of student voice in the classrooms.

This study revealed several leadership practices that could be useful to those desiring to increase the presence of student voice in instruction at their schools. First, utilizing a collaborative approach to leading teachers could result in buy-in from the teachers who may transfer this collaborative approach to teaching students in the classroom. As Doug mentioned in his interview

Human nature, not just for students, is that we are social creatures and we want to be a part of things and we want to be recognized and included, and we want our interests to be fulfilled to a degree. But mostly people want to be validated and know that they are an important part of whatever they are in.

If teachers have collaborative and empowering experiences resulting from the leadership in their school or district leaders, this may influence their beliefs in the importance of such empowerment that will be transferred to their beliefs about instruction. Teachers operating in a system where they feel valued and included, may be more likely to support this empowerment for their students in the classroom.

Second, leaders can assist in supporting the shift in power dynamics in the classroom by supporting certain beliefs about students that they encourage with their teachers. These beliefs include 1) students are *stakeholders* who should be engaged as any other stakeholder in the system 2) students are capable of collaborating with adults and peers to effectively shape

teaching and learning 3) shifts in the power structure between students and teachers must be embraced to allow students more ownership in their education.

Third, school leaders seeking to forward student voice practices in the classroom should encourage the following approaches towards teaching and learning: 1) teaching should focus on student engagement in the learning, 2) teachers must create positive relationships with their students in order to create effective learning communities in the classroom, 3) students must be explicitly taught how to effectively operate in a learning community where students are empowered to collaborate with adults and peers, and 4) teaching should focus on relevant and complex learning experiences not merely content acquisition.

Finally, leaders should emphasize conceptual ideas about the importance of creating a culture of growth and continual change in the school. A part of this culture is to reinforce the concept of positive risk-taking by encouraging teachers to embrace new approaches without fearing repercussions if these ideas fail. This requires leaders to shift from a focus on accountability and performance to embracing collaborative forms of learning experiences.

Principals can affect changes in classroom instruction to include a stronger presence of student voice and communities of learning mainly in two ways: by facilitating professional development, and by observing and evaluating teachers in the school. By approaching school leadership in ways similar to the principals who support student voice efforts in their schools, principals could increase the likelihood that student voice practices will be used and that they will flourish.

5.7   IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study attempted to discover the meaning that principals ascribe to the phenomenon of student voice, how it exists in classrooms, and how principals perceive its role in transforming classroom instructional practices. The research on educational change indicates that in order to make change sustainable, it needs to happen across an entire system (Bateson, 1999). Incorporating student voice practices into everyday instructional settings has the potential to significantly transform education more systemically and significantly by creating change across an entire system, as classroom instructional practice could potentially influence a student's achievement more than many other aspects of the school environment.

The size of this study limited the participants to a small number who worked in districts where the possibility of student voice practices would most likely be present based on their identification as innovative or reform-oriented school districts. In this study, although the presence of student voice in classrooms was higher than expected, the interviews with principals of these schools did not indicate a presence that would be considered pervasive leading to a transformation in the way that teaching and learning were approached. If a school had emerged as a setting where student voice was more pervasive, the way in which instruction was transformed would have been explored in more detail.

This leads to a need for future research that would benefit from a larger population of high schools. A survey designed to elicit information from a large number of principals about the types of student voice practices present in their schools would assist in finding places where student voice is most influential in classroom instructional practice. Once these settings were identified, further qualitative and quantitative research could be completed that would identify the ways in which these practices transformed teaching and learning at these schools. This

survey could also be extended to participants other than principals such as students and teachers whose responses may provide a different perspective. Also, the study of student voice practices could be extended to include elementary and middle schools, or even post-secondary settings to provide a more encompassing view of its implementation at different educational levels. In addition to a larger sample, the need to study more diverse settings might be useful, as the population selected for this study was somewhat homogeneous.

Additionally, there is a need for further research using other research methods such as case studies where teachers are observed as they engage in instructional practices. Also, students and teachers could participate in focus groups designed to elicit information on the way that student voice practices are implemented in the classrooms and the impact on teaching and learning that they might perceive.

The research on student voice indicates only an implied connection between student voice practices an improved achievement. A need also exists for further research exploring a more direct connection between the use of student voice practice in instruction and improved student achievement in order to make a stronger case for the use of student voice in school reform.

