

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CONSIDERING STUDENT VOICE AS PART OF
THEIR COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATIONS AND/OR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH
PLANS**

by

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Michael Louis Pasquinelli, Ed.D

University of Pittsburgh, 2015

This study was designed to understand teachers' perceptions of considering student voice as part of their comprehensive evaluations and/or professional development programs. Literature related to the impact of student voice in education has increased considerably over the past few decades. Research, however, related to the integration of student voice into teachers' evaluations and professional development planning has been limited.

This study is grounded in social constructivism, the theory that the social world is without meaning prior to one's experience of it. The social constructivist perspective provided the context to interpret teachers' perceptions of three models that were linked to form the conceptual framework of this study. The three models were: *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity* (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012), *The Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment and Learning* (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012) and *The Educator Effectiveness Project* (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012).

The use of focus groups was the primary research method because group processes can help people explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less accessible in one to one or group interviews. Three focus groups, each comprised of six teachers with various backgrounds

and experiences, participated in this study. The interactions of the focus groups provided thick, rich data for identifying common units and themes for analysis. A limited number of follow-up questions were posed to understand the influence that the focus group discussions had on the participant's perceptions of student voice.

The major finding of this study was that social constructivist theory did ground teachers' perceptions of considering student voice in teaching and learning and as part of their comprehensive evaluations or professional growth plans. Opportunities were identified for student voice integration within each component of the framework.

The need for additional professional development for teachers around the use of student voice in non-traditional activities emerged. Educational leaders may be encouraged to explore methods for linking student voice to teacher development programs. Additional research related to considering student voice as an aspect of teacher evaluation programs could have useful implications for policy and practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	XVI
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 THE IMPACT OF STUDENT VOICE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING	3
1.2 STUDENT VOICE IN TEACHERS' EVALUATIONS	4
1.3 INTEGRATING STUDENT VOICE INTO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING	6
1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	8
1.4.1 Spectrum of student voice-oriented activity.....	11
1.4.2 Peer enhancement of teaching, assessment and learning.....	12
1.4.3 Educator effectiveness project.....	13
1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	15
1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	16
1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	17
1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS	19
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	21
2.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY.....	23
2.2 STUDENT VOICE	24
2.2.1 Impact of Student Voice on Students.....	25

2.2.2	Impact of student voice on teachers	26
2.2.3	The spectrum of student voice oriented activities.....	27
2.3	STUDENT VOICE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	30
2.3.1	Peer enhancement of teaching, assessment and learning.....	31
2.4	40 YEAR HISTORY OF TEACHER EVALUATIONS	32
2.4.1	A Nation at Risk.....	34
2.4.2	Measuring teacher effectiveness.....	35
2.4.3	Student achievement measures.....	37
2.4.4	No Child Left Behind	40
2.4.5	Race to the Top	42
2.5	STUDENT VOICE IN EVALUATIONS.....	43
2.5.1	History of student surveys	44
2.5.2	Student surveys – strengths and limitations.....	44
2.5.3	Student survey instruments	48
2.5.4	My Student Survey	48
2.5.5	The Gallup Student Poll.....	48
2.5.6	Tripod Surveys.....	49
2.6	TEACHERS’ OPINIONS OF EVALUATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRENDS.....	50
2.6.1	Classroom Observation Models	52
2.6.2	Student Achievement.....	56
2.6.3	Value-Added Measures	61
2.6.4	Student Learning Objectives	64

2.6.5	Student Voice	66
2.7	EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS IN PENNSYLVANIA	71
3.0	METHODOLOGY.....	73
3.1	CONTEXT.....	75
3.1.1	Qualitative Research – Focus Groups	76
3.1.2	Focus Group Strengths	77
3.1.3	Focus Group Limitations	79
3.1.4	Primary Researcher’s and Participant Bias	80
3.2	DATA COLLECTION.....	82
3.2.1	Focus Group Planning and Participant Selection	85
3.2.2	Focus Group Design and Implementation.....	86
3.2.3	Generating Focus Group Questions.....	88
3.2.4	Follow-up questions.....	91
3.3	DATA ANALYSIS.....	92
4.0	DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS.....	95
4.1	TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CONSIDERING STUDENT VOICE ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF STUDENT VOICE ORIENTED ACTIVITY	97
4.2	PURPOSES OF CONSIDERING STUDENT VOICE	101
4.2.1	The Impact of Student Voice on Students.....	102
4.2.2	The Impact of Student Voice on Teachers	104
4.2.3	The Impact of Student Voice on Classrooms, Schools, and School Districts	106
4.2.4	Teachers’ Concerns with Student Voice.....	107

4.3	EXPERIENCES IN CONDUCTING OR PARTICIPATING IN SURVEYS.	110
	
4.3.1	Positive Experiences with Surveys	111
4.3.2	Negative Experiences with Surveys	114
4.4	TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT SURVEYS	116
4.4.1	Positive Experiences with Student Surveys	120
4.4.2	Concerns with Student Surveys	121
4.5	TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT SURVEYS AS PART OF THEIR COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATIONS	124
4.6	TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT SURVEYS AS PART OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLANS	128
4.6.1	Teachers’ perspectives of how other groups may respond to student voice	132
4.7	THE IMPACT OF THE FOCUS GROUP ON TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT VOICE	135
4.7.1	Is there a place where student voice should stop?	136
4.7.2	Influence of focus group discussions on teachers’ perceptions of student voice	139
4.8	DO PERCEPTIONS DIFFER BASED UPON PAST, FORMAL EXPERIENCES WITH CONSIDERING STUDENT VOICE?	141
4.8.1	The impact of past experiences on teachers’ perceptions of student voice	142

4.8.2	The impact of past experiences on teachers’ perceptions of student voice in evaluations	143
4.8.3	The impact of past experiences on teachers’ perceptions of student voice in professional development planning.....	145
4.8.4	Summary	146
5.0	DISCUSSION	148
5.1	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	149
5.2	INTEGRATING STUDENT VOICE ACROSS A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES	152
5.3	WHO BENEFITS FROM STUDENT VOICE?	154
5.3.1	Benefits for students	155
5.3.2	Benefits for Teachers.....	156
5.3.3	Benefits for classroom, schools and school districts	158
5.4	STUDENT VOICE IN TEACHERS’ EVALUATIONS	159
5.5	STUDENT VOICE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING	163
5.6	LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH..	164
5.7	PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS	167
5.8	POLICY IMPLICATIONS.....	171
5.9	CONCLUSION	173
APPENDIX A	176
APPENDIX B	179
APPENDIX C	182

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 184

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Student Voice Survey Responses	25
Table 2. Strengths/Limitations of Student Survey Data	45
Table 3. Student Survey Options	49
Table 4. Average Test-Score Growth for African American and White Students Pre- and Post-NCLB	58
Table 5. Strengths and Weaknesses of Teacher Effectiveness Measures	69
Table 6. Focus Group Participants	82
Table 7. Focus Group Development Process	86
Table 8. Focus Group Design and Implementation Process	87
Table 9. Where Across the <i>Spectrum</i> Focus Group Participants Consider Student Voice.....	99
Table 10. Concerns with Student Voice	109
Table 11. Extensiveness - Experiences with General Surveys	111
Table 12. Examples of How Participants Have Used Student Survey Information	117
Table 13. Frequency - Reasons to Support Student Surveys in Education.....	123
Table 14. Frequency - Concerns with Integrating Student Surveys in Education	124
Table 15. Teachers' Perceptions of Student Voice in Teachers' Evaluations	126
Table 16. Teachers' Perceptions of Student Voice in Professional Development	129

Table 17. Teachers' Perceptions of what Teachers' Unions may say about Student Voice in Professional Development	133
Table 18. Frequency - Concerns with Student Voice across the <i>Spectrum</i>	138
Table 19. Formal Experiences with Student Voice	141

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. A View from the Closet.....	xix
Figure 2. Conceptual Framework	10
Figure 3. The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012)	12
Figure 4. Educator Effectiveness Project (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012)	14
Figure 5. The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012)	28
Figure 6. Continuing Personal and Professional Development (CPPD).....	32
Figure 7. State Policy Trends Related to Teacher Effectiveness Measures.....	52
Figure 8. Teachers Perceptions of Recent Formal Evaluations	54
Figure 9. Qualities of Good Focus Group Questions.....	89
Figure 10. Focus Group Question Development Matrix	90
Figure 11. Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity Reference	96
Figure 12. Extensiveness - Positive Impact of Student Voice on a Group or Area.....	101
Figure 13. Frequency - Positive Impact of Student Voice on a Group or Area.....	102
Figure 14. Word Frequency from Focus Groups Responses on the Impact of General Surveys	116
Figure 15. Educator Effectiveness Project - Act 82 of 2012	125
Figure 16. Teachers' perspectives of how other groups may respond to student voice	135
Figure 17. Conceptual Framework	150
Figure 18. Frequency - Positive Impact of Student Voice on a Group or Area.....	158

Figure 19. The Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity – Focus Groups Question..... 176

Figure 20. Educator Effectiveness Project – Act 82 of 2012 – Focus Group Question 177

PREFACE

THE VIEW FROM MY CLOSET

I titled my preface, “The View from my Closet” because that is where I spent a good portion of my life over the past two years. Depending on the time of year or time of day, the view inspired me to, in the words of Dr. Garman, “press on”, or at other times to stop and reflect upon the lessons learned from this experience.

This preface is for my children. I do not know if you will ever read this entire study – my guess is you will not, but I will make you read this preface and hope you may someday consider passing it on to your children (or adding to it after you complete your dissertations). The academic lessons learned from writing a dissertation are so vast in themselves that I could write another dissertation. But for Zack, Max, and Jaden the life lessons are just as important, if not more.

Life Lesson #1 Resiliency

Nothing worthwhile in life is easy. I started this program in 2007. Here I am 8 years older, I have held 5 different jobs over those 8 years and I have watched the three of you grow into wonderful young people. The challenges of these last 8 years have been great, but nothing compared to what others deal with every day so no complaining from me. I want you to understand that the reason it took so long is because (most of the time) I chose the three of you

over my courses. I probably could have finished years ago, but I would have missed out on too many great memories. So the lesson here is – stick with it. Regardless of the task, be resilient. Regardless of the obstacles in your paths (and they will come up) - finish what you start.

Life Lesson #2 Mentors

There will be people that come along in your life and you will sense that there is something different about them compared to others. When you find these people hold on to them. Dr. McClure has been my advisor since 2007, many students choose to change advisors over the course of their studies – I found a smart, caring, kind person and I stuck with her (thanks Dr. McClure). I met Drs. Garman and Gunzenhauser in a course titled Core (this is another story in itself). Again, there was something different about how they approached people and I could immediately tell they were passionate about teaching, learning, and others – so I held on. Dr. Davis just came into my life last year. She and I are polar opposites when it comes to personalities. In short, Dr. Davis has the guts to say all the things I am thinking. You know the saying that opposites attract – it is true. Dr. Miller and I both graduated from North Allegheny, he is about 4 years younger than me but wise beyond his years. He has the ability to take complex problems and make them simple. You will be amazed at how much you can accomplish when you have people like Dr. Miller in your life – find them and don't let go. There are phases in life, at some point you will have the opportunities to mentor others. Take the lessons from these people – be kind, caring, passionate, say what is on your mind (as long as it is not hurtful to others – challenge the problem not the person), and keep it simple. Others will follow.

Life Lesson #3 I am 3rd

I stole this one from your summer camp but it applies to this dissertation and will serve you well in life. Take a minute and read Matthew 22:37-40. You see I am not the only one who thinks you should put yourselves third. Completing this dissertation has taught me important lessons about this concept. It was a real challenge to take time to serve at church (cut grass, shovel the paths, serve as liturgist, work the sound system, etc.), participate in the Saturday morning men's groups, spend time with the three of you and your mom, help out gram and pap, do a good job at work, and complete this dissertation at the same time. But guess what? There was time. Put God and others before yourself and you will be amazed at what happens not only for you but to you. When you are young, all you really have to think about is yourself. Because of this, it isn't easy to put others ahead of yourself. This takes practice. You will have opportunities to practice being 3rd every day. Start each day with a prayer; it's all downhill from there.

Life Lesson #4 Family

You don't know this right now but you are extremely lucky. Don't worry; I didn't know how lucky I was at your age either. Having a group of people around you that love you more than you can imagine sets you up for success in life. Why, because regardless of what happens, you will always have your family. I didn't realize how awesome my parents and brother were until I was well into my 30's. I cannot think of one time that they were not there for me. That makes every challenge in life easier.

There is no way I finish this dissertation without the help and support of your mom. Your mom took on so much more, sent me encouraging messages, and was always there to listen. You will never find anyone that loves you more than your mom! This is a great life

lesson – take your time in choosing a wife or husband. If you take your time, you may get as lucky as me (but I doubt it). The support does not stop there, Meme and all of your aunts and uncles, cousins, and our friends have been there for me as well from a simple word of encouragement to helping out in small and sometimes big ways. You are all extremely lucky – and so am I.

Finally, my 4-step secret to success and happiness: be kind, friendly, respectful, and work hard. If you do these things consistently - you will always finish 3rd!

Love,

Dr. Dad

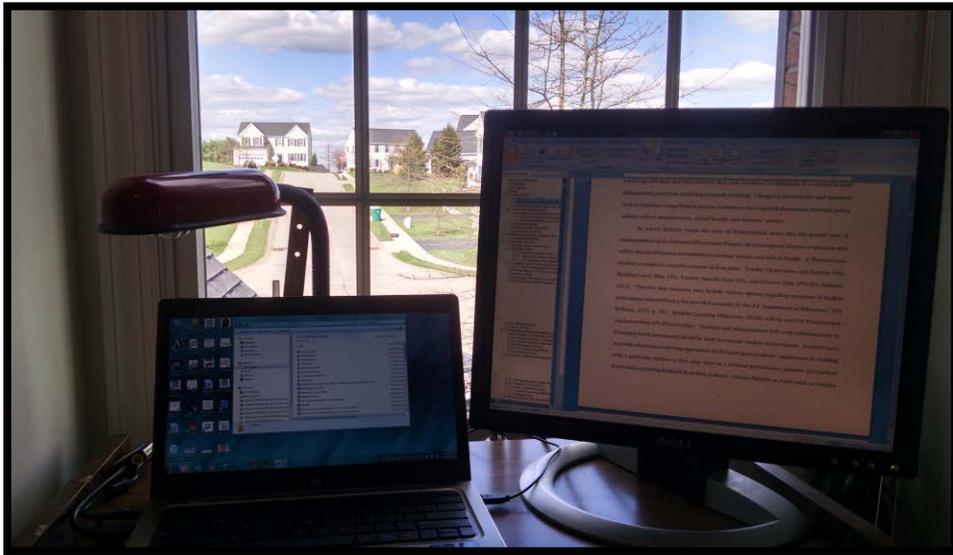


Figure 1. A View from the Closet

1.0 INTRODUCTION

One student's voice was heard by one teacher and as a result many students were impacted for years to come. I learned of this example of the power of student voice through a project assigned during a survey research course at the University of Pittsburgh. I conducted a focus group with a small number of elementary school teachers for one of my assignments. During the focus group, we discussed the use of student voice as part of teachers' evaluations. One of the questions posed during this focus group was: Have you ever conducted a survey with your students and asked them to provide you with feedback related to the impact you had on them over the course of a school year? One teacher shared that she administered informal student surveys at the end of every school year. The data was not shared with anyone; it was for the teacher's eyes only. As the teacher read through each of her students' responses one year, she came across a statement from one student that changed her teaching practice forever. A student shared with this teacher that she rarely was called upon during the school year. She was a shy young lady with wonderful ideas but often lacked the courage to raise her hand or speak up. The impact this student's voice had on the teacher was significant. The teacher vowed moving forward to find ways to ensure all students were provided many opportunities to participate in lessons and discussions regardless of their personalities. Through the voice of one child, a teacher listened. As a result, other students will benefit for years to come.

This response from the teacher confirmed my plans to study the potential impact student voice could have on teaching and learning. This teacher did not only listen to her students, she valued their input enough to modify her practice. My goal was to study teachers' perceptions related to not only listening to students but more importantly changing their behaviors or exploring professional development opportunities as result of what they heard. At the time, Act 82 of 2012, The Educator Effectiveness Project, was being introduced to school districts across the state of Pennsylvania. The concept of evaluating teachers based upon a combination of classroom observation evidence and student achievement data was new to many educators. Act 82 combines 50% classroom observation and practice with 15% overall school performance scores, 15% teacher specific student achievement results, and 20% elective data (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). It was from the 20% elective data that this study emerged. I began to consider a number of questions related to the elective data portion of the evaluation. Is there a place for student input in teachers' evaluations? How would teachers perceive this idea? If the true value of the evaluation process is professional growth, would student input have an impact on teachers' professional development?

This qualitative study is about the potential impact that student voice can have on teachers, classrooms, school buildings, and ultimately future generations of students. It was designed to determine a starting point for the conversation related to where student voice "fits" into education. The study explores teachers' perceptions related to the general idea of student voice across a range of activities from student expression to student leadership. The general concept of student voice is later narrowed to consider teachers' perceptions of student voice as either part of their evaluations or as part of their professional development planning.

1.1 THE IMPACT OF STUDENT VOICE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teachers and students interact daily. Teachers pose questions and students respond. Students pose questions and teachers respond. Learning activities are developed by teachers to encourage collaboration, conversation, and often debate. Writing assignments are designed for students to formulate opinions and support those opinions through text or personal experiences. Those opinions are ultimately shared or published. A significant portion of a teacher's responsibility is to listen to his/her students. Traditionally, teachers are listening to assess students' understandings of the content presented. The student speaks, the teacher listens and provides feedback, and the student learns. This study shifts the learning from the student to the teacher. Teachers were asked if they are, or would consider, listening to students for a different reason: listening to students to improve teaching practices.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Research Program Phase I Network based its work on two complementary premises. The first was that all students have a right to be consulted and to have their voices listened to. The right applies to all aspects of pupils' lives in school, including the area often most neglected, teaching and learning (McIntyre, Pedder, & Rudduck, 2005). The second premise suggests that consulting students offers schools an important means towards their own improvements. Evidence discovered from ESRC indicates that the kinds of changes to teaching and learning which pupils suggest tend to be very sensible. In addition, student motivation increases when consulted about the most effective strategies that help them to learn (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004).

Through my review of literature, I discovered that research around the general concept of student voice has increased significantly over the past few decades. However, research on the impact of student voice on teaching and learning is limited. This may be related to the absence

of evidence of teachers using student voice input when considering modifying their teaching practices. This absence of research of teachers using student voice to improve their practices became the foundation of my study. Teachers' perceptions of how student voice should be integrated into teaching and learning will increase the likelihood of this practice becoming more widespread. Teachers would be more likely to devote time and energy to pupil consultation if pupils' ideas could significantly impact the quality of their teaching. As a result, teachers' perceptions of using student voice to reflect on teaching and learning was studied to identify teachers' questions, concerns, and ideas.

1.2 STUDENT VOICE IN TEACHERS' EVALUATIONS

Teacher evaluations are playing a central role in educational policy discussions throughout the country. As legislators struggle with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), states have requested waivers to avoid the lofty achievement goals of 100% proficiency in reading and mathematics by the year 2014 set by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind, 2002). A crucial component in the waiver agreement between the federal government and the states was the modification of the teacher evaluation system. In addition to NCLB waivers, states have applied for the federal Race to the Top grant. One of the selection criteria, *Great Teachers and Leaders*, requires states to "design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals that differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 9). As a result of these federal guidelines, trends in teacher evaluation systems across the country are evolving to incorporate student academic growth, achievement, and other non-

traditional measures in determining teacher effectiveness. Non-traditional measures include parent and student surveys, student portfolios, professional development portfolios, and student learning objectives.

Locally, the state of Pennsylvania implemented a new teacher rating tool in July, 2013 known as the Educator Effectiveness Project (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). Multiple measures, including formal and informal observations, building level performance data, teacher specific data, and other elective data are combined to determine if a teacher is rated distinguished, proficient, needs improvement, or failing. Changes in the structure and measures used to formulate comprehensive teacher evaluations have ignited discussions between policy makers, school administrators, school boards, and teachers' unions (Rose, 2013).

As school districts across the state of Pennsylvania move into the second year of implementation of the Educator Effectiveness Project during the 2014-2015 school year, administrators, teachers' unions, and school boards will discuss the local topic of elective evaluation data. A Pennsylvania teacher's evaluation currently consists of four parts: 1) Teacher Observation and Practice 50%; 2) Building Level Data 15%; 3) Teacher Specific Data 15%; and 4) Elective Data 20% (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013). "Elective data measures may include various options regarding measures of student performance selected from a list provided annually by the PA Department of Education" (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013, p. 38). Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) will be used by Pennsylvania teachers as their 20% elective data. Teachers and administrators will work collaboratively to determine which assessments should be used to measure student achievement. Student voice may help educators in selecting appropriate SLOs based upon students' experiences in working with a particular teacher or group of teachers. School districts in states such as Georgia and Tennessee along with local school districts are

incorporating student perception results into their teachers' elective data (The New Teacher Project, 2012). I believe other districts can learn from the teachers and administrators of these districts, along with the teachers of this study, who can share how student perception results were used to guide their daily practices. If teachers from these districts indicate that student perception information was helpful in guiding their professional development planning or encouraged them to modify their current practices, then perhaps other teachers and school districts will consider how student perception information could be integrated into their organizations.

1.3 INTEGRATING STUDENT VOICE INTO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

There is both an art and a science to teaching. New teachers enter the profession with some field experience, post-secondary training, and a vision for what teaching is or can be based upon their unique experiences and perspectives. The quantifiable, scientific practices that typically result in student achievement take time and many professional development sessions for teachers to implement effectively (Marzano, 2007). In addition, the art of teaching is refined through experience, peer observations, and professional development. Stenhouse (1983), suggesting that improving the art of teaching is in the hands of each educator, states:

To say that teaching is an art does not imply that teachers are born, not made. On the contrary artists learn and work extraordinarily hard at it. But they learn through the critical practice of their art...Thus art ideas are tested in form by practice. Exploration and interpretation lead to revision and adjustment of idea and practice. If my words are

inadequate, look at the sketchbook of a good artist, a play in rehearsal, a jazz quartet working together. That, I am arguing is what good teaching is like. It is not routine engineering or routine management. (Stenhouse, 1983, p. 158)

As the quote suggests, professional development provides teachers with opportunities to refine the art and science of teaching, explore new techniques, and improve upon specific areas of performance. As student needs continue to evolve, professional development provides teachers with learning opportunities to address those needs.

Professional development topics are often identified through strategic plans or individual areas of focus. My interest in non-traditional measures of teacher performance and professional development planning includes considering student voice as part of both processes. Students spend more time with their teachers than do administrators and supervisors. Although they will not have the backgrounds or experience to comment on areas such as content knowledge or pedagogical skills, students can express how their teachers addressed their social, emotional, and learning needs. Listening to students could benefit teachers as they reflect on current practices related to their pedagogical techniques and plan for their professional development.

The components of the *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment and Learning* (PETAL) professional development program implemented at Oxford Brookes University is a model for combining student input and teacher collaboration (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). PETAL is a professional development program in which teams of teachers work together in a sustained effort in order to improve learning, teaching, and assessments. Students play a significant role, partially in informing areas of concern or need, partly to work directly with teachers to develop possible solutions, and to help evaluate the impact of the change efforts. Detailed descriptions of this process are available in the review of literature found in Chapter 2.

Students' voices have traditionally been absent in conversations related to the professional development needs of teachers or school reform efforts. In 1998, Hodgkin and Newell described lessons from industry where productivity went up as a result of worker participation. Believing the same could hold true for schools and students; they posit:

Pupils themselves have a huge potential contribution to make, not as passive objects but as active players in the education system. Any (policy) concerning school standards will be seriously weakened if it fails to recognize the importance of that contribution. (Hodgkin & Newell, 1998, p. 11)

This collaborative model between teachers and their customers, the students, became one of the main components of this study. How will teachers perceive using student voice to guide some of their professional development decisions? Teachers' perceptions of student voice differ based upon their past experiences and educational philosophies. As a result of these experiences and philosophies, this study will explore their levels of interest in participating in professional development programs designed to engage teachers in conversations directly related to student input.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The overarching theory encompassing this study is social constructivist learning theory. The assumption of this theory is that the social world is without meaning prior to one's experience of it, and a teacher and/or parent play vital roles in providing children with the tools needed to construct their learning (Crotty, 1998). I equate this to the experiences between students and teachers as they interact throughout a school year. Student perception results will reflect the

individual student's interpretations of reality derived from social interactions and interpersonal relationships between a student and his/her teacher. If the teacher was able to meet the needs of the student, the student's feedback will likely reflect that experience. In addition, teachers' perceptions of student voice are developed over time based upon past experiences with collecting students' opinions or through their own personal experiences as students. If a teacher has experience in considering student input and that experience was positive and helpful, then the teacher is more likely to support incorporating student voice into his/her professional planning process. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory is one of the foundations of constructivism (Moll, 2014). In an extension of Vygotsky's work, Crotty (1998) describes social constructivism:

It [constructivism] is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (Crotty, 1998, p. 42)

Under the arch of social constructivism are three component models that combine to formulate the conceptual model for this study: *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity* (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012); *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment and Learning* (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012); and *The Educator Effectiveness Project* (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). The conceptual framework for this study is summarized in Figure 1. I developed the framework after completing the review of literature and prior to developing the focus group questions. Each component was selected based upon its unique opportunities for student voice integration. Individual aspects of each component of the framework will be described in the sections below. In addition, a section describing how these

frameworks interrelate and subsequently guided the methodology decisions of this study will be explained.

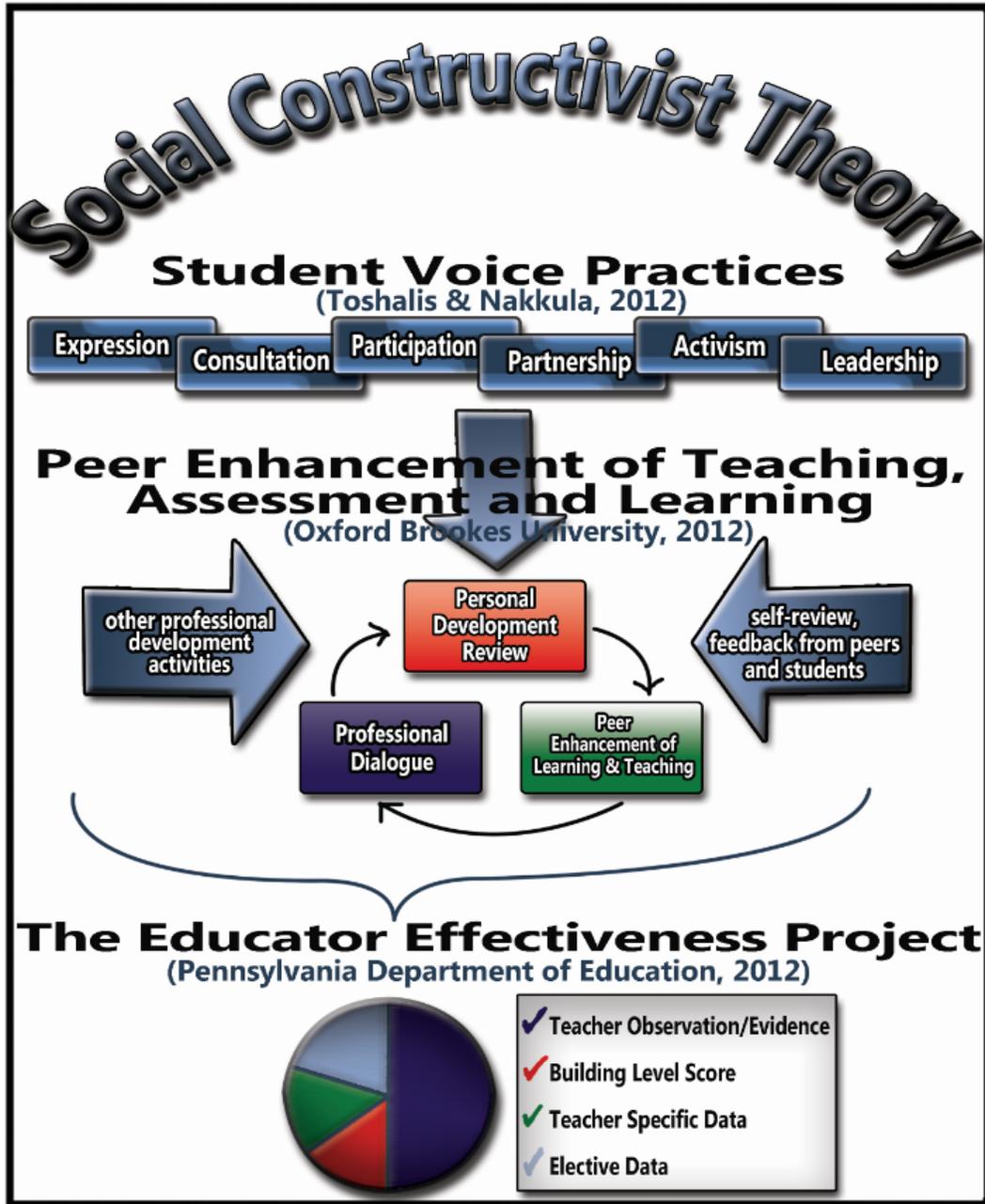


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

1.4.1 Spectrum of student voice-oriented activity

The first component of the conceptual framework for this study involves the range of uses student voice can have on educational practice. Options for how teachers can listen to students or how students can be heard are without limit. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) identify six categories of student voice activities: expression, consultation, participation, partnership, activism, and leadership. Toshalis and Nakkula's model assists educators in identifying a range of student voice related activities titled *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity (Spectrum)* which is described in Figure 2. Student voice is considered across the *Spectrum* from students articulating their perspectives to students directing school activities. As student voice is considered from left to right across the *Spectrum*, student input ranges from being a data source (e.g., focus groups, student surveys) to being an agent of change (e.g., club/activity presidents, student government).

The *Spectrum* was shared with the focus group participants to provide them with a resource for categorizing how they are currently listening to students. Once teachers identified how they listen to students, I was interested in understanding how they believed this information benefitted both them and their students.

Students articulating their perspectives		←————→		Students directing collective activities	
Students as data sources		←————→		Students as leaders of change	
Expression	Consultation	Participation	Partnership	Activism	Leadership
Volunteering opinions, creating art, celebrating, complaining, praising, objecting	Being asked for their opinion, providing feedback, serving on a focus group, completing a survey	Attending meetings in which decisions are made, frequent inclusion when issues are framed and actions planned	Formalized role in decision making, adults are trained in how to work collaboratively with youth partners	Identifying problems, organizing responses, advocating for change in and out of the classroom	Co-planning, making decisions and accepting significant responsibility for outcomes

Figure 3. The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012)

1.4.2 Peer enhancement of teaching, assessment and learning

Listening to students is clearly an important aspect of teaching. Teachers use student responses to guide follow-up questions or in planning future lessons. Listening to students to improve students’ understanding comes naturally to most educators. Listening to students in order to improve teaching is less frequently considered. The *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment and Learning* (PETAL) process was designed as a professional development model for educators (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). “The PETAL scheme is to enhance learning by creating a culture of consistent, sustained and richly informed attention to key aspects of learning and teaching, marked by collegial collaboration and collaboration with students” (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012, p. 1).

The PETAL process guides educators to work collaboratively with their peers, in consultation with students, to improve teaching and learning. The cyclical model of PETAL

incorporates reviewing student and self-reflective input, dialoguing around best practices, and enhancing teaching and learning through collaboration with other teachers and administrators. This model provided study participants with a process for integrating student voice into professional development planning. This component for engaging teachers in professional development conversations is the second layer of this study's conceptual framework. Based upon what teachers learn from listening to their students across the *Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity*, teachers shared their perspectives on using this information as part of their professional development planning.

1.4.3 Educator effectiveness project

Research studies over the past 40 years related to measuring teacher effectiveness have resulted in a consistent theme: multiple measurement data provides the highest degree of predictability of student success (The New Teacher Project, 2012). The Educator Effectiveness Project (EEP) developed from Pennsylvania Public School Code Act 82 was passed in Pennsylvania on June 30, 2012. With Act 82, Pennsylvania Department of Education was given the authority to develop regulations related to evaluating three groups of educators: classroom teaching professionals, principals and career and technical center (CTC) directors, and non-teaching professionals (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). Figure 3 depicts the percentages of a teacher's overall evaluation attributed to four measures: 1) Teacher Observation/Evidence; 2) Building Level Scores; 3) Teacher Specific Data; and 4) Elective Data. Each of these measures is described in detail in the literature review section of this study.

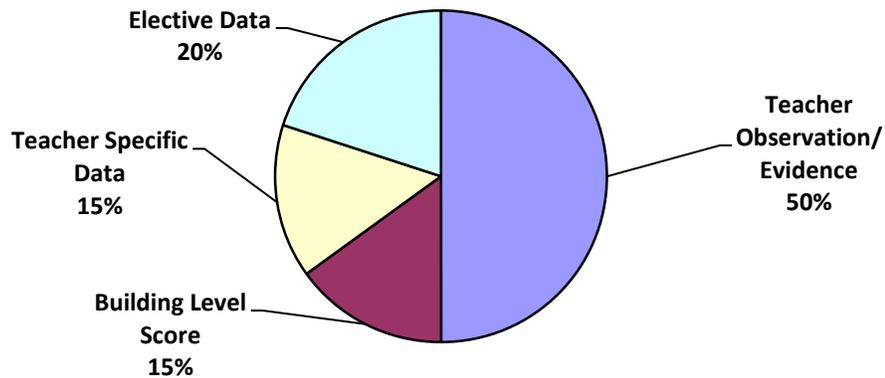


Figure 4. Educator Effectiveness Project (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012)

This study focuses on the 20% Elective Data portion of the Educator Effectiveness Project. Through the elective data design, teachers and administrators work collaboratively to develop Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) to account for the elective portion of the teacher’s overall evaluation. SLOs are a measure of educator effectiveness. They are written to document student achievement for a particular group of students throughout the course of an academic year (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013). Teachers design the performance measures based upon the learning goals established for their students and set performance indicators to measure progress toward the goals.

This study will explore teachers’ perceptions of considering student voice data in the development of their SLOs. *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activities* provide suggestions for ways teachers can listen to their students. Based upon student voice and other traditional teacher effectiveness measures, such as classroom observations by administrators and peers, teachers can then collaborate to create their professional development plans through programs such as *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment, and Learning*. As a result of their

professional development and student input, Student Learning Objectives can then be established as one measure within the *Educator Effective Project*.

This study will explore teachers' perceptions of considering student voice in each of the components within this conceptual framework: 1) *The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activities* is used to determine how teachers perceive the use of student voice; 2) *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment, and Learning* is used to understand how teachers perceive the use of student voice as part of their professional development planning process; and 3) the *Educator Effectiveness Project* elective data section is used to consider how teachers would perceive the use of student voice in the development of the elective portion of their evaluations.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of using student voice data as either part of their comprehensive evaluations or as additional information to consider when building their professional development goals. Recent policy changes across the country related to refining teacher evaluation systems have sparked a debate amongst school leaders, politicians, and teachers in determining which measures are most helpful in identifying effective teaching and ultimately impacting student achievement.

Looney (2011) identified six broad directions for policy considerations related to teacher evaluation: 1) linking teacher evaluations to clear standards and competencies; 2) integrating evaluations with broader assessments and frameworks; 3) basing evaluations on multiple measures; 4) emphasizing timely feedback linked to specific instructional strategies with

opportunities to practice and improve; 5) aligning professional development with identified needs; and 6) aligning formative evaluation information used for improvement with summative evaluation information used for advancement.

This study aligns with Looney's third policy consideration because the impact of student voice data can be one of a number of teacher effectiveness measures. This study also aligns with Looney's fifth policy consideration by identifying information for students that can be aligned with teacher professional development plans. Introducing student voice into the evaluation process is a potentially contentious conversation. Introducing student voice into the professional development plan process, however, can be more easily achieved. If teachers perceive student voice data to be worthwhile and valid, I believe teachers will be more likely to use the feedback to make instructional and/or behavioral changes. If however, teachers view student voice input as unreliable or biased, it is unlikely that the results will be used in planning professional development goals or changing practices.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to explore teachers' perceptions of integrating student voice into teaching and learning and/or as part of their evaluation or professional development plans, I reviewed literature in three areas: 1) student voice integration; 2) the current trends in teacher evaluation models; and 3) teachers' attitudes and perceptions related to using non-traditional measures such as student voice. It is the teachers' perception of how student voice should or could be integrated into a growth process or measurement that establishes the foundation for this research. There is a gap that exists in literature related to asking the customers (the students and/or parents) to provide

insight to help teachers identify areas of strength and need in order to refine their craft. This bottom up approach will help inform school administrators and legislators regarding teachers' experiences and attitudes toward non-traditional evaluation measures and professional development options. Positive attitudes towards and past experiences with student voice will likely increase the probability of teachers using this information when considering pedagogical strategies or developing appropriate learning environment techniques for students.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions about considering the use of student voice?
2. What part do teachers believe student voice should have in:
 - a. the development of the elective portion of their evaluations; and/or
 - b. their independently developed annual professional goals?
3. How do teachers' perceptions differ based upon past experiences with using student voice as part of their evaluation or professional development plans?

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

Given the range of experiences and understandings of the role of student voice in teaching and learning, it is reasonable to assume teachers possess a variety of perceptions related to how student voice could or should be considered in professional development planning or evaluations. In keeping within the social constructivist framework, I designed the study to include multiple interactions between study participants and me. Focus group discussions along with individualized follow-up questions provided me with opportunities to better understand how teachers' thoughts and experiences shaped their perceptions of the place for student voice in the

teaching and learning process. The interactions between focus group participants provided opportunities for study participants to hear others' perspectives which often confirmed or challenged their thinking.

Lessons from research conducted by groups such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recommended combining observations, student achievement data, and student feedback in determining teacher effectiveness and impact (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). A few school districts in Western Pennsylvania along with other states (Georgia, Tennessee, New York, Utah) across the country have begun to integrate student survey data into their teacher evaluation or professional development programs. Others are just beginning to consider if and how student voice should play a role in their teacher growth and performance measurement programs (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). This study was designed to explore teachers' perceptions of where they believe student voice should impact teaching and learning. Should student voice be considered only within the confines of a classroom? Should student voice become part of the professional development planning process? Is there a place for student voice in measuring teacher effectiveness? These questions and others were explored through this qualitative study.

Focus group questions ranged from "Do teachers see value in eliciting student voice?" to "Would teachers consider student voice when developing the elective portion of their evaluations?" The findings from this research may encourage more school districts to consider student voice as another resource in guiding the professional development options for teachers. If teachers perceive the information to be reliable and valid then the collection of the data is worthwhile. If however, teachers do not trust the results due to concerns of bias responses or

students' abilities to accurately and fairly provide information or feedback, then the goal of using the information to impact teacher growth and development will not be achieved.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Student Voice: 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 (Gentile, 2014).

Professional Development: A process of improving and increasing capabilities of teaching staff through access to education and training opportunities, through internal or external resources (Business Dictionary, 2015).

Student Learning Objective (SLO): A process to document a measure of educator effectiveness based on student achievement of curriculum content standards. An SLO in Pennsylvania is written to a specific teacher and a specific class/course/content for which that teacher provides instruction (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013).

Educator Effectiveness Project: Public School Code Act 82 was passed in Pennsylvania on June 30, 2012 and gave Pennsylvania Department of Education the authority to develop regulations related to evaluating three groups of educators; classroom teaching professionals, principals and career and technical center (CTC) directors, and non-teaching professionals (PA Department of Education, 2012).

Building Level Data: Building level data include, but are not limited to: student performance on assessments, value-added assessment system data, graduation rate, promotion rate, attendance

rate, industry certification data, Advanced Placement test data, Scholastic Aptitude Test data and Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test data (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013).

Teacher Specific Data: Teacher specific data include, but are not limited to: student performance on assessments, value-added assessment data, and progress in meeting the goals of a student individualized education plans, and locally developed rubrics (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013).

Elective Data: Measures of student achievement that are locally developed and selected by the Local Education Agency (LEA) from a list approved by the Department and published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin by June 30 of each year. These measures include, but are not limited to: district-designed assessments, nationally recognized standardized tests, industry certification exams, student projects, and student portfolios (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013).

Tripod Student Survey Developed and refined over more than a decade by Dr. Ronald R. Ferguson of Harvard University in partnership with Cambridge Education. *Tripod*® surveys and analysis methods are used to provide students with opportunities to communicate about their experiences in school. The *Tripod*® Project assesses three areas; content, pedagogy, and relationships (The Tripod Project, 2014).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual framework of this study, built upon the theory of social constructivism, incorporates three component models to consider student voice as part of the teaching and learning process. The framework extends to an exploration of determining where student voice “fits” into professional development programs and/or evaluation systems from the perspectives of teachers. The intent of this review of literature is to mirror the conceptual framework in order to link the literature to the potential impact of this study. The literature review will begin by exploring social constructivism to identify the direct connections between the theory and this study. From there, the general concept of student voice as part of the teaching and learning process will be explored. A brief, 40 year history of the trends in measuring effective teaching establishes the foundation for a more specific investigation of integrating student voice into evaluations and/or professional development. In effort to refine the research to a specific aspect of student voice, I explore recent trends in using student survey data as part of teachers’ evaluations or as a guide for developing professional growth plans. Finally, the literature is reviewed to gain a better understanding of how teachers perceive the integration of these non-traditional measures, specifically student voice, into their comprehensive evaluations or individualized professional growth plans.

Over the past 40 years, a number of historical and legislative events have influenced K-12 education. The diverse pedagogical and interpersonal skills required of teachers have evolved

as expectations related to teacher impact have increased. The question of how to measure effective teaching has challenged educators throughout history. The review of literature around effective evaluation or professional development measures helped to identify how political, economic, and social trends have impacted education and subsequently how effective teaching is measured.

The literature concerning student voice in teachers' evaluation or professional growth plans is in its infant stages. Although student voice has been considered in colleges and universities for many years, the concept of using student input as a teacher effectiveness measure is relatively new in K-12 education. This highly controversial topic finds proponents and opponents at polar ends of the debate. Some believe student voice is a natural measure due to the amount of time students spend with their teachers each year. They also believe that even the youngest children are capable of identifying what teacher "actions" helped them the most throughout their school year. Opponents believe student responses would be biased based upon their relationship with the teacher and feel students do not possess the understandings or skills necessary to rate their teachers. Many believe student raters have a lack of knowledge of the full range of teaching requirements and responsibilities, such as curriculum, classroom management, content knowledge, and professional responsibilities (Follman, 1992, 1995).

States across the nation have begun slowly to integrate student voice into either their teachers' evaluation systems or their teachers' professional growth plans. The review of literature found school districts within states such as Tennessee, Utah, Georgia, and Pennsylvania using student surveys as part of their teacher evaluation programs. Teachers' perceptions of various effective measures, developed through their life experiences, will likely impact their support, or lack of support, for policy and practice recommendations. The review of

literature will explore their perceptions of both tradition and non-tradition measures to assist in framing this study.

2.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2007). They develop those meanings based upon experiences and interactions. This theory aligns with this study on teachers' perceptions of considering student voice as part of their professional development planning or evaluation program. The study will rely on participants diverse views of how student voice should or should not be integrated into the teaching and learning process. Crotty (1998) identified several assumptions in discussing constructivism:

1. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views.
2. Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives; we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher's own experiences and background.

3. The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field. (Creswell, 2003, p. 9)

The assumptions Crotty discussed around constructivism are consistent with the framework for this study. The methods section of this study will describe in detail the strategy of inquiry and methods selected. The data analysis and discussions chapters of this study will describe how through inductive reasoning the finding from this study can lead to additional research into the impact of student voice on teaching and learning.

2.2 STUDENT VOICE

In business, consumer consultation and satisfaction are common phrases. Business models are often developed around meeting the needs and listening to the voices of their customers. Customer voice in education is less common. Ruddick and Flutter (2000) suggest, “In our efforts at school improvement we need to tune in to what pupils can tell us about their experiences and what they think will make a difference to their commitment to learning and, in turn, to their progress and achievement” (p. 75). A variety of terms are used to describe the roles students can play in schools such as student participation, student agency, or student action. Student voice is often used as a broader term which can encompass everything from students as data sources to students as agents of change (Anderson, 2011). 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 (Gentile, 2014).

2.2.1 Impact of Student Voice on Students

Anderson (2011) surveyed a group of elementary school aged students. They were asked to respond to the following questions: 1) *What is student voice*; 2) *Why would teachers want student voice*; and 3) *Why is student voice important*? Table 1 highlights some of the students' responses.

Table 1. Student Voice Survey Responses

What is student voice?	Why would teachers want student voice?	Why is student voice important?
<i>Student voice is students...</i>	<i>Teachers want student voice because...</i>	<i>Student voice is important for me because it helps me to...</i>
having ideas on how to improve the school.	students, parents, and staff all contribute to what happens in the school.	enjoy school.
having a chance to have their say about what is good or needs attention.	students are the biggest group in the school and we need to know what they think about their school.	contribute.
expressing their feelings about what they want or what is making them feel bad.	they will know what students want for their school.	learn how to speak up and say what I want to say.