Finally, this research study identified student voice practices that were present in high school classrooms without determining which of these practices were most successful in creating a culture of collaboration and participation that student voice implies. Research exploring which practices are most successful in encouraging and supporting student voice including both leadership and instructional practices would add to the limited research in this area.

An important factor to consider when conducting additional research would be to provide a clear definition of student voice that would assist the participants in understanding the

complexity of the concept of student voice so that responses provided would accurately represent the range of activities and pedagogical applications of student voice that may be present in their schools.

5.8   PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research indicate a need for additional professional development for both teachers and school leaders. Principals must evaluate teachers using *The Framework for Teaching* that requires a distinguished-level teacher to use many complex forms of student voice practices.   Principals reported the need for additional training related to increasing the presence of student voice practices and addressing the components in *The Framework for Teaching* that require teachers to use more participatory approaches to instruction. Principals' reports that many of their best teachers would not achieve the distinguished rating on many of the *Framework* components indicate a possible need for professional development for teachers on ways to incorporate these practices and create learning communities within their classrooms.

Principals reported lower confidence levels in providing such professional development. This lack of confidence could be related to a limited understanding of these concepts; however, when considering this low confidence level in conjunction with principals' responses to previous questions that indicated a fairly thorough understanding of the concept by many of the principals, this finding may be interpreted differently. Perhaps principals' lack of confidence in providing professional development may be due to a *thorough* understanding of the complexity of the concept and the challenges that would arise from integrating student voice practices into classrooms given an educational system that is often perceived to be in direct conflict with these

practices. Therefore, their perception of their ability to address the professional development needs may be low as they contemplate the complexity of the concept and the resulting professional development that would be required to fully address it. This need also has implications for teacher and administrator preparation programs that would benefit from including such training into their curriculum. Professional workshops and trainings could also serve as a means for delivering such training.

5.9   POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study revealed a connection between student voice practices and *The Teacher Effectiveness System,* a model for evaluating teachers that was adopted in 2012 by the state of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). This system uses *The Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2013) as a tool for evaluating teacher performance. As previously discussed, this framework includes an emphasis on the use of student voice practices in instruction and evaluates teachers on these practices. This study revealed that teachers and administrators may not have a common conception of what these practices look like and how they would be practiced in classrooms, however, *The Teacher Effectiveness System* evaluates teachers on their ability to do so and requires principals to be knowledgeable in ways to assist teachers in reaching these goals.

On one level this could be viewed as a weakness in the implementation of the policy since it appears that the policy was implemented without complete consideration of the paradigm shift and the related professional development that would need to occur for teachers and school leaders to be able to implement a more collaborative and participatory approach to teaching and

learning. On the other hand, the implementation of *The Teacher Effectiveness System* could also be viewed as a catalyst for change that might position student voice more prominently in the educational change movement. Changing teacher attitudes is often a difficult task; however, with the proper support and resources, a change in beliefs towards teaching practices is likely to follow. This teacher evaluation system creates a sense of urgency for teachers who seek to achieve distinguished ratings on their evaluations, and for school districts as well as the Pennsylvania Department of Education in providing the appropriate resources and guidance to help educators become the distinguished-level teachers that *The Framework for Teaching* encourages, and that many of them strive to be.

5.10   CONCLUSION

The purpose of this exploratory study was to discover the meaning that high school principals ascribe to the phenomenon of student voice, and how they perceive its role in transforming classroom instructional practices. Student voice is important because giving students choice and control in their educational experiences may increase motivation, engagement, and student achievement. As one of the high school principals in this study said, students are "stakeholders" and should "have ownership in their education pathway." Further, providing opportunities for student voice in the educational process may be an effective approach to transforming and reimagining instruction in high schools of the 21st century.