Source: Anderson (2011, p. 5)

These young children were able to articulate the potential benefits of adults at school listening to students. Since the 1990s, there has been growing acceptance of the benefits of active student voices in education. Hargreaves (2004) states “an active student voice leads to an increase in engagement, participation, meta-cognitive skills, responsibility, relationships and social skills of students which help teachers and students develop a rich vocabulary to talk about learning” (p. 5). As students become more engaged in the learning process, they take additional ownership of not only their learning but the environment in which they learn. As students and teachers

partner, the general culture and climate of the school changes, students are treated differently, and they become ready to participate actively and responsibly in matters of high importance and consequence. Items such as school evaluation and teacher impact are discussed between students and teachers and, as a result, trust and respect emerge (Hargreaves, 2004).

2.2.2 Impact of student voice on teachers

School is often something that happens to students; they are the recipients of an educational experience. Schools are for young people but are rarely designed in collaboration with young people. As adults have begun to embrace the idea of listening to and collaborating with students, they have learned that these experiences can impact the student, the classroom, the school, and the teacher (Fletcher, 2012). A number of common themes have emerged related to why teachers engage with student voice. Communicating with students about learning assists teachers in evaluating their lessons, considering new ideas, shaping the curriculum, and building trust and relationships with their students (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011).

Fletcher (2012) identified 6 forms of interaction between adults and young people and how those interactions can benefit both the students and adults. The first form of interaction is students as data sources in which teachers use information about students such as test scores to plan future lessons. Next are students as active respondents, which invite students to participate in discussions to deepen students' learning and to assist teachers in making professional decisions such as building learning activities. Third, a partnership begins to emerge when teachers interact with students as co-enquirers. Teachers typically take the lead but student are active supports and contributors. At the classroom level this could be the shared decision making of how students could express their learning. Forth, students acting as knowledge

creators shift the leadership from adult to student. Students come forward leading or initiating the process. Developing an anti-bullying program is an example of students as knowledge creators. The fifth approach is students as joint authors which brings students and staff together in order to reach a common goal. This could be in the form of a research project where students and teachers co-plan, observe, and evaluate. Finally, the intergenerational learning as lived democracy approach emphasizes the shared partnership between students and staff to reach a common good. This approach brings groups of teachers and students working side-by-side to address school-wide concerns such as truancy or school violence. As teachers encourage students to become active participants in their learning, the benefits are as numerous for teachers as they are for students.

2.2.3 The spectrum of student voice oriented activities

Student voice opportunities can occur both in and out of school. Mitra (2009) describes student voice activities as those pedagogies in which youth have the opportunity to influence decisions that will shape their lives and those of their peers either in or outside of school settings. In order for student voice activities to position students as the agents of change, it begins and ends with the thoughts, feelings, visions, and actions of students themselves. In effort to understand the different activities related to student voice, Fielding (2001) identified how four different types of student-voice-oriented programs position students as data sources, active respondents, co-researchers, or full independent researchers. Larson, Walker, & Pearce (2005) categorized student voice activities into two types: those that are adult-driven and those that are youth driven (as cited in Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). These two types help identify the range of student involvement from students as sources of information to students as leaders of change.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) considered these and a number of different student voice activity frameworks in the development of *The Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity (Spectrum)* (Figure 4). As one moves from left to right, students' roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority grow. On the left side of the *Spectrum*, student voice related activities are limited to students voicing their opinions or perspectives as compared to the right side of the *Spectrum* with students directing collective actions. Students are perceived more as data sources on the left side of the *Spectrum*. Students are asked to express themselves through classroom-based activities, writing samples, or surveys. The center of the *Spectrum* finds student voice evolving into a partnership between teachers and students. Students attend meetings and participate in the decision making process. On the far right of the *Spectrum*, students transition away from data sources and into independent leaders. They plan, coordinate and accept a significant level of educational responsibility. Throughout the *Spectrum*, teachers take on a consultant role.

Students articulating their perspectives		←————→		Students directing collective activities	
Students as data sources		←————→		Students as leaders of change	
Expression	Consultation	Participation	Partnership	Activism	Leadership
Volunteering opinions, creating art, celebrating, complaining, praising, objecting	Being asked for their opinion, providing feedback, serving on a focus group, completing a survey	Attending meetings in which decisions are made, frequent inclusion when issues are framed and actions planned	Formalized role in decision making, adults are trained in how to work collaboratively with youth partners	Identifying problems, organizing responses, advocating for change in and out of the classroom	Co-planning, making decisions and accepting significant responsibility for outcomes

Figure 5. The Spectrum of Student Voice-Oriented Activity (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012)

Student *expression* provides students with opportunities to voice opinions. Examples include conversations with teachers, peers, and principals along with differentiated projects. Student *consultation* asks students to provide formal opinion or feedback through focus groups or surveys. Examples of *consultation* activities include student surveys and the development of classroom management rules. Student *participation* activities provide students with opportunities to participate in meetings such as school improvement teams. Student *partnerships* further formalize students' roles in the decision making process and adults begin to shift their roles from leaders to partners. On the right hand side of the spectrum, student *activism* provides students with opportunities to advocate for change both inside and outside of the classroom. Student *activism* is often observed in student government and other student lead organizations but is not limited clubs and activities. Students can advocate for change throughout the school community. Finally, student *leadership* activities place students in the role of decision makers. They accept significant responsibility and use their teachers as consultants.

The full spectrum of student voice activities can meet a wide range of needs for students, teachers, and schools. The potential impact for teachers is described by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) who state:

Promoting student voice can be of enormous benefit to the teacher's craft as well. When teachers open space for voice in the classroom, a unique window into what the student thinks and feels about her learning also opens. When student voice is facilitated, the teacher can observe how the student is making sense of things and where that student wants to go with that knowledge. Such information is invaluable to the teacher designing instruction to meet individual needs. (p. 25)

2.3 STUDENT VOICE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sometimes, student voice is confused with the roles students take in the learning process. As Prairie (2004) suggests, teachers identify that they consider student voice daily. They are listening to students to address their academic or social needs. Teachers differentiate lessons based upon what they observe and hear from their students. This integration of student voice is common in most schools. Less common is the use of student voice in the professional development process for teachers (Prairie, 2004).

Some schools have begun to use surveys to improve the learning for students. An example is the Pupil Online Survey Tool (POST) used in several English Secondary Schools (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011). The POST offers students the opportunity to express their views about a set of agreed upon criteria for effective lessons. Students are asked to comment on ten criteria: the point of the lesson, respect, learning by doing, working together, trying new things, choice, praise, time to think, listening, and surroundings. Each department in the school sees only their department specific feedback from students. The survey is then repeated over the course of the school year for departments to measure change and improvements. SooHoo (1993) suggests that the information that teachers can tap into through student voice is a resource that has often been overlooked and maintains:

Somehow educators have forgotten the important connection between teachers and students. We listen to outside experts to inform us, and, consequently, we overlook the treasure in our very own backyards: our students. Student perceptions are valuable to our practice because they are authentic sources; they personally experience our classrooms firsthand. (SooHoo, 1993, p. 386)

Teachers' concerns related to lack of experience with and techniques required for gathering student input as part of their professional development planning has hindered this process. One possible remedy is to introduce the idea of student consultation and input into student teacher training programs (Flutter, 2007). This may assist teachers in considering student voice as part of an ongoing collaborative process rather than an end-of-year evaluation. Combining students' voices with teachers' voices can provide teachers with opportunities to use the input from their students along with their own personal goals to plan opportunities for growth and development.

2.3.1 Peer enhancement of teaching, assessment and learning

Student input is part of the *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment and Learning* (PETAL) model developed at Oxford Brookes University (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). Near the end of each academic year, colleagues review their teaching and assessments. Based upon the students' input and the team's review, the teachers identify areas that could be strengthened through their collective efforts. Similar teacher teams across the university plan professional development opportunities aligned to the needs identified by their students and colleagues. This collaborative effort becomes the foundation for the university's plan for enhancement the following school year. Marshall and Deepwell (2012) describe the features of PETAL that make this model significantly different from typical professional development programs as:

Peer enhancement is set within the context of the educational team, with the expectation that the whole team will agree some key enhancement priorities for sustained work and discussion throughout the academic year. Colleagues working together in the classroom remains important, but such collaboration and mutual learning are freed from the

limitations of 1:1 pairing. Students will have a significant role in PETAL, partly in informing areas of focus for enhancement, partly in working with staff to bring about enhancements and to evaluate the benefits of change. (p. 1)

Figure 5 depicts the Continuing Personal and Professional Development (CPPD) plan that is the framework for the PETAL model (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). The three main components of the plan are: Personal Development Review, Peer Enhancement, and Professional Dialogue. Input from students, peers, and research are used to drive the discussions of enhancements needed to improve teaching and learning. Professional dialogue considers the professional development activities needed to strengthen teacher performance. The cycle continues after teaching occurs and input from students is once again solicited.

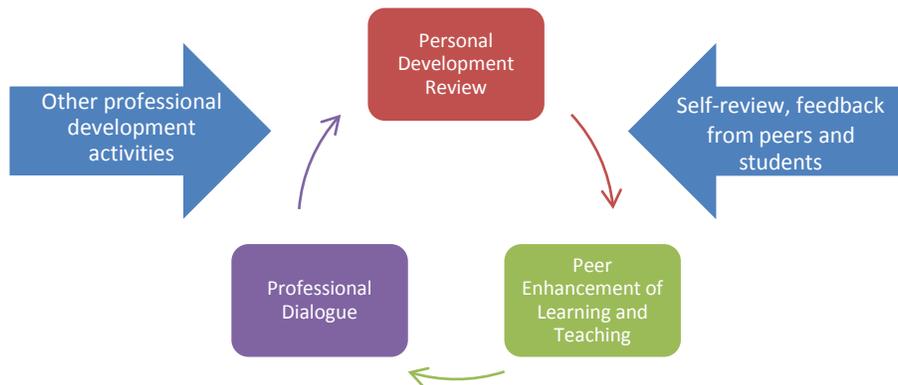


Figure 6. Continuing Personal and Professional Development (CPPD)

2.4 40 YEAR HISTORY OF TEACHER EVALUATIONS

In considering student voice as an aspect of teachers' evaluations, it is important to understand a brief history of the evaluation process and the various measures that have been used. The

purpose of teacher evaluation is to measure teacher effectiveness related to student achievement and to foster professional growth (Marzano, 2012). Research from the 1960's and 1970's began focusing on determining what teacher practices were associated with increased student achievement (Schacter & Thum, 2004). Investigators collected data through observations and ran correlational studies to determine which teachers' behaviors were most closely aligned with student achievement. As more and more researchers conducted similar studies, the research became fragmented and disjointed leaving educators with a list of discrete behaviors such as questioning, pacing, feedback, clarity of presentation, and objectives but little guidance in determining the most effective implementation practices aligned with these behaviors (Gage & Needles, 1989).

In the late 1970's work from several research teams combined these disjointed, discrete teaching behaviors into coherent teaching models. Research teams trained, observed, and conducted experiments with teachers and administered pre- and post-assessments with the students to measure academic growth. The results of these experiments led to the development of six teaching standards in which teachers were assessed: Questioning, Feedback, Presentation, Lesson Structure and Pacing, Lesson Objectives, and Classroom Environment (Schacter & Thum, 2004). Questioning standards included types of questions, frequency of questions, questions requiring active student responses, providing appropriate wait time, and students' abilities to generate questions leading to further inquiry. The feedback standard combined student awareness of performance expectations, providing specific, elaborate, high quality feedback, and frequent teacher circulation to encourage students to think and assess their understandings. Presentation standards called for the use of analogies, labels, teacher modeling, examples and non-examples, and clear, concise communication. Optimized instructional time

through appropriate pacing, lesson organization, and efficiency of routines combined to form the lesson structure and pacing standards. The lesson objective standards guided educators to explicitly state the desired learning and sub-objectives which were to be clear and demanding. Classroom environment standards assessed students' behaviors, initiatives, and work ethic and the teachers' abilities to relate to and inspire individual students. These models of teacher effectiveness and standards of conduct led to some positive results in the late 70's and early 80's (Schacter & Thum, 2004). However, in the 1980's, addressing how students learn was a concern of many educators and researchers leading to additional studies on the abilities of teachers to adjust their instruction based upon the specific learning needs of each child (Bransford, 1984).

2.4.1 A Nation at Risk

Educational reform and teacher effectiveness shifted to the forefront of people's minds in 1983 with the release of "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform". This document written by the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported that schools were failing to teach students basic skills. Prior to the release of this document, teachers were considered laborers assigned to implement a uniformly designed program. After the release of "A Nation at Risk", teachers began to be viewed as professionals responsible for implementing a variety of instructional strategies based upon the diverse needs of each child, a completely different approach from the factory system of years past (Vogt, 1984). Teacher evaluations shifted with the changing roles and expectations of teachers. Effective teachers were now expected to possess the following abilities: to provide for students' varied readiness levels; to state clear objectives in student-friendly terminology; to incorporate a variety of instructional strategies; to use curriculum guides to inform instruction; to assess the academic and social

development of their students; to address the divergent, learning modalities of their students; to consider the scope and sequence of a course while planning instruction; and to allow for flexibility depending on students' levels of understanding (Vogt, 1984).

In addition to these expectations, technology began to emerge as another instructional resource. Research recognized that technology offered significantly greater learning in less time while increasing students' motivation. Throughout the late 1980's and early 1990's as the debate around teacher effectiveness continued a common theme began to emerge. Effective teachers were highly trained and gifted individuals who possessed a clear understanding of the curriculum to be taught and were able to implement instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of a diverse group of learners (Clark, 1993).

2.4.2 Measuring teacher effectiveness

Once the characteristics of an effective teacher were established, the next challenge for educational leaders was determining the most appropriate ways of measuring teacher effectiveness. In 1991, Davey offered an introduction describing why evaluating teaching is such a challenging process in his article "Evaluating Teacher Competence Through the use of Performance Assessment Tasks: An Overview". In it he describes how:

The concept of performance assessment as an employee testing strategy has a long history, particularly as regards trades and labor jobs, where apprentice blacksmiths, carpenters, or painters must prove the mastery of their craft by performance is less challenging. In these cases, "scoring" might involve simply judging the acceptability of the product, which can be seen, felt, examined, and therefore in some way compared to a standard. However, the assessment task becomes more difficult when the primary

outputs by the candidate are not concrete products but processes – decisions, actions, interactions, explanations, etc. that vary from candidate to candidate and have no single objective standard to use as a scoring template (Davey, 1991, p. 129).

These challenges led Davey to compose the following components associated with measuring teacher effectiveness: 1) identifying the dimensions of effective performance which become the focus of the assessment; 2) the use of multiple observations in a variety of situations; 3) using multiple assessors with different backgrounds and perspectives in order to eliminate bias; 4) systematic procedures to enable accurate recordings of behavioral observations; and 5) thorough training for evaluators. Many school districts adopted some aspects of this model as they created their own teacher evaluation systems. Blecke (1982) describes the common procedures associated with teacher evaluation as consisting of a submission of lesson plans, a visit to the classroom in which a checklist instrument was used offering a simplistic view of effective teaching and a follow-up conference with the teacher. Teacher evaluation systems that include these three elements dominate the evaluation process still today.

The debate over how to assess teachers continued throughout the 1980's. Redinger (1988) suggests there is no one way to assess teachers and that each district or school needs to develop their own methods based upon their unique needs and situations. The most successful systems at the time linked the evaluation plans to the goals of the district and were characterized by the district committing a significant amount of time and resources to ensure the plan was implemented with fidelity. Districts for the first time began to incorporate additional formative assessments, such as walk-throughs, along with traditional summative evaluations in determining teachers' final ratings. A model developed by Collins (1990) was taken from Teacher Assessment Project (TAP) by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Collins

suggested that no one mode of assessment would be sufficient. The TAP model placed emphasis on traditional observations, simulation exercises, portfolios, and portfolios based in simulations. The portfolio was introduced as a set of documents providing evidence of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the teacher, samples of students' works, and other items signifying special recognition of the teacher by peers or administrators.

Many researchers and educators disagreed about the validity and reliability of teacher created portfolios. In her paper on teacher evaluation, Alexandrov (1989) found little support for the use of portfolios. She found the portfolio programs to be an exhaustive process with little direct improvement to classroom instruction. Conversely, Savage (1982) recommended portfolios, calling them "Artifacts of Teaching." The artifacts included lesson plans, tests for students, laboratory projects, bibliographies, supplemental reading lists, student work samples, peer testimony, student test results on standardized tests, and other items selected by the teacher. Portfolios enabled teachers for the first time to become active participants in the evaluation process. Instead of the evaluation being done to them they began to take partial ownership of the process.

2.4.3 Student achievement measures

Along with the development of teacher portfolios as part of the evaluation of teacher performance, the 1980's saw student achievement becoming part of teacher evaluation. In 1987, a report by Redfield and Craig (1987) titled "Student Achievement Project" reviewed the teacher performance program from the state of Kentucky. This program introduced student achievement as a measure to determine teacher effectiveness. Student achievement was based upon specific goals agreed upon by both the teacher and administrators related to district and state curriculum,

not to standardized assessments. Eliminating standardized testing satisfied some critics who believed that too many variables existed that were out of teachers' control that would likely influence student achievement on standardized tests, such as: sex, aptitude, attendance, early childhood experiences, family backgrounds, previous schools attended, peer groups, and more. Regardless of these concerns, student achievement was often linked with standardized test scores and was a popular outcome measure in teacher effectiveness research. Proponents believed standardized tests provided high quality questions constructed by specialists in the various subjects. The standardization of the administration and scoring procedures provided national norms for schools to compare their students' achievement to those across the country.

In 1984, McLean and Sanders published a paper on using students' achievement data as a basis for teacher assessment (McLean & Sanders, 1984). They used three years of students' performance scores on the California Achievement Test in grades two through five. McLean and Sanders developed a statistical system based on mixed-model methodology. The study revealed the following:

1. There were measureable differences among schools and teachers with regard to their effect on indicators of student learning.
2. The estimates of school and teacher effects tended to be consistent from year to year.
3. Teacher effects were not site specific; a gain score could not be predicted by simply knowing the location of the school.
4. There was very strong correlation between teacher effects as determined by the data and subjective evaluations by supervisors.
5. Student gains were not related to the ability or achievement levels of the students when they entered the classroom.

Subsequent studies uncovered one additional finding; the estimate of school effects was not related to the racial composition of the student body. These findings indicated a strong correlation between teacher influence and student growth regardless of the external factors listed above (Sanders & Horn, 1994). Although these studies were known only to a small circle of educators and statisticians, they would prove to be significant in subsequent years as a number of states began to consider the value added impact that teachers could have on their students.

An example of this new system of measuring teacher effectiveness was adopted by the state of Tennessee. In 1988, the education department developed a document titled *21st Century Challenge: State Goals and Objectives for Educational Excellence*. One of the major aspects of this challenge was to address the need for accountability and improved student achievement was recognized as an essential component of educational improvement. In 1991, when the Educational Improvement Act was adopted, the model currently known as Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) became an integral part of this legislation. *The Master Plan for Tennessee Schools 1993* report from the Tennessee Department of Education indicated: “state and local education policies will be focused on results; Tennessee will have assessment and management information systems that provide information on students, schools, and school systems to improve learning and assist policy making” (Tennessee State Board of Education, 1992, p. 7). Beginning in 1993, detailed information identifying each teacher with the students he or she taught was collected annually. Included in this data collection were the subjects taught and the proportion of time each student spent with a teacher. If a student was reported as being in a teacher’s class for a minimum of 150 days, the student’s academic growth would become part of the teacher’s evaluation. TVAAS used scaled scores from the norm-referenced items on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) which assessed skills in reading,

language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The TVAAS scores provided an unbiased estimate of the influence schools and teachers had on students' academic growth. The era of linking teachers to the value they were adding to each of their students' academic growth had begun.

2.4.4 No Child Left Behind

In 2001, Federal No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB, 2002) was developed and designed to improve teacher performance and, as a result, improve student achievement. School districts were required to hire only highly qualified teachers (HQTs). Research supporting the need for HQTs found that students learning with the most effective teachers outperformed their peers who were learning with the least effective teachers by as much as one grade level (Hanushek, 1992). Over the course of the first decade of the 21st century, a number of teacher evaluation approaches emerged. As they developed their own unique evaluation systems, school districts began to choose combinations of several different approaches to measuring the efficacy of teacher performance. Looney (2011) summarizes the approaches as:

Teacher appraisal—Formal performance reviews are conducted by a school level supervisor, to judge individual teacher performance. The results of appraisals may be used formatively to identify specific needs for professional development, or summatively for decisions related to promotion, rewards or sanctions.

Teacher peer evaluation —Teachers working in the same subject area (in the same or a different school) may observe their peers and offer feedback and suggestions for improvement. Peers may use evaluation tools to guide the observation process. The

results may be used formatively, with primary emphasis on providing feedback for improvement, or summatively, as a complement to formal appraisals.

Student ratings — Students are invited to complete evaluation forms, providing feedback on teacher effectiveness at the end of a term.

School evaluation (external and internal) — External evaluations are conducted by an individual or team who are not part of the school staff. Internal evaluations (school self-evaluations) are conducted by the school staff usually in advance of the external evaluation. The distinction is in regard to who conducts the evaluation and for what purposes (i.e., school accountability vs. improvement).

Large-scale national or regional assessments—These tests of student achievement have the primary purpose of evaluating the performance of the school system. They may also be used to hold schools accountable for student learning and/or to provide feedback to schools and teachers on their performance. The results may be published and used to guide school choice and create incentives for schools to improve performance.

Value-added assessments — Valued-added measurements of student achievement refer to gains over a given year which can be attributed to the contributions of the local education area, the school or individual teachers. These gains are the “value added”. The approach is intended to show how educators promote student progress beyond the level predicted by the student’s socio-economic status. (pp. 442-443)

These various approaches as described by Looney in 2011 are examples of how teacher evaluations have evolved. No longer are school districts using one observation to measure effective teaching. Now multiple measures including peer and student input along with external resources are being considered.

2.4.5 Race to the Top

Several years after the No Child Left Behind legislation passed, Race to the Top Act in 2011 was enacted as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Race to the Top used financial incentives to encourage states to reform and implement comprehensive principal and teacher effectiveness systems. As part of the agreement, states had to modify their policies to include student achievement data and some level of value-added data as part of their comprehensive evaluation plans. Opponents of these comprehensive systems have cited a number of flaws in using standardized tests and value added data as part of a teacher's evaluation. As summarized by Marshall (2012) many believe using standardized test data will fuel litigation by teachers who could suffer negative job consequences as a result of one test score. In order for districts to obtain a fair, value-added score, three years of assessment data must be collected and many believe three years is too long for an unsatisfactory teacher to work with children. The likelihood of teachers "teaching to the test" will increase and the opportunities for students to explore authentic learning activities will narrow. Standardized test scores are only available for about 20 percent of teachers; the question of equity is being raised for the other 80 percent (Marshall, 2012).

Researchers and educators continue to explore the most effective techniques for measuring teachers' effectiveness and developing professional growth plans for teachers. As new evaluation systems begin to roll out throughout the country, administrators and teachers are feeling the impact of these changes. In recent years, states have learned how multiple measures can identify effective teaching. The combination of teacher observations, student achievement data, student learning objectives, and student perception data can help identify teachers who, by virtue of their instruction and classroom management practices, are helping students achieve.

Identifying these teachers and the pedagogical strategies that strongly correlate with student achievement may serve to guide pre- and in-service teaching programs in effort to replicate the best practices.

2.5 STUDENT VOICE IN EVALUATIONS

The challenge in determining teacher effectiveness lies in identifying teacher actions that are directly aligned with student achievement. A common measure used in most K-12 schools, classroom observations, is often viewed by teachers and administrators as routine and ineffective. The Widget Effect Study (Weisber, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009) acknowledged the national challenge facing schools in distinguishing great teaching from good, fair, or poor teaching. The federal government has encouraged states and local school districts to revise their teacher evaluation process through programs such as Race to the Top (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Innovative teacher evaluation programs are adding measures to include student achievement data, student growth data, and other non-traditional measures such as portfolios, peer evaluations, student learning objectives, and student perception data.

States across the country are revising their evaluation plans to integrate a variety of these nontraditional measures into their comprehensive teacher effectiveness models. The Measure of Effective Teaching Project and other state and federal studies have provided states with research to help guide them in choosing the right combination of measures. A consistent theme emerged from the studies. Multiple measurement data provide the highest degree of predictability of student success (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). One measure gaining momentum throughout the country is the use of student voice data, specifically student surveys.

2.5.1 History of student surveys

Higher education institutions have utilized student surveys in the evaluation of teachers and courses of study for years. University administrators understand that students provide vital information related to what is happening in the classrooms. The feedback obtained from students is used to assess the impact of the instruction, assessments, feedback, and course activities. College and university teachers and administrators access this information to reflect upon past practices and make appropriate adjustments. According to White (2013), Ronald Ferguson has emerged as a leader in the field of student survey data collection in K-12 schools. Ferguson's (2010) work found students at the elementary, middle, and high schools levels were capable of reporting information pertaining to the quality of the teaching they experienced. The results indicated that students have the ability to distinguish great from average and poor teaching. Ferguson of Harvard University has partnered with Cambridge Education to develop the Tripod Student Survey. Over ten years, the Tripod Project has involved more than 300,000 students, hundreds of schools, and thousands of classrooms throughout the United States, Canada, and China. Along with the Tripod Project, other student surveys have emerged, including My Student Survey and The Gallup Student Poll. My Student Survey was developed by Ryan Balch at Vanderbilt University (White, 2013). The Gallup Student Poll, designed for students in grades 5-12 was first administered in 2009 (White, 2013).

2.5.2 Student surveys – strengths and limitations

Researchers continue to examine the strengths and limitations of using students' perception data to inform teachers and administrators of effective practices. In the briefing paper entitled, "The

Use of Student Perceptual Data as a Measure of Teaching Effectiveness” Burniske & Meibaum (2012) gathered research related to the benefits and limitations of students surveys. They organized the research into five major categories: 1) use of students as raters; 2) discrimination between teaching behaviors and student/teacher interactions; 3) reliability and validity of student ratings; 4) impact of student demographics; and 5) use of student ratings. Table 2 summarizes the work of Burniske & Meibaum and lists the strengths and weaknesses of using student survey data.

Table 2. Strengths/Limitations of Student Survey Data

Category	Benefits	Limitations
Use of students as raters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have extensive daily contact with teachers, resulting in unique perspectives and ratings of teacher behaviors. • Students are the direct recipients of instruction and have more experience with their teachers than other evaluators • Student ratings are consistent from year-to-year • Student responses distinguish between teachers; students may rate one teacher high and another low, based on the quality of teaching the student experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student raters have a lack of knowledge of the full range of teaching requirements and responsibilities, such as curriculum, classroom management, content knowledge, and professional responsibilities.
Discrimination between teaching behaviors and student/teacher interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students discriminate between effective teaching behaviors and warm, caring, supportive teacher/student interactions. • Secondary students can discriminate between effective and ineffective teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There may be negative effects of feedback from student ratings on subsequent teacher behaviors.

Table 2. (Continued)

<p>Reliability and validity of student ratings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student ratings are a valid and reliable data source. • Elementary and secondary student raters are no more impacted by validity concerns, such as halo and leniency effects, than adult raters. • Elementary and secondary students are as reliable as older, adult raters in rating teaching behaviors. • Elementary students, including preschoolers as young as four years old, can rate reliability. • Appropriately administered well-constructed instruments yield high-reliability results; subjective and correlational studies indicate positive validity of student rating results. • Secondary and older primary education students provide ratings of teacher behavior that are stable, reliable, valid, and predictive for teacher evaluation. • Student responses [in the Tripod survey] are reliable, valid, and stable over time at the classroom level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliability and validity of student ratings depend on the content, construction, and administration of student rating instruments. • Potential student rater bias may affect teacher rating. • The earliest age by which students can adequately rate their teachers is unresolved, and that must be considered when applying ratings by students who are below grade 3.
<p>Impact of student demographics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student rater demographic characteristics (for example, expected or obtained course grade, pupil and/or student gender, grade point average, subject matter) did not influence teacher ratings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student rater demographics and personality traits have a perceived significant influence on student ratings. • Student rating research includes widely inconsistent results regarding the correlation between student grades and instructor ratings.
<p>Use of student ratings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student ratings are more highly correlated with student achievement than principal ratings and teacher self-ratings. • Student ratings are a moderate predictor of student achievement. • Appropriate use of student ratings feedback by the teacher can result in an improved teaching and learning environment. • Results of student ratings can be collected anonymously. • Student ratings require minimal training and are both cost- and time-efficient. • Student ratings of teachers align with student achievement; teachers rated higher by students in instructional effectiveness align with students achieving at higher levels in that teacher's class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student ratings should not be the primary teacher evaluation instrument, but should be included in a comprehensive teacher evaluation process. • Confidentiality concerns in regard to protecting the anonymity of student raters must be addressed. • Results of student ratings may be misinterpreted and misused. • Use of data by administrators for punitive purposes could result in teachers' lack of support for the student ratings.

Note. Adapted from “The Use of Student Perceptual Data as a Measure of Teaching Effectiveness”. (Burniske & Meibaum, 2012, p. 2-3).

Several of the studies reviewed by Burniske & Meibaum show that student ratings of teachers can be helpful in providing information related to teaching. The ratings about teachers from students in grades 3-12 may be as useful as judgments made by college students and, in many cases, correlate with measures of student achievement. The use of survey information from students below grade three remains a question for many educators and researchers. Follman (1995) stated in his paper, “The age at which young pupils can legitimately rate their teachers, or anyone else, remains an issue unresolved by the very limited literature and, therefore, will have to be taken into consideration in any application of ratings by children below about grade 3” (Follman, 1995, p. 6). Validity will be dependent upon the instrument used and how it is administered. Proponents of student surveys indicate that surveys provide perspectives of students who spend the most time with the teacher, they can provide formative information to help teachers reflect upon and improve their practices, and the results are found to be as accurate and useful as adult raters. A study by Wilkerson, Manatt, Rogers, & Maughan (2000) found student ratings correlated higher with student achievement than other ratings and were the best predictors of student achievement across all subjects. Opponents of the use of student surveys contend that student surveys should not be used as a sole or primary measure of teacher evaluation and students cannot provide information on aspects of teaching such as teacher’s content knowledge, curriculum alignment, and professional activities (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). The validity of student surveys depends in large part on the instrument being used, how it was developed, and the fidelity with which it is administered.

2.5.3 Student survey instruments

Currently, eleven states use student surveys or feedback as an optional measure of teacher effectiveness. Examples of 3 survey tools being used by school districts are Ferguson’s Tripod Project Survey, My Student Survey, and The Gallup Student Poll (White, 2013).

2.5.4 My Student Survey

My Student Survey (My Student Survey, 2012) was developed by Ryan Balch at Vanderbilt University. It is based upon the observation rubrics used by Charlotte Danielson’s group in the Framework for Teaching. The STeP (Survey of Teacher Practice) exists for students in grades 4-5 and 6-12. The survey is designed to assess teacher as presenter, manager, counselor, coach, motivational speaker, and content expert. This 55 item survey has been used in large school districts including Baltimore City Schools.

2.5.5 The Gallup Student Poll

The Gallup Student Poll was first administered in 2009 and is designed for students in grades 5-12 (White, 2013). The poll measures three variables identified as the key factors that drive students’ grades: hope, engagement, and well-being. The Gallup Student Poll was designed by Gallup Inc., in partnership with America’s Promise Alliance and the American Association of School Administrators. Potemski, Baral, & Meyer (2011) define hope as “the ideas and energy students have for the future,” engagement as a student’s “level of involvement in and enthusiasm for school,” and well-being as “how students think about and experience their lives” (p. 13).

2.5.6 Tripod Surveys

The Tripod Surveys were developed by Ron Ferguson from Harvard University and Cambridge Education currently in its 16th iteration. The “tripod” of quality teaching, content, pedagogy, and relationships, aims to improve school capacity by addressing each of 3 areas. “Tripod surveys examine the Seven C’s of quality teaching: care about students, control of student behavior, captivating students, clarifying lessons, challenging students academically, conferring with students, and consolidating knowledge” (Potemski et al., 2011, p. 22). Table 3 summarizes three of the most common student surveys.

Table 3. Student Survey Options

Measure	Developer	Information Gathered	Grade Range
My Student Survey (STeP)	Ryan Balch, Vanderbilt University	Assess teachers as: Presenter Manager Counselor Coach Motivational Speaker Content Expert	4-5 and 6-12
Gallup Student Poll	Gallup Inc.	Hope <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • energy student have for the future Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • level of involvement in and enthusiasm for school Well-Being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how students think about and experience their lives 	5-12
Tripod Surveys	Ronald Ferguson, Harvard University and Cambridge Education	Identifies students’ attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and classroom practices related to teachers’ content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and relationships with students. 7 C’s: Care, Control, Captivating, Clarifying, Challenging, Conferring, Consolidating	K-12

Multiple measures used in identifying teacher effectiveness provide school districts with a balanced approach in developing a comprehensive evaluation system. Classroom observations, peer observations, portfolios, student achievement data, student value-added data, student learning objectives, and student perception surveys offer school districts a variety of data sources from which to select. Student perception surveys continue to grow in popularity across the country. As a part of the summative evaluation of a teacher's performance or as a formative assessment for professional development, educators and researchers are identifying the benefits of asking the opinions of those individuals who spend the most time with teachers over the course of the school year, the students.

2.6 TEACHERS' OPINIONS OF EVALUATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Developing an understanding of teachers' perspectives and attitudes regarding teacher evaluation and professional development models can help district and state administrators formulate teacher policies that are not only successful in meeting their designed goals but are also supported by teachers. This alignment between intended goals and teacher support provide the foundation for successful implementation and intended consequences. The state of teacher evaluation programs is transforming throughout the country due in large part to the competition for federal Race to the Top program funds and conditions laid out by the U.S. Department of Education to states pursuing waivers of the No Child Left Behind laws (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Although many states are still in the early stages of rethinking and implementing new teacher evaluation policies, it is important for teachers to play an active role in the framework for how

states will use evaluation data in meaningful ways, and most importantly, how this information will impact instructional practice. The critical components will address how evaluation results will inform tenure decisions, improve instruction, provide consequences for ineffective performance, determine compensation, plan for professional development, improve pre-service programs, and assign the most effective teachers to work with the students who need them the most (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013).

Figure 6 depicts the policy trends in state teacher effectiveness measures over the past five years. Generally, states incorporate measures of student achievement twice as often as measures of student growth and tying evaluations to tenure. The validity and reliability of the measures proposed for determining teacher effectiveness along with the teachers' perspectives of these measures are discussed in this section of the literature review. The following measures will be examined: classroom observation/feedback models, student achievement data, student growth data, student learning objectives (SLOs), and student perception surveys.

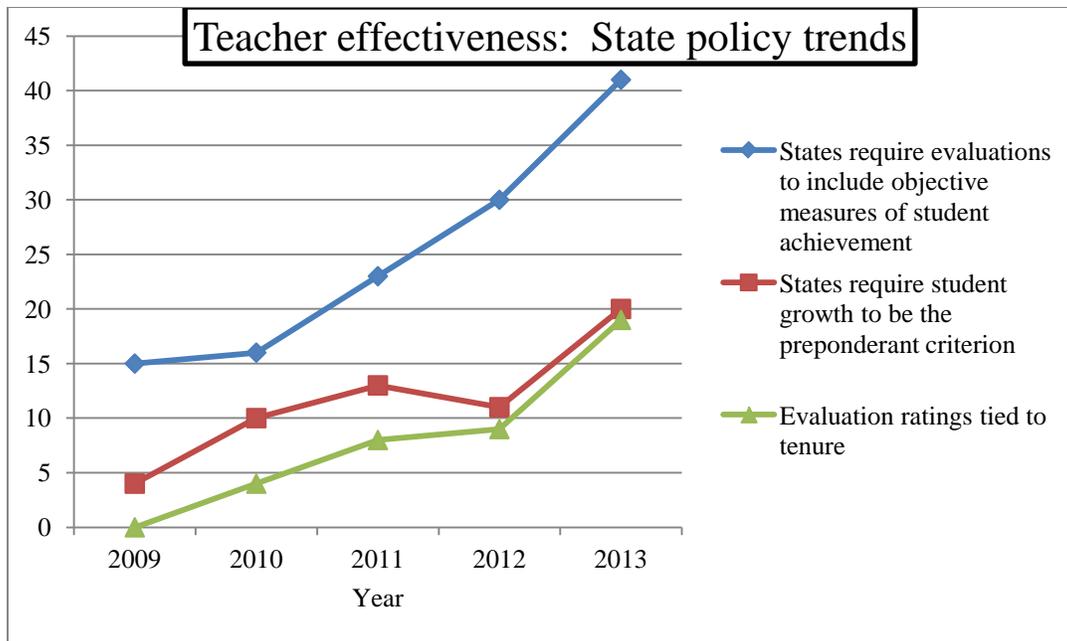


Figure 7. State Policy Trends Related to Teacher Effectiveness Measures.
Adapted from (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013, p. ii)

2.6.1 Classroom Observation Models

One of the concerns teachers raise regarding comprehensive evaluations has been the lack of frequent observations and the quality of feedback provided through the observation process. Research has found a direct correlation between increased numbers of observations with the impact of the feedback provided (Denner, Miller, Newsome & Birdsong, 2002). Constructive and meaningful feedback is needed to promote reflection and allow teachers to plan and achieve new goals, which will ultimately lead to an increased sense of efficacy in their teaching. Quality feedback should support teachers in making decisions about what to teach and how to teach to better meet the needs of the students. An evaluation has no meaning if it is not interpreted, questioned, discussed, and reflected on in order for it to lead to teachers and administrators making different and more effective educational decisions (Feeney, 2007). A study completed

by Turnbull, Haslan, Arcaira, Riley, Sinclair & Coleman (2009) found that principals spent less time in providing feedback to teachers than on observations. The study reported that teachers stated that their principals provided little to no individual feedback and instead focused on group feedback and checklist criteria. Teachers and researchers agree that in order to provide focused and effective feedback a structure needs to occur to promote reflective inquiry and conversations for facilitating the learning of teachers. The art of conferencing helps develop a collaborative, reflective dialogue after a lesson has been observed. According to Fenney (2007) “When a structure to promote reflective inquiry is provided, teachers are more likely to internalize the feedback and make adjustments to improve their teaching” (p. 195). In a report titled *Teachers’ Perspectives on Evaluation Reform*, Donaldson (2012) recommends the following policy and practice:

Invest in building the capacity of administrators as instructional leaders. Bolstering the professional learning aspect of a teacher-evaluation program requires increased attention to developing the skill and willingness of school leaders to go into classrooms and offer high-quality, ongoing feedback. To increase the probability that teacher-evaluation reform will improve teachers’ instruction, policymakers should consider ways to increase the capacity of school administrators to act as instructional leaders and provide administrators with opportunities to exercise these skills. It includes putting in place structures that allow school leaders to get into classrooms and work with teachers on instructional matters more frequently. (p.4)

Teachers indicate that the most obvious technique used to assess teacher quality, the formal observation, is not doing the job. Figure 7 illustrates that a small percentage, 26%, report their observations to be “useful and effective” while the majority report the observation and

evaluation process to be “just a formality” or “well-intentioned but not particularly helpful” (Duffett, Farkas, Rothertham, & Silva, 2008, p. 3).

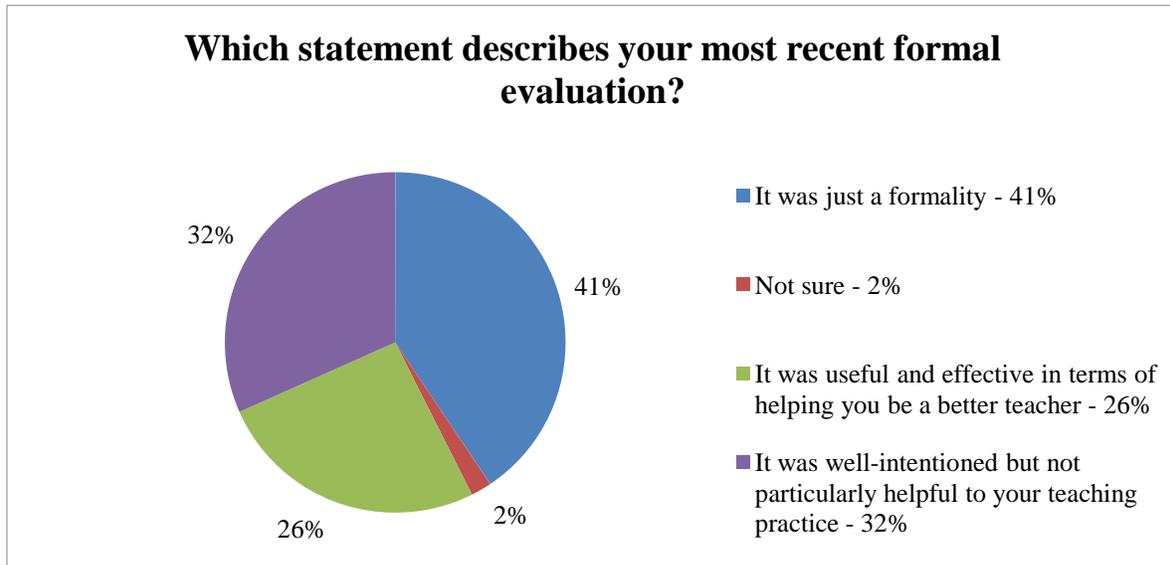


Figure 8. Teachers Perceptions of Recent Formal Evaluations. Adapted from (Duffett, Farkas, Rothertham, & Silva, 2008, p. 3)

The traditional classroom observation checklist is perceived by teachers to be meaningless and unfair and rarely has it been used to identify or remove low-performing teachers. In a report conducted by Sartain, Stoelinga, and Brown (2011) for Chicago Public Schools, only 0.3 percent of teachers were rated Unsatisfactory and 7 percent were rated Satisfactory. The remaining 93 percent of teachers were rated Excellent or Superior. School districts across the country consistently reported similar evaluation results. In an effort to address these concerns, states have begun to introduce evidence-based observations by implementing multiple classroom observations, using rubrics that clearly define instructional improvements, and gathering observation data from multiple observers.

A popular framework developed by Charlotte Danielson is being implemented in many districts across the country (Danielson, 2013). The framework is used to document and develop teaching practices. The framework divides teaching into four domains: 1) planning and preparation; 2) classroom environment; 3) instruction; and 4) professional responsibilities. Domains 1 and 4 cover aspects of the teaching profession that occur outside of the classroom and Domains 2 and 3 address directly observable classroom practices. Domains 1 and 4 are designated as “off stage” domains and Domains 3 and 4 are “on stage” domains. Each domain is comprised of a number of components which make up a rubric that specifies rating criteria. The rating criteria range from unsatisfactory to distinguished. The rubric eliminates many of the subjective comments often found in traditional teacher observations and replaces them with specific, factual reporting of events. Using the Danielson Framework, teachers participate in an active process that involves three features: self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation. Shulman (2004) explains:

Authentic and enduring learning will occur when the teacher is an active agent in the process – not passive, nor an audience, not a client or a collector. Teacher learning becomes more active through experimentation and inquiry, as well as through writing, dialogue, and questioning. Thus, the school settings in which teachers work must provide them with the opportunities and support for becoming active investigators of their own teaching. (p. 514)

A study by Stark and Lowther (1984) attempted to identify factors that might affect teachers’ view of evaluation. The study found that 89% of the teachers surveyed viewed self-assessment as the most appropriate method of evaluation. Also noted, 75% of teachers felt peer assessments were reliable approaches to successful teacher evaluation. The study found that

teachers perceived a multidimensional evaluation process including administrator judgments, peer reviews, self-assessments, and negotiated goals to be most effective and appropriate. A quantitative study completed by Sweeley (2004) found the majority of teachers responded favorably, agreeing or strongly agreeing that Danielson's Framework for Teaching model was an effective instrument for increasing student achievement and encouraging teachers to pursue additional professional development opportunities. Overall, the review of literature finds that teachers value feedback and want to be involved in both the evaluation and professional development process to ensure the information gathered is both useful and meaningful for improving their practice.