The research presented provides insight into eight high school principals' experiences with and perceptions of the concept of student voice: descriptions of student voice practices observed classrooms, beliefs about the connection between student voice and effective

instructional practices, and beliefs about the role of leadership in supporting student voice. Several findings are instructive. First, the understanding of the concept of student voice presented by the principals was more sophisticated than that indicated in the existing literature. However, a difference between what the principals perceived as student voice and how it actually existed in classrooms in the school was identified, implying a disconnect between theory and practice. Second, principals identified that some of their "best" teachers did not use many of the more participatory forms of student voice approaches in their classrooms. Third, a conflict between student voice practices as identified as distinguished practice in *The Framework for Teaching* and the expectations of teachers in current accountability movements emerged as a major barrier to the implementation of student voice. Other barriers to student voice practices identified included fear of vulnerability and the difficulty in shifting the traditional roles of students and teachers. Finally, several aspects of leadership were identified as promoting student voice, yet there appears to be a need for additional training for teachers and administrators related to increasing the presence of student voice practices.

Overall, these findings have notable policy and practice implications. Of most note, the factors identified in this research are important if educators are to reach the "distinguished" level rating on the *Teacher Effectiveness System* (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012) currently used as a teacher evaluation metric in many schools. A major part of this system is the observation of teacher practices that uses *The Framework for Effective Teaching* (Danielson, 2013) to evaluate a teacher's instructional practices. Many facets of student voice are incorporated into this framework. Thus, both principals and teachers should possess an understanding of student voice and how to create a classroom environment where student voice is recognized. If principals do not or cannot implement the evaluation tool with integrity, this

creates the question of whether or not the evaluation tool should be used at all. As such, this evaluation metric may foster the further development of student voice in our classrooms. The practice implications of this research indicate that providing principals with an expanded definition of student voice is advantageous in helping principals operationalize student voice practices. However, the further development of the skills for implementing specific practices is needed.

Student voice is understudied, yet it is likely to increase in importance, especially considering its presence in the teacher evaluation system adopted by many school systems in the U.S. Furthermore, positioning students as leaders and co-creators of their own learning experiences provides students with valuable learning that is applicable to a global world where problem-solving and creativity outweigh knowledge acquisition. The policy and practice implications of student voice clearly need further elaboration. The research presented in the current study may help in providing a roadmap for more extensive research in this area.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS WITH ASSOCIATED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Question 1: How do principals perceive the concept of student voice and the way that student voice is practiced in instructional settings in their school?

Related question 1a: What personal factors might affect the way that principals perceive the presence of student voice in their school

Related interview questions:
- Would you briefly describe your educational background beginning with your undergraduate degree and additional degrees or certifications that you have received up to the present time?
- Please describe your professional experience including teaching and administrative experience.
- Please describe your job as the principal at this school
- How many years have you been in your current position?
- Have you had a professional career outside of the educational field? If so, can you tell me briefly about that experience?
- Briefly explain to me why you decided to become an educator. Why did you pursue administration?
- What is the approximate number of students in your school this year?
- Are their any unique characteristics of this school that come to mind that might help me understand the culture here?
- In your career as an educator, have you had any specialized training around the concept of student voice (Course work, conferences, in-service) or had any experiences that influence your perceptions about its role classrooms?
- Have you personally taken any steps to promote student voice practices in your school or has your school or district ever formally promoted the idea of student voice in its initiatives, strategic plans, or other types of professional development?

Related question1b: What meanings do principals ascribe to student voice and what examples of student voice do they identify as present in classrooms in their schools?

Related Interview questions:
- The term "student voice" is interpreted in many different ways by educators. Please describe for me what you think student voice is as it applies to educational settings.
- Based on your understanding of student voice, please think of a classroom where you would say that student voice practices are a part of this teacher's pedagogy
  - What it is like to be in this classroom?
  - How did the teacher create an environment that supported and respected student voice?
  - What other examples of student voice practices or teachers come to mind when you think about student voice in instructional settings?
- I would now like you to consider the following definition of student voice: (this will be given to the participant in writing) "a construct used to describe a range of activities that provide opportunities for students to **express** unique ideas and perspectives, **collaborate** with adults, and **participate** in the process of improving school experiences and student learning."
  - How does this definition change or confirm your original perception of student voice as you previously described? Considering this definition, are their any additional examples of student voice that you would like to add to your previous account of observations of student voice in the classroom?
- Thinking about the different types of student voice that we discussed: students **expressing** unique ideas and perspectives, **collaborating** with adults, and **participating** in the process of improving school experiences and student learning, how would you describe the presence of student voice that exists in classrooms in your school?

Related question 1c: What barriers to implementing student voice do principals identify?
Related interview questions:

- What do you see as the barriers for including student voice practices in the classroom? What have you observed that might explain why some teachers embrace the concept more than others?