2.6.2 Student Achievement

School districts often fall short in efforts to improve the performances of less effective teachers as well as highly effective teachers. Deficiencies in many evaluation practices include checklist criteria with outdated components, simplistic comments ranging from needs improvement to outstanding, and inconsistencies between evaluators. In addition, little differentiation exists between the process for experienced teachers and those new the profession (Danielson, 2011). Past practices of classroom observations conducted by administrators with too little time and inadequate training in assessing and supporting teachers rarely led to pedagogical improvements or student achievement. In response to these shortcomings, the federal government passed the Race to the Top Act in 2011 as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009). This legislation encouraged states to make greater use of students' test results as a measure for determining teachers' pay and job tenure and/or as a percentage of teachers' comprehensive evaluations. Champions of this approach expected performance-based financial rewards to

encourage teachers to work harder which would likely increase student achievement. Others believed the objectivity of test-based performance would expedite the removal of ineffective teachers and attract more effective teachers incentivized by the prospect of higher pay (Baker et al., 2010). Opponents of using student performance to evaluate teachers cite the country's experiment with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law that used student test scores to evaluate schools and implemented sanctions against schools whose students failed to meet performance standards. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a federally administered, low-stakes test found little to no gain and, in some instances, a decline in growth rates for African American or white students in reading or math throughout the post NCLB era (Table 4). These findings do not support the hypothesis that test-based incentives for school or individual teachers are likely to improve student achievement. Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) summarize the statistical misidentification of effective teachers this way:

Basing teacher evaluation primarily on student test scores does not accurately distinguish more from less effective teachers because even relatively sophisticated approaches cannot adequately address the full range of statistical problems that arise in estimating a teacher's effectiveness. Efforts to address one statistical problem often introduce new ones. These challenges arise because of the influence of student socioeconomic advantage or disadvantage on learning, measurement error and instability, the non-random sorting of teachers across schools and of students to teachers in classrooms within schools, and the difficulty of disentangling the contributions of multiple teachers over time to students' learning. As a result, reliance on student test scores for evaluating teachers is likely to misidentify many teachers as either poor or successful. (p. 8)

Table 4. Average Test-Score Growth for African American and White Students Pre- and Post-NCLB

	African American Students		White Students	
	Pre-NCLB 1990-2003	Post-NCLB 2003-2009	Pre-NCLB 1990-2003	Post-NCLB 2003-2009
Fourth Grade Math	2.2	1.0	1.8	0.8
Fourth Grade Reading	0.5	1.1	1.8	0.8
Eighth Grade Math	1.2	1.4	1.4	0.9
Eighth Grade Reading	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.1

Note. Adapted from Baker et al., (2010). *Problems with the use of student test scores to evaluate teachers. EPI briefing paper #278. Economic Policy Institute.* Economic Policy Institute. Data retrieved August 17, 2010 using NAEP Data Explorer.

In 2013, more than two-thirds of the states required that teacher evaluations use student growth and/or achievement as part of a teacher’s evaluation. The impact of student achievement scores to a teacher’s final evaluation rating differ from state to state. Of the 41 states integrating student achievement into their teacher evaluations, only 20 identify student achievement as the most significant criterion in determining the final evaluation rating (see Figure 6). The term “most significant” does equate to student achievement amounting to greater than 50 percent of a teacher’s final evaluation; however, in some states a teacher cannot earn an effective rating if he or she is not rated as effective on the student growth/achievement portion of the evaluation (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013).

A report by Donaldson (2012) entitled *Teachers’ Perspectives on Evaluation Reform*, reported a study conducted in a northeastern urban school district that implemented a new teacher evaluation system in 2010-2011, the Teacher Evaluation Program (TEP). Students’ growth and achievement measures, along with more conventional observation-based data, were used to determine annual summative ratings. From the district, 72 teachers were interviewed. Overall, about 75% of the teachers sampled said they would recommend the district’s new

evaluation program to other districts. The teachers identified the following aspects of the evaluation program to be most valuable: the emphasis on teacher-selected goals; inclusion of additional data points compared to prior years; increased accountability for teachers; safeguards against capricious treatment of teachers; and the program's status as a "homegrown" reform effort. Teachers also noted several negative elements of the evaluation system. The primary negative reported was the perception that the evaluation system increased the power of school leaders. In addition, the increased number of teachers rated as "needs improvement" heightened the anxiety of many teachers. A few teachers felt they could not teach as creatively because of the fear that students would not attain the skills necessary to perform well on standardized assessments that were embedded into their goals.

An Education Sector Report conducted by Duffett, Farkas, Rotherham, and Silva (2008) titled *Waiting to Be Won Over: Teachers Speak on the Profession, Unions, and Reform*, surveyed over 1,000 teachers about their views on a host of reforms aimed at improving teacher quality. Of the teachers surveyed, 63% believed their current evaluation process was either just a formality, or it was well-intentioned but not particularly helpful for improving teaching practices. One teacher summarized the fears of many by commenting:

To reward teachers for great test scores is absurd. There is such a range of external issues that work in a classroom; there is no way to accurately assess how great a job a teacher is doing based on test scores! And if it is based on test scores, who ultimately decides? How can favoritism, cronyism, and all other matters of human subjectiveness not come into play? (p. 7)

Research conducted by the RAND Education for the Carnegie Corporation of New York entitled *Evaluating Value-Added Models for Teacher Accountability* (McCaffrey, Lockwood,

Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003) reported on using value-added measures as part of a teacher's evaluation. A section of the research focused on the use of achievement tests as an outcome of teacher performance. Two concerns arose from this study: the timing of the tests does not generally conform to the school year and tests contain measurement errors which can affect students' scores and estimated teacher effectiveness. Summative tests used to measure teacher effectiveness are typically conducted once per year and span two grades, the end of one grade and more than three quarters of the following grade. The combination of multiple grade spans and the time for summer recess are a concern for many educators. Along with the length of time involved in summative assessments is the effect of scaling summative test scores. Researchers believe that scores from test forms for different grades must be vertically linked to a single scale so that achievement in one grade can be compared to achievement in other grades. Such scaling may not reflect the developmental nature of student learning.

The existing literature related to the use of student achievement data as part of teachers' evaluation or professional development planning finds mixed results. For those who believe that evaluations should measure teacher effectiveness, student achievement data provides quantitative measures that will either support or conflict with traditional subjective findings. The literature suggests that teachers often question the reliability of these single assessment results. Teachers are concerned with external factors such as home environments and students' aptitudes that they believe are outside of their control (Duffett et al., 2008). For those who believe that evaluations should be used to help develop teachers, the literature supporting the relationship between student achievement data and teacher growth is limited. Proponents for using student achievement data believe these measures will help educators identify the most effective pedagogy in effort to replicate these practices across other classrooms. As the quality and

availability of student achievement data have increased considerably over the past decade, the literature consistently recommends considering multiple data sources when measuring teaching impact or identifying professional development needs (Kane et al., 2011).

Recently policymakers have focused on using student achievement as part of a teacher's comprehensive evaluation. The question remains, how will this information enhance the practices and outcomes of teachers across the performance spectrum? Teachers are interested in participating in an evaluation process that contributes to improving their craft but have concerns related to the validity and reliability of using student achievement data to determine if their practices are effective or in need of improvement.

2.6.3 Value-Added Measures

In 2013, more than two-thirds of the states required that teacher evaluations measure student growth and achievement as part of their teachers' effectiveness rating (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013). Value-added models (VAM) have become increasingly popular over the past decade as they relate to teacher evaluations. A value-added model enables statisticians to measure student test score gains from one year to the next while considering factors often found to influence achievement such as students' prior achievement and demographic characteristics. States are beginning to incorporate value-added measures into teachers' comprehensive evaluations in effort to assess if students assigned to a particular teacher achieved at least a year's worth of academic growth. Two of the reasons VAMs are attracting this growing interest are: 1) the hope that VAMs hold the promise of separating the effects of teachers and schools from non-educational factors such as family background; and 2) some early VAM studies show large differences among teachers. If these differences can be linked to specific characteristics of

effective teaching, the potential for improving instructional practices could be significant (McCaffrey et al., 2003). Advocates believe these measures are fairer comparisons of teachers than judgments based upon one test score at a single point in time or comparisons of student cohorts involving different groups of students.

A study conducted by the Center for American Progress (Donaldson, 2012) reported the findings on teachers' opinions of a new teacher-evaluation reform effort entitled Teacher Evaluation Program or TEP. Ninety-two educators were interviewed after the second year of the program. The main finding asserted that teachers agreed that evaluation reform was necessary. They recognized the use of student performance growth, rather than a percentage of students attaining a benchmark with no consideration of the starting point, as a key aspect in making the TEP a fair evaluation program.

An Education Sector report found teachers nearly split on this topic. Of the 1,010 K-12 public school teachers surveyed, almost half, 49% said measuring teacher effectiveness based on student growth was a good or excellent idea while the other 48% said it was a fair or poor idea (Duffett et al., 2008). Opponents of VAMs do not believe these measures fairly reflect a teacher's effectiveness. They do not believe that one test is a valid measure of student learning or that the student is influenced by the teacher alone. They believe other factors such as class size, curriculum materials, instructional time, home and community support, individual students' needs, health, attendance, prior teachers, and other learning resources also contribute to students' academic growth. Baker et al. (2010) describe a common sentiment related to VAMs as:

No single teacher accounts for all of a student's achievement. Prior teachers have lasting effects, for good or ill, on students' later learning, and several current teachers can also interact to produce students' knowledge and skills. For example, with VAM, the essay-

writing a student learns from his history teacher may be credited to his English teacher, even if the English teacher assigns no writing; the mathematics a student learns in her physics class may be credited to her math teacher. (p. 9)

The limitations of value added measures were outlined by Kane et al. (2011) in their article “Identifying Effective Classroom Practices Using Student Achievement Data”. They cited three main limitations: 1) less than a quarter of K-12 teachers are likely to teach in grades or subjects where standardized assessments are available; 2) test-based measures offer little guidance related to effective teaching practices; and 3) the fear that teachers will focus on teaching test-taking skills rather than the more valuable problem solving and communication skills needed for success in our current work force.

The question of how to measure student growth in non-tested grades or in subjects such as music and art have both opponents and proponents of VAMs concerned about the validity and objectivity of selected measurements. The measurement tools and algorithms used in the student achievement component for non-tested teachers are still being developed in many states. Researchers caution states to take their time in developing these assessments where standardized measures are not available because student achievement matters just as much regardless of the subject taught (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013). Critics of VAMs are concerned with states’ abilities to accurately link a student to the correct teacher. In order for states to require teacher evaluations to be based on student outcomes, they must have the data systems in place to support such requirements. The data systems must be able to match teacher records with student records and in many cases students are taught by a number of different teachers even within the same subject. For example, a reading student could be taught by two teachers in an inclusion model and pulled out for a period of time by a reading specialist. In this example, the student would be linked to

three teachers for different percentages of time. The data systems must be robust enough to support a large variety of instruction models and supports but easy enough for schools and districts to manage them efficiently.

As states continue to implement revised evaluation systems, it is evident that the “perfect” system does not exist. Strengths pertaining to value-added measures have some excited about the potential for not only measuring teacher effectiveness but identifying effective instructional practices. The validity and reliability of this data when external factors are considered have opponents of VAMs concerned. Through the implementation process, states are being encouraged to create checks and balances and to study and analyze their systems regularly and systematically. It is believed that regardless of the evaluation system’s design, modifications and flexibility will be needed (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013).

2.6.4 Student Learning Objectives

One of the questions generated from critics of the new teacher evaluation systems is determining how to measure student academic growth in subjects such as art, physical education, and music where a standardized assessment does not exist. Some states have begun to ask teachers to assemble their own evidence of student learning commonly referred to as Student Learning Objectives or SLOs. Student learning objectives are taken from classroom and school-based assessments and documentation. Pre- and post-tests are being used to measure student learning. A study in Arizona where teachers are required to use multiple methods of student assessments found that over time teachers improved their abilities to align curriculum with district objectives, and increased their focus on higher quality content, skills, and pedagogy (Packard & Dereshiwsky, 1991). The state of Georgia is using SLOs for all teachers. Lessons can be

learned from these progressive states. Depending on the learning objective, the measure of student achievement can be either strong or weak. States have a responsibility to ensure measures are meaningful which will require oversight to ensure teachers, principals, and districts are developing quality performance indicators. It is believed that SLOs should be used as part of a set of multiple measures but are not appropriate to stand alone in determining teacher effectiveness (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013).

In December 2011, Governor Haslam of Tennessee initiated a formal statewide feedback process. He asked an independent organization, State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), to develop a report based upon feedback from teachers related to the recently adopted Tennessee Teacher Evaluation System. The purpose of the report was to propose a range of policy considerations for refining the evaluation system. A teacher's evaluation in Tennessee is comprised of 50% observations and other qualitative data, 15% student achievement measures agreed upon by the educator and evaluator, and 35% on student growth as represented by the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). The findings from the report indicated that the 15% percent measure of student achievement was considered one of the least effective components for two primary reasons. First, achievement measures were being inconsistently selected by similar groups of teachers and teachers were at times selecting measures that did not align to their job responsibilities. Second some of the approved achievement measures did not provide the data needed for a final evaluation until after the school year ended. As a result, a final evaluation rating would not be available for groups of teachers until the following school year (Tennessee Department of Education, 2012).

In order for student learning objectives to be valid measures of student achievement a number of components related to quality assessments must be considered. The assessments must

be aligned with the curriculum and student learning goals along with identifying the specific teacher or teachers responsible for the learning gains. In addition, the assessments must be constructed to evaluate student learning. Multiple points of assessments are more effective than one snapshot of student achievement. Finally, the diversity of students must be considered, including students with special needs or limited English proficiency as well as gifted and high-achieving students. These combined principles should be considered as educators and evaluators agree upon which student learning objectives are the most appropriate, valid, and reliable measures for determining a portion of a teacher's overall effectiveness rating (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2011).

2.6.5 Student Voice

As school districts across the county work collaboratively with their teachers' unions to develop new evaluation systems, the topic of student voice data has begun to emerge. A process that is commonplace in post-secondary education is relatively new to K-12 schools. Teachers and administrators are sharing their perceptions of this alternative data sources in states such as Colorado, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Utah, and Pennsylvania where district-wide administration of student voice surveys has begun (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). Most agree that student voice neither will, nor ever should, become a stand-alone assessment used to measure teacher effectiveness. Instead, student input can provide feedback to teachers related to engagement, challenge, comfort, and relationships from the perspective of those individuals who spend the most time each day with their teachers, the students. The question of how teachers perceive student input results will likely determine if this type of information gains momentum. If teachers do not believe students' feedback are useful or accurate, the information

will not likely impact instructional practices. However, if teachers believe there is merit and worth to student voice, then this piece of information could provide teachers with additional data to consider as they reflect upon lessons, their classroom environment, and relationships with students.

A study conducted by Peterson, Wahlquist, and Bone (2000) analyzed teachers' perceptions of using student survey data as part of their evaluations. The study comprised of 401 teachers in grades K-12 in a Utah school district asked teachers to share their opinions of student voice surveys related to the questions posed, methods of reporting scores, logistical concerns, and overall satisfaction. If improving teaching practices is the ultimate goal of evaluations, the data collected by teachers and administrators must be viewed by teachers as trustworthy and useful. Over 80% of the study participants agreed with each of these three statements: 1) I had more control over my evaluation; 2) This will better help me reflect on my teaching; and 3) This was an improvement over the old data system. The majority of teachers found that student voice surveys were not merely popularity contests. Students were able to distinguish between a teacher who supported student learning and one who simply treated them well.

Critics of integrating student voice data into teachers' evaluations often cite the validity of the data as a major concern. Some believe students may be biased and the earliest age at which students can adequately rate teachers is uncertain. Student bias could be the result of grades earned throughout a school year or interpersonal experiences. Regardless, concerns related to leniency and halo errors are consistent with college students, military officers, and other feedback groups (Follman, 1995). Teachers are concerned that student voice data may become a primary evaluation instrument and that the data may be used by administrators for

punitive purposes (Aleamoni, 1999). If teachers are concerned with the validity and how student voice data will be used, they are unlikely to use the information to improve their practice.

Teachers' opinions of evaluation and professional development planning measures such as observations, student achievement data, growth data, student learning objectives, and student feedback ultimately determine the impact these measures have on teaching and learning. Table 5 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the various teacher effectiveness measures (Goe et al., 2008). Questions of validity and reliability arise with each measure, and more importantly, the question of which measure or measures will most likely impact instructional practice should remain at the forefront of this discussion. As a result, most states developing evaluation systems are combining various measures to account for a teacher's overall effectiveness rating.

Table 5. Strengths and Weaknesses of Teacher Effectiveness Measures

Measure	Strength(s)	Weakness(es)
Classroom Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reliable and valid when accompanied with frequent feedback -Reflective inquiry and conversations facilitate learning for teachers -Multiple classroom observations by a variety of observers provides valid information for teachers -Evidence-based observations are more effective than subjective statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of frequency -Lack of quality feedback -Lack of professional development for administrators -Checklists are ineffective -Self-reflections are more powerful than traditional observations
Student Achievement Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Performance-based rewards may encourage teachers to work harder -The objectivity of test-based performance would expedite the removal of ineffective teachers -Assessment data may lead to determining the teacher behaviors most closely linked to student achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NCLB history found little gain in student achievement through the use of student test scores -External issues affect student performance -Non-random selection of students for classrooms will distort the data -Timing of the tests do not conform to a "typical" school year -The nature of achievement is set by the test developer
Value-Added Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Measures student gains while considering external factors such as prior achievement and demographics -May separate effects of teachers and schools from non-educational factors -Spotlight differences between teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -One test is not a valid measure of student learning -No single teacher accounts for all of a student's achievement. Factors such as prior teachers, background experiences, and family dynamics must be considered -Fear of teachers focusing on test-taking skills rather than problem solving and higher order thinking skills

Table 5. (Continued)

Student Learning Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Assessments are available in all subject areas including art, physical education, and music -Options for multiple assessments -Effective when used as one of the measures of a comprehensive evaluation -When quality assessments are considered, results are valid -Increases teacher “ownership” of the evaluation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Require strict oversight -Depending on the learning objectives, the measure of student achievement can be either strong or weak -Not a stand-alone measure, should be used with other measures -Selected measures must align with curriculum and final data points must be available near the end of the school year -Diversity of students must be considered - including students with special needs or limited English proficiency
Student Perception (Voice) Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students have extensive daily contact with teachers, resulting in unique perspectives -Student ratings are consistent from year to year -Students are able to distinguish between effective teaching behaviors and warm, caring, supportive teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -There may be negative effects of feedback from student ratings on subsequent teacher behaviors -Potential student rater bias -Appropriate age limits are uncertain -Results between student grade and student ratings have found to be highly inconsistent -Use of data by administrators for punitive purposes could result in teachers’ lack of support for using student ratings

Note. Adapted from “Approaches to Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness: A Research Synthesis”. (Goe et al., 2008, p. 16-19)

The combination of multiple observations conducted frequently by a number of highly trained evaluators, assessments aligned with district and state standards that are appropriately challenging for all learners, and a fair system for measuring student growth that ties directly to the teacher of record, could provide educators with the performance data they need. Teachers consider traditional observations valuable when they are conducted frequently by highly qualified professionals and the feedback is timely, detailed, and specific. Teachers’ positive

perceptions of student achievement data increases when multiple data points are considered. Value-added assessments may help to separate external factors from a teacher's impact but the limited number of content area assessments narrows the range of teacher-aligned results. Student learning objectives can be developed across all content areas but oversight and accountability by administrators may be necessary to ensure teachers are setting challenging goals. Finally, gathering perspectives from students could provide teachers with additional insight into their impact on learning, but the results must be considered valid and reliable if teachers are expected to use the information to modify practices or consider professional development opportunities. With the right combination of these features in place, evaluations may become a more useful tool to not only rate teacher effectiveness but, more importantly, to determine the instructional practices that will most likely result in student achievement.

2.7 EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS IN PENNSYLVANIA

As school districts across the state of Pennsylvania move into the second year of implementation of the Educator Effectiveness Project, the topic of elective evaluation data will be discussed between administrators, teachers' unions, and school boards. A Pennsylvania teacher's evaluation currently consists of four parts: Teacher Observation and Practice 50%, Building Level Data 15%, Teacher Specific Data 15%, and Elective Data 20% (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013). "Elective data measures may include various options regarding measures of student performance selected from a list provided annually by the PA Department of Education" (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013, p. 38). Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) will be used by Pennsylvania teachers as their 20% Elective Data. Teachers and administrators will work

collaboratively to determine which assessments should be used to measure student achievement. Student survey data may help educators in selecting appropriate SLOs based upon students' experiences in working with a particular teacher.

School districts in states such as Georgia and Tennessee along with local school districts such as Pittsburgh Public Schools are incorporating student perception results into their teachers' elective data. I believe other districts can learn from the teachers and administrators of these districts who can share how student perception results impacted their daily practices. This study was conducted to determine teachers' perceptions of and experience with using student voice as part of teacher evaluation or professional development planning. The next chapter discusses the methodology used for identifying the findings and potential impact on practice and policy.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Social constructivist theory served as the theoretical framework for this study. The idea that the world is without meaning prior to one's experience of it is the foundation of this theory. Michael Crotty (1998) describes this epistemology as:

Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of [one's] engagement with the realities of [one's] world. There is no meaning with a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. In this view of things, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning. (p. 8)

The consistent theme emerging from the literature related to teacher evaluation and professional development planning was the positive impact of collecting multiple measures from a variety of evaluators and data points. However, the measures are only as good as teachers' perceptions of their reliability and validity. In relation to Crotty's (1998) definition of social constructivist theory, teachers' perceptions of traditional observations, student achievement data, or student voice will be developed through their diverse personal experiences. Perceptions are established through both positive and negative experiences.

Teaching is a complex act. The literature reviewed confirms that attempts at finding an ideal teacher effectiveness model continue to elude educators and researchers. However,

identifying a combination of measures that teachers perceive to be valid and reliable may impact instructional decisions and professional development planning (Collins, 1990).

The review of literature suggests that teachers' perceptions of evaluations and professional development measures vary based upon their background, knowledge, and past experiences. Focus group data was collected to determine teachers' general perceptions of student voice related to a range of activities from student expression to student leadership. Focus group questions then narrowed to determine teachers' perceptions of considering student voice specifically as part of their evaluation or professional development planning. The focus group strategy was selected in effort to elicit participants' points of view through the interactions of the groups. The focus group created a natural environment where small groups of individuals, with common characteristics were provided opportunities to discuss their perspectives in a relaxed, comfortable environment. Focus groups possess elements of both participant observation and individual interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2000). These interactions helped to identify some of the underlying concerns or appreciations for considering student voice.

One focus group was selected from a school district with a history of intentionally using student voice as part of the professional development process. The other focus groups were selected from a school district where teachers have not formally incorporated student voice into any aspect of their professional development process. Three focus group meetings were conducted, two from the school district with no formal experience of using student voice and one focus group with participants across all grade spans from the district with some history of intentionally integrating student voice into their professional development and evaluation programs. Section 3.2 *Data Collection* provides demographic and professional information related to the participants from each focus group. Follow-up questions were developed to probe

more deeply into previous responses. The data compared the perspectives of individuals within each group and across groups in effort to identify common themes. The focus group questions are available in Appendix A.

This qualitative study provides research into the work of understanding the place for student voice in education. This study was designed to gather insight into teachers' perceptions of intentionally eliciting student voice across a spectrum of activities versus the typical and practical examples of listening to students associated with general classroom instruction (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Opportunities for listening to students range from informal classroom activities to formalized approaches related to either evaluating teacher effectiveness or guiding teachers in selecting appropriate individualized professional growth plans.

3.1 CONTEXT

This exploratory study is guided by the essential question: *What are teachers' perceptions of considering student voice as part of their comprehensive evaluations and/or professional development planning processes?* In effort to answer this question, research questions were developed. The first research question asks: What are teachers' perspectives about considering the use of student voice? The second research question asks: What part do teachers believe student voice should have in the development of the elective portion of teacher evaluations and/or teachers' independently developed annual professional goals? The final research question asks: How do teachers differ based upon past experiences with using student voice as part of their evaluation or professional development plans?

3.1.1 Qualitative Research – Focus Groups

Focus group interviewing is a qualitative approach to gathering information that is inductive and naturalistic. The groups typically involve homogeneous groups of socially interactive individuals (Kruger & Casey, 2000). This methodology was selected in effort to generate information and discussion related to teachers' perceptions of the general use of student voice in education as well as specifically considering student voice as a component of evaluations or as a measure to determine appropriate professional development plans. Simon (1999) defines focus groups:

A focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment. It is conducted with approximately seven to ten people by a skilled interviewer. The discussion is comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion. (p. 40)

In this study, focus groups were used to analyze the interaction and responses of the groups around the topic of using student voice as a general practice and/or more specifically as a professional development or evaluation tool. There is a key distinction between focus groups and group interviews. In group interviewing, a number of people are simultaneously interviewed; the key difference is the importance of group interaction during a focus group (Gibbs, 1997). According to Kitzinger (1995), the idea behind focus group methodology is that group processes can help people explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less accessible in a one to one or group interview. Focus group methodology was used as the primary

data-collection method. The most commonly cited strengths and limitations were reviewed and considered while developing the data collection process.

3.1.2 Focus Group Strengths

Focus groups are gaining popularity as a qualitative research method in the social and behavioral sciences (Sagoe, 2012). Focus groups can be adapted to meet the specific needs of researchers from testing a hypothesis to generating ideas to the development and/or evaluation of programs.

The moderator of the focus group is the authority figure in the groups and plays the role of maintaining and guiding the conversation. The moderator must ensure the conversation is on track, encourage participation from all participants, and prevent one individual from dominating the discussion. In addition, focus groups provide opportunities to observe and note body language and facial gestures for gathering insight that other qualitative or quantitative methods would be unable to achieve. The expressions, attitudes, and intensity of the conversation were captured and included in the analysis. As the moderator of the focus group, opportunities to probe more deeply into responses improve the depth of responses. Focus groups typically range from seven to ten people. These small group settings increase the participants' attention to the activity. The structure of focus groups ensures participants are equally engaged and involved.

According to Kitzinger (1995), interaction is the crucial feature of focus groups. The interactions help highlight participants' perceptions, values, and beliefs. The interactions and clarifying questions can help participants re-evaluate and reconsider their own perceptions and/or understandings. In this study, focus groups were comprised of small groups of teachers with various certifications and levels of experience. The interactions between participants around various topics related to student voice helped capture perceptions, beliefs, and the potential or

lack of potential for integrating student voice through evaluations or professional development planning across other schools. An assistant moderator, who is an administrative assistant of a local school district, collected nonverbal communication by noting body language and facial gestures.

Focus group research benefits participants. The opportunity to become actively involved in research and to share beliefs and experiences empowers participants as valued experts in their field (Race, Hotch, & Parker, 1994). If teachers perceive student voice data to be invalid or unreliable they will unlikely support programs incorporating student voice into their daily practice, evaluation, or professional growth plans. However, if teachers view student voice as valid and reliable, they are more likely to support the integration of student voice. The social constructivist paradigm aligns with the focus group framework. The paradigm supports the belief that people construct their own personal understanding and knowledge of the world through their experiences and subsequent reflections on those experiences (Prawat & Peterson, 1999). Focus group methodology provided the participants with opportunities to share their understandings and beliefs with other teachers. Perceptions shared by one participant often inspired others to agree or disagree and further elaborate. Specific examples of focus group participants' interactions will be described in the findings section of this study. As discussions naturally developed, common themes and patterns between individuals and across the groups emerged.

3.1.3 Focus Group Limitations

As with any research method, limitations exist with the use of focus groups. Sensitivity of topics, dominant voices in the group, artificial environments, and the lack of ability to generalize findings are often cited as the most common concerns with focus groups (Sagoe, 2012).

Researchers will often avoid focus groups when acquiring information on highly personal or sensitive topics. A group setting could inhibit discussions based upon the relationship of the participants with each other or to the moderator. In selecting the focus groups, I purposefully worked outside of my current school district to avoid concerns related to my supervisory role with teachers. Effort was made to maintain confidentiality and create an environment where all participants had opportunities to respond. This was accomplished through the design and selection of comfortable settings and expectations were clearly stated related to the time allotted for each participant to answer each question.

The role of the moderator is vital to the success of the focus group. If the focus group is dominated by one participant or a small subgroup, then the opinion of others may be lost or ignored. If the opinion of the majority is permitted to dominate the opinion of the minority, the validity of the data would be impacted. As the moderator, my role was to provide a level of structure to the process to ensure all voices were heard and all participants were given the opportunity to answer each question. A detailed script was developed and delivered prior to each focus group. A copy of the script is available in Appendix C. Each participant was given equal opportunity to respond to each question. As the moderator, I followed up with some participants to gather further insight and understanding of their perspectives.

Some researchers avoid using focus groups due to the artificial environments. The belief that “real world” environments provide the most accurate information is often cited as reason for

avoiding focus groups. These researchers believe that participants behave differently than how they behave when they are not being observed (Sagoe, 2012). Regardless of the qualitative method, I believe this limitation exists. I selected this method because I believe the security of a group may empower participants to share their honest perspectives. The focus group participants were provided food and drinks in effort to help them feel comfortable and appreciated. Time was taken prior to each focus group for introductions and general conversation in effort to establish a friendly, non-threatening environment.

External validity is defined as the degree to which the results of research accurately generalize to other individuals and situations (Heiman, 2001). Since focus group samples are typically very small and purposefully selected, they do not allow for generalization to larger populations. External validity of focus group findings is a major shortcoming of this type of research. The goal for this study was not to generalize the findings. The goal of this study was to gain insight into teachers' perceptions of the intentional use of student voice as part of the teaching and learning process or more specifically as part of their evaluations or professional growth plans. The findings from this study may encourage or discourage others school districts to explore student voice options with their employees.

3.1.4 Primary Researcher's and Participant Bias

Research on student voice related to professional development planning and evaluations is relatively limited and often theoretical and perceptual. Although over the past decade the number of studies directly related to student voice has increased significantly, the need for additional high quality empirical studies exists.

Through this study, concern for researcher and participant bias exists. As the primary researcher, my interest in this study emerged through my belief that student voice should be considered throughout the K-12 educational experience. Students are the primary customers in education and I believe educators should place the same level of value on student voice as businesses place on customer voice. The student is “not always right” but we have an obligation to listen and respond to their ideas and needs.

Through this study, I attempted to shield my bias from the participants by developing a clear, consistent general script for introducing the study (Appendix B) and a clear consistent general introduction to the focus groups (Appendix C). The questions were designed to engage participants in sharing their unique perspectives related to student voice based upon their personal perceptions and beliefs.

Butin (2010) described participant bias as the possibility that respondents modify their answers to be more socially acceptable or provide a response that they believe the moderator wants to hear (Butin, 2010). I attempted to minimize this possibility through the careful wording of my focus group questions along with the introductory script. The following paragraphs were taken directly from my focus group introductory script:

I want to make this very clear. Your district is not considering incorporating student voice into your evaluations or professional development program designs. They were simply willing to offer their assistance to me. My hope is that the results of this study may encourage others to continue this conversation with teachers, administrators as well as state and local officials.

Please consider sharing your honest perspective of integrating student voice into teaching and learning regardless of the views of other participants. A comfortable, rich dialogue will help me in gathering a clear picture of teachers' various perspectives.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

The focus groups consisted of three different groups of teachers from two different Western Pennsylvania school districts. Fictitious names were assigned to each district to improve clarity during the analysis of the data. They will be referred to as District 1 - "Parkway School District" and District 2 - "Lyons Creek School District". A podcast was developed to provide potential study participants with a brief overview of the study along with a description of the data collection process. Once participants were identified, the focus groups were scheduled and conducted at each district. The focus groups were recorded using a computer and microphone. Each of the three focus groups lasted approximately two hours. Follow-up questions were posed to probe further into some participants' responses. Table 6 lists demographic information about each participant. Pseudonyms were used for both district and participant names.

Table 6. Focus Group Participants

Participant	District	Focus Group Number	Years of Teaching Experience	Current grade level(s) Taught	Area(s) of Certification	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Evaluation (Yes/No)	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Professional Development Planning (Yes/No)
Kim	Parkway	1	9	5	Elementary Education	No	No
Beth	Parkway	1	30	5	Elementary Education, Principal K-12	No	No

Table 6. (Continued)

Laura	Parkway	1	24	1	Elementary Education	No	No
Carol	Parkway	1	4	2	Elementary Education, Middle Level Math, Family and Consumer Sciences	No	No
Cindy	Parkway	1	10	4	Elementary Education, Middle Level Math, Educational Technology	No	No
Rich	Parkway	1	16	3	Elementary Education	No	No
Conner	Parkway	2	9	11	Physics, Biology, General Science	No	No
Mike	Parkway	2	14	6-8	Special Education, Middle Level English, Math, Science	No	No
Loren	Parkway	2	10	6-8	Special Education, Elementary Education	No	No
Sally	Parkway	2	23	7	Elementary Education, Middle Level English, Science	No	No
Linda	Parkway	2	17	6-8	Elementary and Secondary School Counseling	No	No
Evan	Parkway	2	7	8	Elementary Education, Middle Level Math, Science, English	No	No
Adam	Lyons Creek	3	7	9-12	Technology Education	No	Yes
John	Lyons Creek	3	7	3	Elementary Education	No	Yes
Robin	Lyons Creek	3	17	5	Elementary Education	Yes	Yes
Brian	Lyons Creek	3	11	10-11	Secondary English	Yes	Yes
Lisa	Lyons Creek	3	14	5	Elementary Education, Principal K-12	Yes	Yes
Nancy	Lyons Creek	3	10	5	Elementary Education, Principal K-12	No	Yes

Parkway School District is a high performing suburban school district located in Western Pennsylvania. The demographic make-up of the district is approximately 85% White, 11% Asian, 1% Hispanic, 2% Black, <1% Muti-Racial, and 1% American Indian or Pacific Islander. Less than 5% of the student population is economically disadvantaged. This district was selected because of the similarities in academic performance and demographics with Lyons Creek. Parkway School District has never used student survey data as either part of teachers' evaluations or professional growth plans. Parkway is transitioning from their current evaluation program to the PA Act 82 Educator Effectiveness model. The delay in implementation was related to its current collective bargaining agreement with its teachers' association. This study was conducted at the same time as Parkway's professional development sessions related to the Act 82 evaluation model. The two focus groups from this district were comprised of six teachers from grades K-5 and six teachers from grades 6-12.

Lyons Creek School District is a high performing suburban school district located in Western Pennsylvania. The demographic make-up of the district is approximately 90% White, 5% Asian, 2% Hispanic, 1% Black, 1% Muti-Racial, and 1% American Indian or Pacific Islander. Less than 10% of the student population is economically disadvantaged. I selected this district because over the past ten years Lyons Creed has used 360-degree feedback as part of its professional development model. The 360-degree feedback model is a contemporary feedback strategy focused on building professional growth plans. The strategy relies upon feedback from peers (other teachers), subordinates (students), supervisors (building administrators), and self evaluations (Mahar & Strobert, 2010). The goal is to link the feedback received from a variety of sources to professional growth plans. Within the past two to five years the 360-degree feedback was discontinued at Lyons Creek due to budget cuts; however, a modified version of

the system was instituted for beginning teachers. Two years ago, the modified program was also removed due to budget cuts, but a number of teachers voluntarily continued the practice. The teachers selected for the focus group participated in either the 360-degree feedback system or the modified program. The focus group from Lyons Creek was comprised of 6 teachers who were currently working with students in grades 3-12.

3.2.1 Focus Group Planning and Participant Selection

The timeline for planning and implementing the focus groups is described in Table 7. After the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the overview podcast and introductory scripts were sent to each school district. A copy of each script and a link to the podcast can be found in Appendix B.

The focus group participants from Parkway School District were selected based upon interest in participating in the study, current teaching assignments, and experience with using a formal processes for considering student voice in evaluations or professional development. The introductory script was initially sent from Parkway's assistant superintendent to a small group of grade level and department chairs. The introductory script was later presented to a larger population to encourage a greater range of backgrounds and experiences. Current teaching assignments were considered when selecting participants in effort to gather input from both elementary (kindergarten through fifth grade) and secondary (sixth grade to twelfth grade) teachers. In order to gather perceptions from teachers without any formal experiences with integrating student voice into the teaching and learning process, any participants with formal experiences in using student voice as part of their evaluations or professional development planning were excluded.

Consistent with Parkway School District, the participants from Lyons Creek School District were selected based upon interest in participating in the study, current teaching assignments, and experience with using a formal process for considering student voice in evaluations or professional development. Unlike Parkway School District, the participants from Lyons Creek were only selected if they had some formal experience with the use of student voice data either through their evaluations or professional development planning processes. This stipulation reduced the number of possible participants. As a result, one focus group was conducted at Lyons Creek with participants across third through twelfth grades.

Table 7. Focus Group Development Process

Date	Action
October 2014	Developed letters of request to conduct focus group at selected districts
October 2014	Contacted the superintendents of Parkway School District and Lyons Creek School District via telephone to determine levels of interest in participating in the study
October 2014	Submitted a formal letter of request to each district
November 2014	Approval letters received from each district
December 2014	IRB Approval
January 2015	Developed an overview podcast and distribute to school districts as part of the recruitment process
January/February 2015	Identified participants and scheduled focus groups
February/March 2015	Conducted focus groups and follow-up interviews

3.2.2 Focus Group Design and Implementation

Simon’s (1999) developed guidelines for conducting focus groups involve the nine steps of: 1) defining a clear and specific purpose; 2) establishing a six to eight week timeline; 3) identifying and selecting participants; 4) generating questions; 5) developing a script; 6) selecting a

facilitator who has some working knowledge of the topic and the group; 7) choosing appropriate locations to minimize the likelihood of distractions; 8) conducting the focus groups; and 9) interpreting and reporting the results. Table 8 summarizes how each step was implemented for this study.

Table 8. Focus Group Design and Implementation Process

Step 1: Define the Purpose

To determine teachers' perceptions of using student voice as a general practice in education or more specifically as either part of their evaluation or as information to guide decisions around developing professional growth plans. The analysis of the focus groups may guide other school districts in making decisions related to integrating student voice into their evaluation or professional development programs.

Step 2: Establish a Timeline

- October 2014 – Requested approval to conduct focus groups at two school districts
 - October 2014 – Secured approval letters
 - November 2014 – IRB approval
 - November 2014 – Identified focus group participants
 - December 2014/January 2015 – Developed an overview podcast and distribute to school districts as part of the recruitment process
 - February 2015/March 2015 – Conducted the focus groups
 - April/May – Interpreted and reported results
-

Step 3: Identify and Invite the Participants

Focus groups were held at two different school districts. Each group consisted of 6 participants. Participants were selected from across all grade levels.

- Parkway – Only those teachers will no prior formal experience using student voice data were selected.
 - Lyons Creek – Only those teachers with prior experience using student voice data were selected.
-

Step 4: Generate the Questions to be Asked

Nine questions were asked of each participant. The questions were open-ended, focused, and transitioned from general to specific. A copy of the questions is available in Appendix A.

Table 8. (Continued)

Step 5: Develop a Script

A script was developed as a way to ensure the same information was shared across all focus groups. A copy of the script is available in Appendix C.

- Opening: Welcome, introduced the purpose, explained the process, explained confidentiality, and facilitated introductions
 - Questions: Equal opportunities for answering each question was provided to all participants
 - Closing: Thank you, explained how the data will be used, goal of the study
-

Step 6: Select a Facilitator

I was the facilitator/moderator; an assistant moderator accompanied me to collect detailed notes.

Step 7: Choose a Location

The focus groups were held in a conference room at each of the two school districts. Focus groups were held after school hours to accommodate various schedules.

Step 8: Conduct the Focus Groups

- The focus group questions were given to the participants one week prior to the focus groups
 - An assistant moderator was available to support the participants, the moderator, and to record non-verbal data.
 - Notepad, pencils, and refreshments were provided for each participant
 - A computer and microphone was used to capture the responses
 - Each participant was assigned a number in effort to ensure the identities of the participants were held in strict confidence.
-

Step 9: Interpret the Results and Report Finding and Lessons

Details related to the data analysis, findings, and lessons are provided in chapters 4 and 5 of this study.

3.2.3 Generating Focus Group Questions

Krueger and Casey (2000) formulated a ladder process (Figure 8) for developing high quality focus group questions. The questions should *sound conversational* in effort to maintain an informal environment. *Participants should be familiar with word choices* and with any

acronyms or professional jargon. Questions should be *easy to say* so the moderator does not confuse the participants through the delivery of the questions. *Clear and focused* questions help participants to focus on their cognitive energies on their responses instead of understanding the question. *Short, open-ended* questions ensure clarity and focus. *One-dimensional questions* help avoid differing interpretations between participants or between participants and the moderator. Finally, *clear directions* provide consistency from one focus group the to next.

***Effective focus group questions
should...***

- _____
- sound conversational
- _____
- use words participants would use
- _____
- be easy to say
- _____
- be clear
- _____
- be short
- _____
- be open-ended
- _____
- be one-dimensional
- _____
- include good directions
- _____

Figure 9. Qualities of Good Focus Group Questions

Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) describe a common problem in qualitative research occurring when researchers do not always provide their readers with detailed explanations of how research questions are related to data sources. In developing the focus group questions, the questions followed the conceptual framework of this study and were directly aligned to the research questions. Figure 9 is the matrix that was developed in order to ensure each focus group question aligned to the framework and sufficient data would be available to analyze results related to each research question. The focus group questions are available in Appendix A.

Research Questions	Focus Group Questions								
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9
What are teachers' perceptions of considering the use of student voice?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
What part student voice should have in:									
a. The development of the elective portion of their evaluations;			X		X			X	X
b. Their independently developed annual professional goals.			X	X		X	X	X	X
Do teachers' perceptions differ based upon past experiences with using student voice as part of their evaluation or professional development plans?	This question will be addressed through the analysis of the responses based upon the teachers' experiences or lack of experiences with student voice.								

Figure 10. Focus Group Question Development Matrix

3.2.4 Follow-up questions

After the initial analysis of the focus group data, follow-up questions were distributed to all participants. The first follow-up question was designed to provide the participants with an additional opportunity to share their perspectives related to integrating student voice across the *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activities*. The question, “*After participating in the focus group, have you changed, or considered changing, how you integrate student voice across the Spectrum into your classroom or school?*” was asked to determine if the conversations from the focus groups encouraged participants to rethink how they listen to students.

Three components of integrating student voice were explored in this study: 1) teachers’ perceptions of the general concept of student voice in education; 2) student voice in evaluations; and 3) student voice in professional development planning. Policy and practice implications emerged quickly from the initial review of the focus group data across all three of these areas. The second follow-up question was designed to probe more deeply into the teachers’ beliefs of the strengths and concerns of each component. The teachers were asked to respond to the statement: *During the focus groups, we discussed three components for integrating student voice into education: 1) the general integration of student voice into teaching and learning; 2) student voice as part of the teacher evaluation program; and 3) student voice as part of the professional development process. After reflecting on the focus group discussions, please share any additional comments related to the strengths and concerns of each of these components.*

The follow-up questions provided addition data to understand specifically why teachers do or do not support the use student voice across these various components. The questions were delivered electronically through an electronic form. Additional clarification statements were later conducted through follow-up conversations.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

In analyzing focus group discussions, Kruger and Casey (2000) emphasize that focus groups are not intended to generalize but to go into greater depth with a small group of people. The focus group data was audio recorded and additional notes were collected by an assistant moderator. The assistant moderator helped to collect some of the non-verbal communication gestures of both the person responding and the other participants. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed in effort to generate a written record of each discussion. It is understood that the transcriptions may be incomplete or inaccurate based upon misunderstood words and typographical errors. As a result, the transcripts were edited.

Once edited, the content of the transcripts was analyzed. Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences for texts to the contexts of their use” (p. 18). The level of content analysis is based upon the number of focus groups and the volume of data. In qualitative analysis a *sign-vehicle* is defined as “anything that may carry meaning, though most often it is likely to be a word or set of words in the context of a focus group interview” (Stewart, 2006, p. 118). Janis (1965) identified the following three distinct types of content analyses based on the purpose of the research:

1. *Pragmatical Content Analysis* – the emphasis in pragmatical content analysis is on why something is said.
2. *Semantical Content Analysis* – to classify signs according to their meanings. This type of analysis may take on three forms:
 - a) Designation Analysis – the frequency with which certain concepts are mentioned.

- b) Attribution Analysis – the frequency with which certain characterizations or descriptors are used. Emphasis on adjectives, adverbs, and descriptive phrases.
 - c) Assertions Analysis – the frequency with which certain objects are characterized in a particular way. This analysis combines designation and attribution analysis.
3. *Sign –Vehicle Analysis* – classifies content according to the number of times specific words or types of words are used. (p. 57)

A combination of these content analysis techniques was used in this study. As part of the analysis, it was important to attempt to understand not only why something was said (pragmatical analysis) but also the frequency of concepts related to the pros and cons of using considering student voice (designation analysis). The data was coded using the highlighting feature in a word processing program in effort to identify themes, trends, and patterns within each individual district and across districts.

Krueger and Casey (2000) describe four factors to consider when identifying themes and trends: frequency, specificity, emotion, and extensiveness. Frequency directly relates to the number of occurrences of a word or phrase but it is a mistake to assume that what is said most frequently is most important. Specificity is described as those comments that provide the most detail. Specific detailed responses provide more insight into how the respondents are thinking. Emotional responses were coded to indicate the level of enthusiasm, passion, or intensity. Often how a person responds is as important as what he or she may say. Finally, extensiveness was analyzed. Extensiveness and frequency are related but different. Extensiveness refers to the number of different people saying something similar, where frequency is a count of how many times something is said. One person may repeat a word or phrase many times, but the impact changes when many different people use similar words or phrases.

The following five step process developed by Greoenwald (2004) was used to analyze each focus group question: 1) the questions were listened to multiple times in effort to develop holistic understandings and to begin to identify common ideas; 2) based upon relevance, frequency of occurrence, and manner of statement, units for analysis were identified and any redundancies were eliminated; 3) commonalities between units were clustered together to form themes; 4) once themes were identified, the data was reviewed and briefly summarized. Each summary was developed to ensure the essence of each focus group question response was accurately captured; and 5) theme summaries were compared and contrasted within and across focus groups to develop composite summaries for each research question.