Research question #2: What do principals state or imply about the connection between student voice and effective instructional practices?	

	Related question 2a: How do their **descriptions of an outstanding teacher** reflect the presence of student voice? *Related research question* - Please think about one or two of the best teachers that you have ever observed or worked with in your professional experience. Describe for me what it is like to be in this person's classroom. - What makes this person stand out to you compared to other teachers you have encountered? - Now think of one of the worst teachers that you have observed or worked with. Describe for me what it was like to be in this person's classroom.
	Related question 2b: What tools do these principals use to define and document effective instruction in the classroom? *Related interview questions:* - As an administrator in the school, can you please describe for me your role as a supervisor to teachers? - What tool do you currently use to document your observations of teachers and provide a feedback and rating for this teacher - What are your thoughts about how this tool describes and evaluates effective teaching?
	Related question 2c: How do their responses indicate an understanding or perception of student voice and **its role in instruction**? *Related research questions:* - The introduction to this framework states: "The hallmark of distinguished-level practice in the Framework is that teachers have been able to create a community of learners, in which students assume a large part of the responsibility for the success of a lesson; they make suggestions, initiate improvements, monitor their own learning against clear standards, and serve as resources to one another." - Describe your thoughts on this statement? - Where do you see the classrooms in your school in relationship to what is described here? - How do you think the inclusion of student voice in instructional settings could potentially affect the instruction in the classrooms in your school? - Given what you have said about your past experiences as a teacher and an administrator as well as the examples of student voice that you have recalled from your observations, how do you understand student voice and its impact on instruction?

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Research question #3: How do principals view their role in providing leadership to increase the presence of student voice in the classroom?

- Explain your role as the school principal/assistant principal.
- How would you describe your approach or philosophy towards leadership in your current position?
- What impact do you feel you have on the instruction that occurs in the classrooms in your school?
- Reflecting on the type of instructional approaches that were described in Danielson's Framework for Effective Teaching, how do you feel about providing leadership to assist teachers in creating learning communities in the classroom and increasing student voice practices?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction:

The topic of my study is principals' perceptions of student voice and its role in instructional practices in high school classrooms. As I mentioned, the interview process will involve three interviews: The first interview will focus on biographical information related to your professional background including teaching experience and administrative experience. It will also include a few questions about the demographics and the culture of your school as well as a few questions about your perception of effective instruction. This interview has nine questions and can be completed in approximately 30 minutes.

I will return to conduct interview two at a later date as we discussed. Please remember that your responses will be recorded in confidence and that none of the information reported will be associated with your name or the name of your school, so please feel free to answer truthfully to the questions that I will ask. Also remember that you will be provided with a transcript of both interviews that you can review prior to the third stage, which is the follow-up interview.

Session 1: Background information on the participant and the school

First, I would like to make sure that you are comfortable with the audio-recording of this interview. Is the location and workings of the audio-recording device acceptable to you? What questions do you have for me before we begin?

1) Please describe your professional experience including teaching and administrative experience.
   o How many years have you been in your current position?
   o Have you had a professional career outside of the educational field? If so, can you tell me briefly about that experience?
2) Briefly explain to me why you decided to become an educator. Why did you pursue administration?

3) Please describe your job as the principal at this school?
4) How would you describe your approach or philosophy towards leadership in your current position?
5) Describe the impact that you have as the building principal on the instructional practices in your school.

I would now like to ask you a few questions about your school:

6) What is the approximate number of students in your school this year?
7) Are their any unique characteristics of this school that come to mind that might help me understand the culture here?

There are two more questions to this interview related to your observation of effective instructional practices:

8) Please think about one of best teachers that you have ever observed or worked with in your professional experience. Describe for me what it is like to be in this person's classroom. What makes this person stand out to you in comparison to other teachers you have encountered?
9) Now think of a different teacher, one who is the opposite of the teacher that you described. Perhaps this teacher was not strong instructionally or he or she was in need of some administrative assistance. Describe for me what it was like to be in this person's classroom.