The conceptual framework of this study guided the development of the findings sections. A review of the findings will begin with an analysis of the focus group data related to teachers' opinions of considering student voice in education. The next findings section will analyze teachers' perceptions of student voice, specifically student surveys, as part of teachers' evaluations. The third section will shift into an analysis of teachers' perceptions of using student voice in professional development planning and the final section will compare the perspectives of teachers with experience using formal student feedback data to those without any formal experience.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Several important findings will be discussed in this chapter related to the impact student voice may have on teaching and learning from the perspectives of 18 teachers across two school districts. Focus group methodology provided the opportunity to explore and clarify teacher perception in ways that could not have been accomplished through one or more interviews. The group discussions encouraged participants to explore issues and ideas that were meaningful and important to individuals and common amongst the group. The follow-up questions extended the data sets in effort to further clarify comments made during focus groups. Kitzenger (1995) described ways in which focus groups help researchers through various forms of communication such as jokes, anecdotal, teasing, and arguing. The access to this variety of communication is helpful in exploring the similarities and differences between the participants and for participants to extend their thinking in relation to the responses of others.

Three focus groups and follow-up questions provided a great deal of data that allowed for a thick, rich analysis and insight into teachers' perceptions of student voice. The research findings are described in this chapter and are organized into sections following this study's conceptual framework: 1) teachers' perceptions of considering the use of student voice; 2) teachers' perceptions of the part student voice should have in the development of the elective portion of teachers' evaluations and/or teachers' independently developed annual professional planning; and 3) the similarities and differences between teachers' perceptions of student voice

based upon experiences in using student voice as part of their evaluation or professional development plans.

Groenwald’s (2004) research analysis design was used to identify the findings described in the following sections. Groenwald’s design includes the steps of: 1) bracketing and phenomenological reduction; 2) delineating units; 3) clustering of meaning units to form themes; 4) summarizing; and 5) making a composite summary. Each section will begin with a brief summary of each focus group question as it relates to the research questions and conceptual framework. Additionally, throughout the findings, direct quotes from focus group participants were used to connect the research questions to the units and themes that emerged from the interactions of the groups and from the specific comments of individual participants. The *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* (Figure 10) is mentioned throughout the findings and may serve as a valuable reference for the reader.

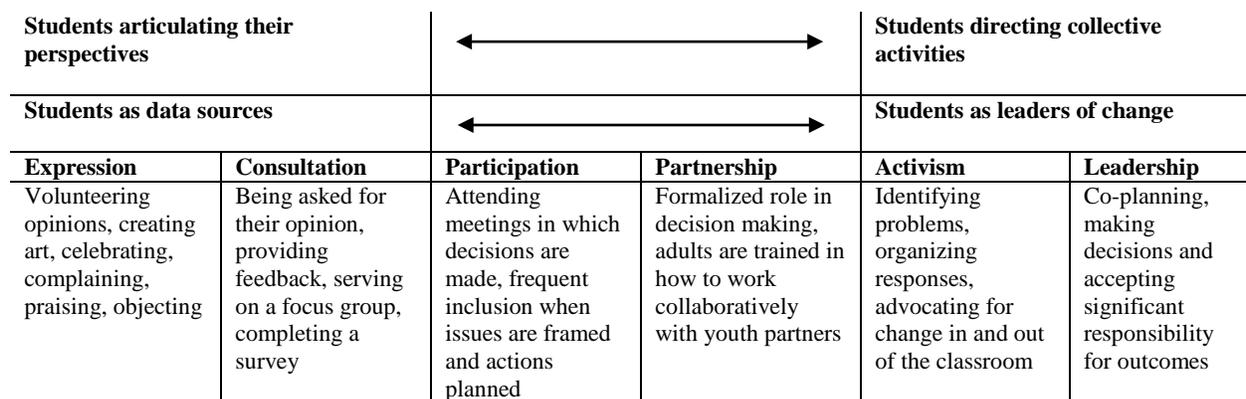


Figure 11. Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity Reference

4.1 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CONSIDERING STUDENT VOICE ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF STUDENT VOICE ORIENTED ACTIVITY

The opening question for the focus groups asked the participants to share specific examples of how they are listening to students by considering the *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012). The *Spectrum* ranges from students' articulating their perspectives to students directing collective activities with adults. This question provided me with an opportunity to hear how teachers are listening to students and if the teachers consider student voices more often as data sources or as change agents. The teachers were asked to review the *Spectrum* table and then respond to the following two part question: *What experiences have you had with soliciting student voice across this spectrum? What was your purpose in soliciting student voice?* The first part of this question helped to establish an understanding of how the participants have considered student voice in teaching and learning. Table 9 provides an overview of the types of activities that the participants shared across the *Spectrum*. When this question was introduced, many participants commented that they never saw the *Spectrum* before and never really considered how they listened to students. Participants initially shared that listening to students is something that they thought was done naturally, but after reflecting on the *Spectrum* they discovered and learned from other participants some new and unique ways to consider student voice. The majority of participants identified activities on the left side of the spectrum within the categories of expression and consultation where students are provided opportunities to voice their opinions or perspectives. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) describe expression as opportunities for students to express themselves in activities such as creative artwork, writing newspaper articles, and expressing their general opinions. Adults then use this information to guide some of their decision making. Consultation involves a more active

role for the students. Through consultation, students are formally asked their opinions through surveys or focus groups related to items such as curriculum and school climate. John from Lyons Creek shared an example of how he allows students to express themselves. He stated:

I use a lot of exit slips in my classroom to check for understanding. I wouldn't really count it as a survey, so much as just probably two or three questions that have basic lesson ideas to check for understanding and then I always include one at the end that's basically a variation of "How well do you understand this topic?" (John)

Beth from Parkway described an example of consultation through a formal survey that she administers to her students after they return from an annual overnight camping trip. The students' responses to the survey help Beth and other teachers to determine which activities to offer or modify for future students. She stated:

One of the things that we do, we do some formal surveying of the students. One time that we do it is when we come back from camp. We have a written survey that they complete. We ask their feedback about activities they've done, what they liked, what they didn't like, what suggestions they would make for improvements. I always give them examples of how their input does change what we do and how because kids last year really didn't think that such-and-such an activity was valuable -- we actually eliminated it because we wanted to make the best use of our time. (Beth)

Table 9. Where Across the *Spectrum* Focus Group Participants Consider Student Voice

Participant	School District	Years of Teaching Experience	Current grade level(s) Taught	LEFT SIDE OF THE SPECTRUM			RIGHT SIDE OF THE SPECTRUM		
				Expression	Consultation	Participation	Partnership	Activism	Leadership
Kim	Parkway	9	5	X	X				
Beth	Parkway	30	5	X	X				
Cindy	Parkway	10	4	X	X				
Laura	Parkway	24	1	X		X			
Carol	Parkway	4	2	X	X	X		X	
Rich	Parkway	16	3	X		X			
Conner	Parkway	9	11	X			X		
Mike	Parkway	14	6-8	X	X			X	
Loren	Parkway	10	6-8	X	X				
Sally	Parkway	23	7	X	X		X		
Linda	Parkway	17	6-8	X	X				
Evan	Parkway	7	8	X	X				
Adam	Lyons Creek	7	9-12	X	X				
John	Lyons Creek	7	3	X	X				
Robin	Lyons Creek	17	5	X			X		
Brian	Lyons Creek	11	10-11	X	X				
Lisa	Lyons Creek	14	5	X		X			
Nancy	Lyons Creek	10	5	X		X			

The data displayed in Table 9 shows the majority of participants consider student voice on the left side of the *Spectrum*, students as data sources. All of the teachers shared at least one example of how they listen to students through expression and 66% of the teachers shared at least one example of how they consult with students. As we moved further to right on the *Spectrum*, the number of student voice activity examples significantly declined. Out of the 5

participants who identified examples of student voice activities on the right side of the *Spectrum* only Carol and Mike shared examples as far to the right as activism. Carol related:

Whenever they had that earthquake in Haiti, we collected supplies, but the kids came up with everything. They came up with what we should collect and why; why we should send materials instead of money, even though it would be easier to send money or do something that way; they made all the posters and the morning announcements; they went around and collected everything and they got really involved in it because it was theirs. But that's the only time I feel like I've really gone to the right side with elementary kids. I definitely stay more towards the left. (Carol)

Mike added:

I'm thinking, too, about how we involved students in our bully prevention program at the school. We went through an initial training and there was a student representative. The students contributed to how we were going to design that program moving forward. And then, even now, seeing how students have been involved in spearheading a peer buddy program. Students pair up with special needs classmates, and that has again for me been the most effective way to have a kid connected to a classroom, building, or an initiative. (Mike)

The findings related to teachers' perceptions of considering student voice across the *Spectrum* were consistent with the literature reviewed. Teachers are interested in hearing from their students and will use the information generated from listening to students in activities such as developing classroom rules or modifying learning activities, but teachers become increasingly hesitant as students' roles begin to transition from consultants to partners and, eventually, leaders (Fletcher, 2012).

4.2 PURPOSES OF CONSIDERING STUDENT VOICE

Each focus group began by asking participants to identify where across the *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* they believed student voice could impact teaching, classroom environments, and schools. After the teachers shared how they listen to students, they were asked to identify their purposes for listening to students. The participants shared that listening to students can help: 1) students; 2) teachers; 3) classrooms; 4) schools; and 5) districts. Figure 11 indicates the extensiveness of how many different focus group members mentioned each of the groups or areas. Figure 12 identifies the frequency that each group or area was referenced across all focus group participants.

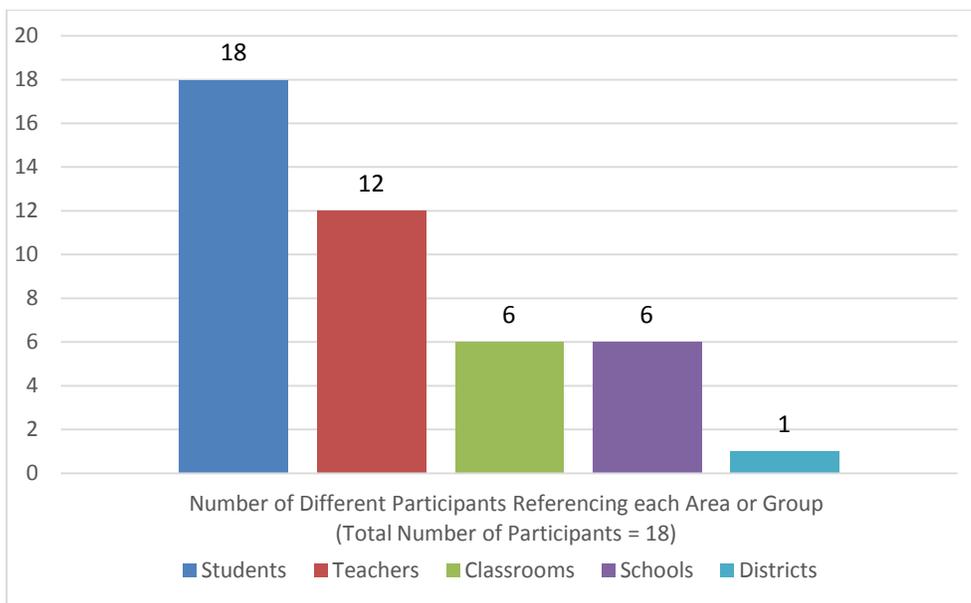


Figure 12. Extensiveness - Positive Impact of Student Voice on a Group or Area

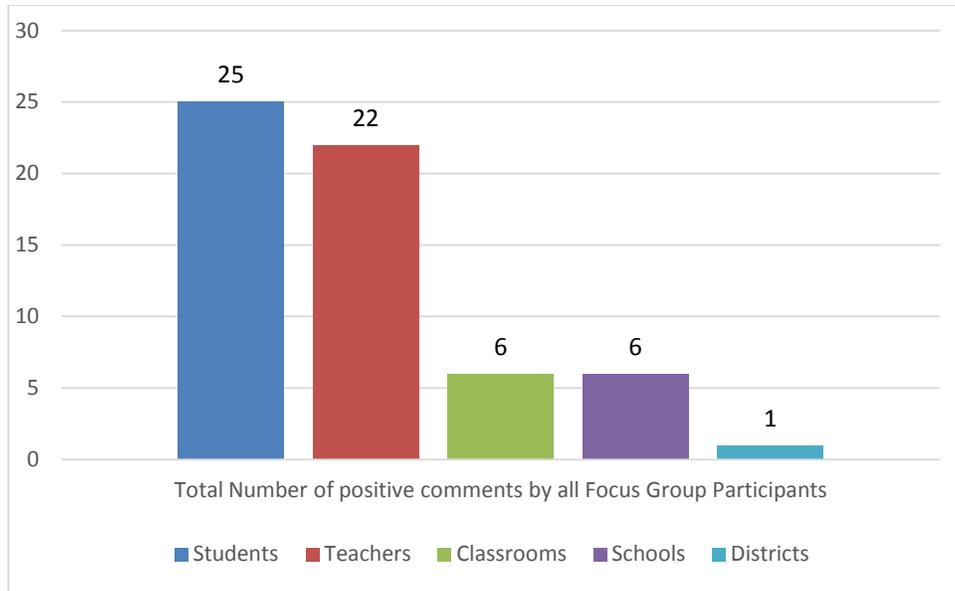


Figure 13. Frequency - Positive Impact of Student Voice on a Group or Area

Nearly all of the participants identified the direct or indirect impact that student voice can have on students and teachers. The following sections will describe how teachers perceive student voice can be used to improve learning experiences for students, instructional strategies for teachers, school climates, and relationships between students and staff and students with their peers.

4.2.1 The Impact of Student Voice on Students

All of the 18 participants described helping students as one of the purposes for considering student voice. Participants identified building rapport, helping students to feel valued, allowing students to take ownership of their learning, personalizing the learning for students, and considering the whole child as the ways student voice can positively impact the educational and social experiences for children.

Hargreaves (2004) noted the impact student voice can have on students. When students believe their voices matter, their relationships with their teachers and classmates improve. Focus group participants shared a number of examples of how listening to students helps build rapport between both teacher and student and student to student. Conner from Parkway described an example of how students' voices resonate at times larger than the teacher's by saying:

I see the students when they start their own conversations about things; they're almost forming a learning community on their own. And oftentimes I see them trying, like with my flipped classroom stuff; they'll try an activity or try a new learning strategy because one of their peers said to do it. And they often don't listen to me because I'm just the teacher but they'll listen to each other. (Conner)

Sharing her perspective on the power of students feeling validated Linda believes:

I think there's always value in eliciting student voice. Why? Because I think kids need to be validated. What do you get when you validate students, you earn their trust. You build that rapport; you build that relationship of a strong learning community. Does that always mean you're going to agree with what their voices say? No. "I hear what you're saying and I will take that into account." Everybody wants to feel like they're heard. I think it's just validating to kids. (Linda)

I could hear the emotion in her voice as she talked about the power of student validation. Phrases such as "learning communities", "trusting environments", and "student/teacher partnerships" were common in the responses from focus group participants. Direct relationships between listening to students and building cultures of mutual trust and respect emerged as a theme throughout all focus groups. Flutter (2007) described positive learning cultures within

schools through a sustained program of student voice initiatives. As students voices were consistently considered, school climates improved.

4.2.2 The Impact of Student Voice on Teachers

The primary purpose of this study was to identify teachers' perceptions of considering student voice as part of their professional development planning process or as part of their evaluations. Through the focus groups, teachers consistently shared their strong beliefs that there is value in listening to students. Phrases such, as “empowers students in their own learning”, “students hold themselves more accountable”, and “listening to students changes the dynamics of the room” were common. I was interested to hear how teachers perceived listening to students could help teachers. Figure 11 supports the finding that teachers identified benefits for themselves in listening to students almost as often as they identified benefits for students. Peterson, Wahlquist, and Bone's (2000) study suggested that teachers were comfortable using student voice feedback to reflect on their teaching and lesson design. The responses from many of the focus group participants support this finding. Loren from Parkway described how listening to unique perspectives can help teachers to improve both the art and science of teaching as:

So I think sometimes as teachers, we get used to a way of doing things and sometimes given a new perspective or something that the students would like to try or something that's current and fresh, definitely livens things up a bit. So definitely having their perspective is new and I think it's beneficial. (Loren)

The following dialogue between two participants highlights the impact that student voice can have on teachers and is an example of how conducting focus groups enhanced this study through engaging conversations. Brian from Lyons Creeks commented after hearing from others:

I agree with the participants before me. I would rank it up there as probably the most important thing that I can know is how my message is being received by the people I'm giving the message to. There's absolutely the most value in figuring out how you can reach those kids and the only way you do that and I don't care what kind of tests you can give them is if you talk to them like you've heard in the people before me, you get to know them a little bit. You hear their voice not even about school but about anything and once their voices are heard, they're much more willing to hear your voice in the classroom and, of course, then I think easier to teach them something. (Brian)

Brian's comments prompted Nancy to respond:

I agree with what everybody has said before me and especially Brian, when he said it's [student feedback] really the most important thing that we use. I mean really, the students are our customers. And so, I want to adjust to make sure that their day is going smoothly and they're getting everything they can out of that day. And they think, as it was mentioned before, when they have that opportunity to share their opinion or give you feedback that shows that we value them as our students. And it just builds that relationship and I think they're more likely to participate and engage in the activities that we have planned for them when they know that their voices are heard and that we will adjust, if necessary. (Nancy)

The findings from this study identified student voice impacting teachers through relationship building, understanding the needs of the students, making adjustments to learning activities, and reflecting on what is working and what may need to be adjusted.

4.2.3 The Impact of Student Voice on Classrooms, Schools, and School Districts

The number of focus group participants mentioning the impact of student voice on classrooms, schools, and school districts was much lower than comments on the impact of student voice on teachers and students. Out of 18 participants only 6 across all focus groups discussed the impact of student voice on classrooms and schools and only 1 participant from Parkway mentioned the impact of student voice on school districts. The following themes emerged around how student voice can impact classrooms and schools: school improvement, student ownership and control over their learning and environment, and rapport building with teachers, administrators, and their peers.

Evan from Parkway described a specific example of how administrators motivated a group of students just by listening to their ideas. The students were eager to share how important and valued they felt as a result of this experience. The assistant moderator noted the enthusiasm in Evan's voice as he described this event as well as smiles and nods of agreement from other participants when he said:

I remember a couple months ago our principal and assistant principal had a luncheon with some students at our school and just asked them questions about what they would change about the school. I remember kids coming back to my homeroom that were in that meeting and they were like, "Wow, that was like awesome! It was so cool to have the

principal and the assistant principal asking us questions like what we would change.”

And I think they felt like they really had a lot of power. And that’s a good thing. (Evan)

As participants shared their perceptions of the impact of student voice on classrooms, schools, and school districts, they often described the importance of change occurring as a result of what students had to say. Comments such as, “what was most important was they took comments to heart and we saw change” and “if they [students] rarely see change then they do not see value in giving their opinions” were shared by many of the participants.

The impact of student voice across a district was only mentioned by one participant. Mike from Parkway described how involving students in the planning of a district initiative and then maintaining student input throughout the implementation process impacted the district’s action planning. He shared:

I’m thinking about how we involved students in our bully prevention program. As we went through that initial training, there were student representatives and their perspectives, I think, contributed to how we designed that program. And then, even now, seeing how students have been involved in kind of spearheading a peer buddy program which is a pairing up of students with special needs with what you’d consider their same-age classmates. So getting students involved was the most effective way to have kids connected to a school or district initiative. (Mike)

4.2.4 Teachers’ Concerns with Student Voice

Although all of the participants shared positive comments related to the potential impact listening to students can have on students, teachers, classrooms, schools, and school districts. A number of concerns were shared. Three themes emerged related to concerns with student voice:

1) students responding truthfully and being fair with their assessments or comments; 2) concerns with the developmental readiness levels of students to comment on teachers; and 3) a belief that the adults are trained and certified to make the decisions, not the students. Table 10 identifies the teachers who expressed some concern with student voice. All of the teachers from Lyons Creek with formal experience in using student voice as part of their 360 degree evaluation plan voiced concern related to the fairness of the process. Robin described her perspective on how teachers often felt during the 360 degree evaluation by stating:

If a little person just got back a spelling test and received 2 out of 10, then it wasn't their fault. It was your fault. I think that many of the elementary teachers, we felt like we were in a lose-lose situation. If they [the students] loved us and if they thought we loved them the most, then they were circling all the "smiley" faces. And if they got yelled at or for other various reasons, they filled out all the "frowny" faces. (Robin)

The majority of participants, 11 out of 18, shared concerns regarding the readiness levels of students. Within those 11, 10 of the teachers were currently teaching elementary aged students. Follman (1995) shared the same concern that students may be biased especially at earlier ages and the earliest age by which students can adequately rate teachers is uncertain. After having time to reflect on the focus group discussions, Carol's response to a follow-up question reinforced this concern and stated:

Overall, my opinion stayed the same. I feel that student voice has a place in expression, consultation, and leadership in the elementary classroom. Participation, partnership, and activism may be more appropriate at the middle and high school levels. (Carol)

Table 10. Concerns with Student Voice

Participant	District	Participant Number	Current grade level(s) Taught	Concern with Honest Fair Feedback	Concern with Developmental Readiness	Teachers, not Students, are Trained and Certified to make the Decisions	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Evaluation (Yes/No)	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Professional Development Planning (Yes/No)
Kim	Parkway	1	5		X	X	No	No
Beth	Parkway	2	5		X	X	No	No
Cindy	Parkway	3	4		X		No	No
Laura	Parkway	4	1	X	X	X	No	No
Carol	Parkway	5	2		X		No	No
Rich	Parkway	6	3	X	X		No	No
Conner	Parkway	7	11				No	No
Mike	Parkway	8	6-8				No	No
Loren	Parkway	9	6-8				No	No
Sally	Parkway	10	7			X	No	No
Linda	Parkway	11	6-8	X	X		No	No
Evan	Parkway	12	8				No	No
Adam	Lyons Creek	13	9-12	X			No	Yes
John	Lyons Creek	14	3	X	X		No	Yes
Robin	Lyons Creek	15	5	X	X		Yes	Yes
Brian	Lyons Creek	16	10-11	X			Yes	Yes
Lisa	Lyons Creek	17	5	X	X		Yes	Yes
Nancy	Lyons Creek	18	5	X	X		No	Yes

A smaller group of teachers, 4 out of 18, expressed the importance of considering teachers' life experiences and educational backgrounds for making final decisions. They

believed that the teacher should be the person ultimately responsible for making the final decisions. Laura supported this belief by stating:

I teach first grade and I think there's a fine line between my roles in developing for them what it means to be a good student. As the adult and as the professional, I am making a lot of the decisions because I know what they need. And then, the other side of the line is saying, "I do want them to have a voice." And so, I've tried to develop over the years some areas where they do have a voice but mostly I make the decisions. (Laura)

The first two questions posed to the focus groups were designed to gain an understanding of how teachers were listening to students, where they identified value in listening to students, and any general concerns related to listening to students. The next set of questions was created to shift participants thinking specifically toward student surveys as a practical way for teachers to gather student input and feedback.