Part 2: Perceptions of student voice and effective instruction

This interview will focus on effective instruction and the concept of student voice. I will be recording this interview as I did in the first interview with you. Please remember that your responses will be recorded in confidence and that none of the information reported will be associated with your name or the name of your school in the final report, so please feel free to answer truthfully to the questions that I will ask. There are eight main questions in this interview and it should take approximately one hour to complete. What questions do you have for me before we begin?

1) *The term "student voice" is interpreted in many different ways by educators. Please describe for me what you think student voice is.*
   - Based on your understanding of student voice, please think of a classroom where you would say that student voice practices are a part of this teacher's pedagogy
     o What it is like to be in this classroom?
     o How did the teacher create an environment that supported and respected student voice?
     o What other examples of student voice practices or teachers come to mind when you think about student voice in instructional settings?

*2) I would now like you to consider the following definition of student voice: (this will be given to the participant in writing) "a construct used to describe a range of activities that provide opportunities for students to **express** unique ideas and perspectives **collaborate** with adults, and **participate** in the process of improving school experiences and student learning."*

- How does this definition change or confirm your original perception of student voice as you previously described? Considering this definition, are their any additional examples of student voice that you would like to add to your previous account of your observations of student voice in the classroom?

3) I would now like to talk about your experience with student voice in instructional settings and how you view the role of student voice in effective instruction. I would first like to know about your teacher evaluation process:

- As an administrator in the school, can you please describe for me your role as a supervisor to teachers? (how many teachers do you supervise, how often do you observe instructional practices in the classroom either formally or informally)
- What tool do you currently use to determine the effectiveness of a teacher and provide an evaluation of their teaching?
- What are your thoughts about how this tool assists you in defining and evaluating effective teaching?

4) Student voice has been presented in educational reform research, especially in the past 10-15 years as a way to transform our approaches to education and is pursued as a reform method to increase student achievement. The idea is that student voice practices in instructional settings would improve pedagogy in the classroom and therefore improve student achievement.

The new teacher evaluation tool in the state of Pennsylvania, based on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, embraces the use of student voice as a way to improve instructional practices. The introduction to this framework states: "The hallmark of distinguished-level practice in the Framework is that teachers have been able to create a community of learners, in which students assume a large part of the responsibility for the success of a lesson; they make suggestions, initiate improvements, monitor their own learning against clear standards, and serve as resources to one another."

- Describe your thoughts on this statement.
- Where do you see the classrooms in this school in relationship to what is described here.

5) How do you think the inclusion of student voice in instructional settings could potentially affect the instruction in the classrooms in your school?

6) What do you see as barriers for including student voice practices in the classroom? What have you observed that might explain why some teachers embrace the concept more than others?

7) In your career as an educator, have you participated in any specialized training around the concept of student voice (course work, conferences, in-service) or had any experiences that influence your perceptions about its role in classrooms? Have you personally taken any steps to promote student voice practices in your school or has your school or district ever formally promoted the idea of student voice in its initiatives, strategic plans, or other types of professional development?

8) Take a moment and think of any additional information that you would like to add about student voice and your perception of how it lives in the classrooms at your school.

Part 3: Follow-up (this will be done by phone or in person depending on the choice of the participant) As a follow-up interview, the nature of the questions will be different depending on what was contained in the first two interviews and what information the researcher may need to clarify with the participant. The following questions will be used as a guide:

Thank you for participating in my research study. Again, I wanted to remind you that with the I will be recording our conversation. The identity and the identity of the school will remain confidential and will not be revealed in the published report of this study. I truly appreciate that you are willing to meet with me one last time to discuss any additional thoughts that you might have after reflecting on the questions that I posed in the first two interviews. You have been provided with a copy of the transcript of our interviews. Do you have any concerns about anything contained in that document or anything that you feel was not accurately depicted? Would you like to clarify or add to anything that you said?

I have a few questions that I would like to ask you regarding some of the answers you provided in the first (or second) interview… (questions will depend upon the nature of each individual interview).

1) Given what you have said about your past experiences as a teacher and an administrator as well as the examples of student voice that you have recalled from your observations, how do you understand student voice and its impact on instruction?
2) Thinking about the different types of student voice that we discussed: students **expressing** unique ideas and perspectives, **collaborating** with adults, and **participating** in the process of improving school experiences and student learning, how would you describe the presence of student voice that exists in classrooms in your school?
3) Reflecting on the type of instructional approaches that were described in Danielson's Framework for Effective Teaching, how do you feel about providing leadership to assist teachers in creating learning communities in the classroom and increasing student voice practices?
4) What additional thoughts do you have about student voice and its role in instruction that you would like to share with me at this time?

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear (participant),

I am writing to request your assistance with research related to my doctoral dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh. The purpose of my study is to learn about principals' perceptions of student voice and its role in effective instruction. I have chosen to high schools identified as reform-oriented and innovative, and your school was among those schools in the area identified as high performing. I would appreciate the chance to speak with you about this topic and hope that you might be willing to participate in this study.

The process will involve three interviews spaced approximately 3-7 days apart. The first interview will request information about you and your experience as an administrator and will last approximately 30 minutes. The second interview will focus on the concept of student voice and effective instructional practices and will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. The third follow-up interview will ask you to reflect on the first two interviews and will last no longer than 30 minutes. I would like to conduct interviews one and two in person at your school, and interview three can be completed either in person or by phone depending on your preference.

As a building principal myself, I realize that it may be very difficult to find time to commit to multiple interviews. If you are willing to participate in this study but are not able to participate on three different days, it is possible to combine the interviews into two sessions or conduct interviews by phone. I am willing to work with whatever scheduling needs you may have.

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to your participation. I will keep a record of the names and locations of each interview during the interview process. This identifying information will only be viewed by me and will not be known by any additional parties. Responses will be maintained in confidence and no identifying information will be used other than to describe the characteristics of the aggregate group sample (gender representation, years of experience, etc.). With your approval, the interviews will be recorded and upon transcription, the audio files will be erased. You will also receive a copy of the transcribed interview to review and may delete or modify any of your responses. This study is being conducted solely by me. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

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I greatly appreciate any consideration you give to this request. If you are willing to participate, please email me at . I will follow-up this letter with an email reminder that will include a digital copy of this letter for your convenience. Thank you in advance for your willingness to help with my research.

Sincerely,

Susan Gentile
Edgeworth Elementary Principal – Quaker Valley School District
University of Pittsburgh Doctoral Candidate
Phone: 412-848-3667 (cell phone)
Email:

APPENDIX D

FIRST FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

Dear (participant),

I have recently mailed a letter to you to requesting your assistance with research related to my doctoral dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh. As I mentioned in this letter, the purpose of my study is to learn about principals' perceptions of student voice and its role in effective instruction. I have chosen to study high schools identified as reform-oriented and innovative, and your school was among those schools in the area identified as high performing. I will be interviewing local high school principals for this study and would appreciate the chance to speak with you about this topic.

The process will involve three interviews spaced approximately 3-7 days apart. The first interview will request information about you and your experience as an administrator and will last approximately 30 minutes. The second interview will focus on the concept of student voice and effective instructional practices and will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. The third follow-up interview will ask you to reflect on the first two interviews and will last no longer than 30 minutes. I would like to conduct interviews one and two in person at your school, and interview three can be completed either in person or by phone depending on your preference.

As a building principal myself, I realize that it may be very difficult to find time to commit to multiple interviews. If you are willing to participate in this study but are not able to participate on three different days, it is possible to combine the interviews into two sessions or conduct interviews by phone. I am willing to work with whatever scheduling needs you may have.

I am sending you an electornic version of the description of the study for your convenience. If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email at skg11@pitt.edu.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to help with my research.

Sincerely,
Susan K. Gentile

Edgeworth Elementary Principal – Quaker Valley School District
University of Pittsburgh Doctoral Candidate
Phone: 412-848-3667 (cell phone)
Email: skg11@pitt.edu

APPENDIX E

SECOND FOLLOW-UP EMAIL:

Dear (participant),

I have recently emailed you with a request to participate in research related to my doctoral dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh on principals' perceptions of student voice and its role in effective instruction in high schools. I am hoping that you may still be interested in participating in this study.

I have attached the letter describing the research study. I greatly appreciate any consideration you give to this request. If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email at skg11@pitt.edu.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to help with my research.

Sincerely,

Susan K. Gentile
Edgeworth Elementary Principal – Quaker Valley School District
University of Pittsburgh Doctoral Candidate
Phone: 412-848-3667 (cell phone)
Email: skg11@pitt.edu

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