4.3 EXPERIENCES IN CONDUCTING OR PARTICIPATING IN SURVEYS

Student surveys are identified under the consultation column of the *Spectrum for Student Voice Oriented Activity* (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Students serve as data sources by being asked their opinions and providing feedback. In an effort to begin to shift the focus group participants' attentions to student surveys, they were asked to respond to the following question: *What are your personal experiences with conducting or participating in general surveys and were the outcomes positive?* All of the participants shared some level of experience with general surveys either as a participant or as the person administering the survey. Social constructivist theory recognizes that people develop their understandings based upon their life experiences and

interactions. This question was posed in effort to identify the participants' backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives related to general surveys which may have impacted their perspectives toward student surveys.

4.3.1 Positive Experiences with Surveys

The focus group participants shared their experiences with participating in or conducting surveys. The following examples were identified as the various types of surveys the participants have experienced: 1) consumer report information from the general public; 2) rating college professors; 3) sharing feedback to businesses with the hope of receiving some financial reward; 4) commenting on services rendered from businesses; 5) collecting formal or informal surveys from students; and 6) providing feedback to administrators or colleagues after professional development sessions. Table 11 describes the extensiveness of focus group members who shared various survey experiences.

Table 11. Extensiveness - Experiences with General Surveys

Type of Survey Experience	Experience as a Survey Participant	Experience Conducting Survey
Consumer Reports Information	6	0
Providing Feedback to College Professors	2	0
Sharing Feedback Motivated by Financial Reward	4	0
Sharing Feedback – to Describe Extremely Good or Poor Service	8	0
Collecting Formal or Informal Surveys from Students	0	6
Feedback after Professional Development Sessions	18	2

Opportunities for participating in surveys are common with online shopping and 6 of the focus group participants shared positive experiences in using information submitted by other

consumers when making purchasing decisions. These participants found value in considering the input of others related to the quality of the products or service. Robin from Lyons Creek explained the value she has found from online feedback as she states:

I can't pick a contractor without researching it. I wouldn't pick a doctor without researching him or her first. I won't buy a washer without, so I think yes these surveys and the feedback that you get from people's input, their comments to me are terrific. I think that reading the surveys really do help us avoid the hassle. We don't have enough time in the day as it is. So, I do think other people's expertise is so important in just about every part of my life. (Robin)

Providing feedback to college professors or administrators after a course or professional development session was a common experience for all participants. Sally from Parkway discussed the importance of taking the time to provide detailed and honest feedback. Sally has experience as both a presenter and participant during professional development sessions. She values the input from others and as a result takes the time to share her feedback, adding:

One that I really take a lot of time with is my in-service evaluations, which is a form of feedback. But having taught an in-service class, they're very valuable hearing the comments, not just the numbers but the comments. So, I'm always careful to fill those out. (Sally)

Financial gain was also cited as a reason for participating in surveys. If there was a possibility of receiving some monetary reward, 4 participants stated that they were more likely to participate in the survey. As Kim from Parkway stated, "I don't usually participate in them unless they are going to give me something for it."

Nearly half of the participants expressed a desire to complete surveys when the service received was either extremely poor or excellent. This group of participants shared a sense of obligation when service experiences were at either extreme. They wanted to make sure employees were recognized for excellent work and employers were notified when the service was poor. Conner is representative when he states:

I guess in my own experience, the only ones I can say that I really have been careful to fill out are whenever I have a case of an extreme. So, either really poor service that I wanted somebody to know about, or really good service that I felt like that particular employee might get a reward for it from their company. So, I guess otherwise, if it's just what I expected -- I don't ever really think about it. (Conner)

Conducting classroom-based student surveys was discussed by 5 of the participants. The teachers from Lyons Creek were required in the past to conduct student surveys as part of their 360 degree evaluations. All of the participants with experience conducting student surveys found value in the experience, provided they were given some level of control over how the surveys were administered or what questions were posed to the students. They did not find value in general student survey questions that were not directly related to their content areas. Brian from Lyons Creek had experience with the 360 degree evaluation program and recalled a specific piece of feedback that has stuck with him over the past twelve years. The assistant moderator noted that Brian's facial expressions showed signs that he was still visibly moved by this experience. Brian describes:

I do remember getting a couple important things from the survey. I remember, and I think this was my first year of teaching, some student wrote a comment that said I play

favorites, which I tried really hard not to do. And so that stuck with me now twelve years later. (Brian)

Brian's example described the potential impact that one student's voice can have on a teacher. This could serve as a positive or negative experience depending on the student's statement. Moving forward, Brian used this feedback to consider how he treats all of his students. He turned a piece of negative feedback into positive action.

4.3.2 Negative Experiences with Surveys

The study identified a number of concerns that teachers have with the use of general surveys. Pressure to complete a survey, the timing of when the survey is administered, the absence of any change occurring as a result of the survey input, and extreme outliers that impact survey results were shared as the main concerns.

Cindy, Sally, and Linda all expressed concern with the amount of pressure they feel from some companies regarding completing a survey. Sally shared an example of being asked by a car dealer to complete a survey immediately following the purchase of a new car. She stated:

But the one that really bothers me is when you buy a car and then the person who sells you the car, the salesman, begs you to give him 100% rating because that's how the dealership is rated. And I always do because I feel bad for him, but I don't think I should. And I feel like he's gonna lose his job or something if I don't. But that's one survey that really bothers me when somebody tells me what their score should be. (Sally)

This pressure often deters them from completing the survey or from taking their time in order to provide specific feedback. Eric cited a concern with the timing of surveys. If surveys are administered after the service is complete or after the course ends then the participant will not

benefit from any of the changes that occur as a result of the feedback received. Ryan shared a concern with surveys related to his experiences with sharing his thoughts but never seeing any change and said, “I think a lot of teachers do note that each year we need more time in our classrooms before school begins, but it never changes. So, I just kind of give up; they’re not listening to us.” Brian from Lyons Creeks discussed the importance of removing the outliers from data sets. He will often ignore the highest and lowest ratings and focus on the middle range comments and says:

I do read the surveys and stars and things whenever it comes to a product, but what I learned somewhere on some other Internet site is I really only need to read the 2 ½ - 3 star ones because usually those comments give you what’s good about a product, what’s bad about a product. This is where you will find the most valuable information. (Brian)

This portion of the study considered teachers’ general perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of surveys. Throughout the focus group conversations, the concept of value was a recurring term. When teachers perceive the activity will add value to their lives through consumer information, financial gain, improved service, or to improve their practice they are willing to spend the time reviewing and considering the information. However, if the teachers perceived that the survey placed undue pressure on them, the information was biased or invalid, the timing of the results did not provide opportunities for them to experience the impact of the change, or data outliers were distorting the results, they were unlikely to participate or consider the information. All of the participants’ responses to the question: “*What are your personal experiences with conducting or participating in general surveys and where the outcomes positive?*” were pasted into Wordle, an online resource. Wordle creates “word clouds” to visually represent words that have greater prominence and are used most frequently (Feinberg,

student surveys as part of their formal evaluation plans or as part of their professional development planning processes.

The focus groups were asked to respond to the following questions specifically related to student surveys: *What are your personal experiences with conducting or participating in student surveys? Were the outcomes positive?* Table 12 describes the ways in which participants have used student survey information. As described earlier, 3 teachers from Lyons Creek, Robin, Brian, and Lisa have formal experience using student surveys as part of their evaluations. All 6 of the Lyons Creek teachers have formal experience using student surveys as part of their professional development planning processes.

Table 12. Examples of How Participants Have Used Student Survey Information

Participant	District	Participant Number	Current grade level(s) Taught	School Improvement	Classroom Improvements	Information to Guide Instruction	Feedback for Teachers to Improve Practice	Improve Relationships
Kim	Parkway SD	1	5			X		
Beth	Parkway SD	2	5			X	X	
Cindy	Parkway SD	3	4		X	X	X	X
Laura	Parkway SD	4	1	X		X		
Carol	Parkway SD	5	2			X		
Rich	Parkway SD	6	3	X			X	
Conner	Parkway SD	7	11				X	
Mike	Parkway SD	8	6-8			X	X	
Loren	Parkway SD	9	6-8				X	X

Table 12. (Continued)

Participant	District	Participant Number	Current grade level(s) Taught	School Improvement	Classroom Improvements	Information to Guide Instruction	Feedback for Teachers to Improve Practice	Improve Relationships
Sally	Parkway SD	10	7				X	X
Linda	Parkway SD	11	6-8	X		X		
Evan	Parkway SD	12	8			X		
Adam	Lyons Creek SD	13	9-12				X	
John	Lyons Creek SD	14	3			X		
Robin	Lyons Creek SD	15	5				X	
Brian	Lyons Creek SD	16	10-11				X	
Lisa	Lyons Creek SD	17	5	X		X	X	
Nancy	Lyons Creek SD	18	5			X	X	

Using student survey data to guide instructional decisions and to provide teachers with feedback to improve practice were the most common ways the focus group participants have used student survey data. The examples shared were primarily informal activities used to collect feedback from students. None of the surveys described in the literature, such as My Student Survey, The Gallup Student Poll, or the Tripod Survey were referenced by the focus groups. Those specific surveys as described by Potemski, et al. (2011) are designed for students to assess their teachers in areas such as how well they manage the classroom, their understanding of content, and how much the teacher challenged them over the course of the school year. The following examples shared by focus group participants reinforce the fact that the teachers have little to no formal experience with the types of surveys described by Potemski, et al. First, Linda states:

Well, we do run a lot of groups, and there are always surveys at the end of group. I wouldn't say that it is directed maybe to me about me doing my job, but more tailored to

-- was the group helpful to them? So, in a way, yes it is about me, because obviously I am the one setting up the activities and running the group. (Linda)

Beth describes:

We use exit tickets all the time, thumbs up, thumbs down, just to survey how comfortable they feel with their learning. So, I think we use surveys quite a bit, without even realizing we're doing it. I think people think a survey is a formal document, with something maybe you write down. But I think we survey kids much more than we realize, as teachers. (Beth)

Lyons Creek was selected as part of this study because of the teachers' formal experiences with student surveys. Although this formal program is no longer in place and a requirement, all of the teachers in the Lyons Creek study group have continued to use student surveys in some informal manner. Budget cuts were cited as the reason this program was discontinued. Adam describing how he has adjusted his questions to be more specific to his course and lessons, states:

So we've since moved away from 360 degree feedback, and we have something online now which is on our online gradebook. You turn that on and students answer the questions, but they're very open-ended and I think that they're also very generic. They're not really specific, like trade-specific, or course-specific. So it's kind of hard to come up with a gauge. So what I have done in the past and still do currently is either at the end of the unit or at the end of a lesson, or maybe it's at the end of a semester, I have developed different questions. The questions might be specific to that lesson that I want to know more about or they might be just to ask students what they liked and didn't like. (Adam)

Brain has also continued to use student surveys that focus more on the impact his activities and instructional approaches had on the students. His questions ranged from: “Did the lessons make you a better reader or writer?” to “What could I do better as a teacher to make this a better course?” Brain’s experience of the formal survey was not positive. He believes that surveys should be designed with teacher input to provide specific information about that course, not general questions that are often unrelated to teaching and learning.

When it came to the kids I remember personally, mine [scores] were high, but I don’t remember feeling like that was good though. I remember feeling more lucky that it worked out well than I felt like I had done something well. (Brian)

4.4.1 Positive Experiences with Student Surveys

Through the review of literature, this study identified a number of strengths and limitations related to student surveys. Follman (1992) identified that students having extensive daily contact with teachers resulted in unique perspectives and ratings of teacher behaviors as a benefit of conducting surveys. This study identified that teachers are receptive in general to student surveys, provided they are well designed with questions specifically related to the course and teacher. The teachers from Lyons Creek with formal experience in using student surveys stressed the importance of teacher input in the development of the surveys. Brian spoke for others when he said:

So, I guess I feel like most of my feelings about straight surveys that I wasn’t in control of -- was not very positive. Whenever I feel like I’m in charge of the questions and I’m actually getting information that I can use that identify areas of my weakness then I feel like then I’ve had a much more positive experience. (Brian)

Other participants such as Cindy from Parkway shared how listening to students through surveys help her to build relationships with her students. She relates:

I conduct surveys at the end of the nine weeks to see how the students are doing. I ask general questions -- “What are your strengths and weaknesses?” One of the last questions I always put on there is, “What is something I don’t know that you think I should know about you?” So, I feel like when you can give that opportunity for students to let them know -- we really care about you not just your academics, we care about you as a child. That can help them. (Cindy)

The findings from this study are consistent with finding from Aleamoni (1999). If a survey is appropriately administered and well-constructed with input from teachers, then teachers will be more likely to consider the results when planning lessons and delivering instruction.

4.4.2 Concerns with Student Surveys

Participants’ shared a number of concerns with the general use of student surveys including the wording of questions, how students may interpret the questions, fear of favoritism where students would rate a teacher higher because the teacher was “kind”, and concerns with students’ developmental readiness levels. Follman (1992) identified a similar concern that student raters have a lack of knowledge of the full range of teaching requirements and responsibilities, such as curriculum, classroom management, content knowledge, and professional responsibilities.

Teachers shared examples of students reading the same question but interpreting the question differently. Beth described an example from a bully prevention survey where students were asked to comment on the question: “My teacher helps me when I am being bullied.” Beth shared that students would respond “No” to this question, not because the teacher would not help

but because the student was never in a bullying situation. Conner from Parkway described some of his concerns with student surveys based upon the wording of the questions and added:

I think it can be useful if the survey is carefully designed and it's explained to the kids what it means and what you're trying to get out of it. But just to hand them a stock form doesn't mean much to me because the feedback I often get will be -- "I like you" or "I don't like your class" or "You're fun." Where you're asking the students to either make a judgment call or explain what was good or bad about a teaching style, they're not experts on teaching. (Conner)

Follman's (1992) concern with student bias was shared by Nancy from Lyons Creek. She supports the concept of gathering input from students related to lesson design and personal learning experiences but is concerned with any rating related to likeability. She explains:

When the survey is designed by me or as Adam said for a specific lesson, I like the idea. Give me feedback on the pace. Give me feedback on these factors so that I can make adjustments - it's really beneficial. However, if it's more of this general likeability rating scale then it's not necessarily that beneficial in the long run. (Nancy)

This focus group question was designed to gather teacher's general perceptions of considering student survey results. The study identified that teachers are interested in hearing from students primarily as sources of data for helping to understanding individual student's needs and modifying lesson design. Participants believe student surveys should play some role in education and specifically cited the following reasons: 1) improved classroom environments; 2) students are generally very honest and teachers value their feedback; and 3) listening to students may guide teachers in improving their practice. Table 13 is a frequency table listing the

three main reasons why teachers were in favor of integrating students surveys into education. Improving teaching practices was cited most often across all participants.

Table 13. Frequency - Reasons to Support Student Surveys in Education

Reasons Stated Why Student Surveys Should Play a Role in Education	Number of Comments Across All Focus Groups
Improved Classroom Environments	12
Value in Receiving Honest Feedback from Students	14
Improving Teaching Practices	19

Teachers voiced their concerns with general student surveys based upon how the survey was designed and students' abilities to fairly and accurately reflect on a teacher's ability to manage a class or deliver content. The focus group participants specifically cited the following concerns with student surveys in education: 1) fear of how the data would be used and fear of the results; 2) student input is valuable for making instructional decisions but should not impact teachers' evaluations; 3) students are not developmentally capable of accurately commenting on teachers instructional techniques; 4) the process of collecting the data and analyzing the data takes too much time; and 5) how the data is interpreted could result in a negative evaluation. Table 14 is a frequency table listing the main concerns teachers expressed regarding integrating students surveys into education. Fear of how the data could be used, concern with using survey data as part of their evaluation, and students' developmental readiness levels were cited most often across all focus groups.

Table 14. Frequency - Concerns with Integrating Student Surveys in Education

Reasons Stated Regarding Concerns with Using Student Surveys in Education	Number of Comments Across All Focus Groups
Fear	14
Student Surveys Should not be Part of a Teacher's Evaluation	12
Students are not Developmentally Ready	13
The Process take too much Time	8
Differences in how the Data May be Analyzed	3

The next two sections of this study focus specifically on teachers' perceptions of using student survey results as either part of their formal evaluations or professional development planning.

4.5 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT SURVEYS AS PART OF THEIR COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATIONS

To provide a context with which to understand teachers' perceptions for considering student voice as part of teachers' comprehensive evaluations, Act 82 of 2012, the Educator Effectiveness Project, was discussed with the participants. The current configuration of a teacher's evaluation in the state of Pennsylvania is displayed in Figure 14.

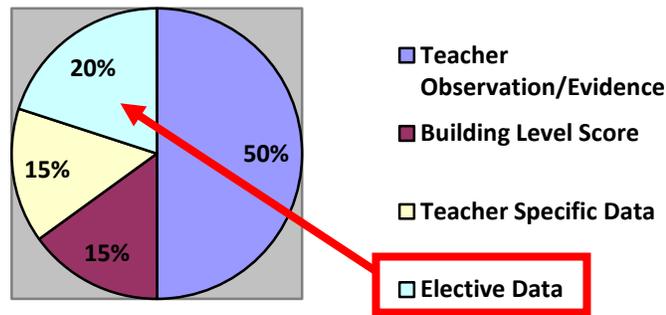


Figure 15. Educator Effectiveness Project - Act 82 of 2012

Participants were asked to share their perspectives for considering student survey data in the development of the elective portion of their evaluations. The 20% elective portion of Act 82 provides teachers and administrators with opportunities to collaborate on Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) that are directly aligned to the learning goals of a course or school/district initiatives (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). Student survey data could guide teachers in determining where to focus their professional development goals. Teachers were asked: *Do you see a place for student survey data in the development of the elective portion (20%) of this model?* Table 15 describes how each participant responded to this question followed by a brief justification for why they were, or were not, in favor of integrating students' survey data into the development of the elective portion of their evaluations.

Table 15. Teachers’ Perceptions of Student Voice in Teachers’ Evaluations

Participant	District	Current grade level(s) Taught	In Favor of Using Student Survey Data in Development of SLO (Yes/No)	Reasoning	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Evaluation (Yes/No)	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Professional Development Planning (Yes/No)
Kim	Parkway	5	No	Not the place for surveys	No	No
Beth	Parkway	5	No	Student readiness concerns	No	No
Cindy	Parkway	4	Yes	If surveys were differentiated for every child	No	No
Laura	Parkway	1	No	Not the place for surveys	No	No
Carol	Parkway	2	No	Fairness	No	No
Rich	Parkway	3	No	Fairness	No	No
Conner	Parkway	11	Yes	If I have input in developing the survey	No	No
Mike	Parkway	6-8	No	Not the place for surveys	No	No
Loren	Parkway	6-8	No	Not the place for surveys	No	No
Sally	Parkway	7	Yes	As part of my professional goal planning	No	No
Linda	Parkway	6-8	No	Risk of how they will be used	No	No
Evan	Parkway	8	No	Could have a negative impact on teaching (teaching to the survey)	No	No
Adam	Lyons Creek	9-12	Yes	As part of my professional goal planning	No	Yes
John	Lyons Creek	3	Yes	As part of my professional goal planning	No	Yes
Robin	Lyons Creek	5	Yes	Should be larger than 20% of the overall evaluation	Yes	Yes
Brian	Lyons Creek	10-11	Yes	Yes with concerns that administrators will not find the time to meet and discuss goals	Yes	Yes
Lisa	Lyons Creek	5	Yes	If teachers work together to develop the goals	Yes	Yes
Nancy	Lyons Creek	5	Yes	If teachers work together to develop the goals	No	Yes

The study found that the teachers with prior formal experience incorporating student survey data into their evaluations or professional development plans were in favor of integrating

student survey data into the development of their SLOs provided they were directly involved in the development of the surveys and the analysis of the results. The teachers from Lyons Creek believed there was value in this information but only when the questions were personalized for each teacher. In the words of Brian from Lyons creek, general student survey questions are “useless”. Adam from Lyons Creeks shared some of the key words from the question that resonated with him when he said:

I think that's great. Looking at the learning objectives here and the personal goals, look at those key words: self-improvement, professional development. I would be using my data to target coursework, strengthen it, and then in turn, ultimately my professional development will just become second nature to that. (Adam)

The teachers from Parkway were more hesitant in considering student survey data into the development of their SLOs. Only 3 of the 12 teachers from Parkway were in favor of this practice. Carol described her concerns related to the fairness of this process by stating:

I wouldn't want to be the person who had to make the survey and try to make it fair and accurate. I think it would be really hard to do that across different grade levels. If there ever was a survey that went into the elective part, I think the questions would have to be framed more around the class than the teacher. I think there still needs to be that line of “I'm the professional, you're the student.” Their voice matters and it matters in the classroom every day and it could matter on something like this, but I don't think they should have that impression that they're evaluating us. (Carol)

Through the review of literature, benefits and limitations for integrating student surveys directly into a teacher's evaluation were reviewed (Burniske & Meibaum, 2012). This study differs from other studies in how student survey data could be integrated into a teacher's

comprehensive evaluation. Instead of student survey results directly impacting a teacher's evaluation, this study explored teachers' perceptions of using student survey data to help guide the development of their student learning objectives. For many of the participants, this indirect method was considered much more effective than directly integrating survey results into evaluations.

4.6 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT SURVEYS AS PART OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLANS

A transition occurred at this point of the research study. Teachers were asked to shift their thinking from student voice in evaluations to student voice in professional development planning. Focus group participants were asked to look back across the *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* in order to answer the following focus group question: *Have you, or would you consider using student voice data when planning your professional development goals if this data were for "your eyes only"?*

The *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment and Learning* (PETAL) model was developed at Oxford Brookes University (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). PETAL was used in the development of the conceptual framework of this study. Based upon the students' input and the team's review, teachers identify areas that could be strengthened through their collective efforts. Colleagues work together to improve teaching practices based upon feedback from administrators, other teachers, and students. This independent or group activity would allow teachers to consider feedback from students while planning their professional goals or professional development options for the school year. Table 16 displays the responses and a

brief description of why teachers were, or were not, in favor of integrating student voice into their individualized professional development planning processes.

Table 16. Teachers’ Perceptions of Student Voice in Professional Development

Participant	District	Current grade level(s) Taught	In Favor of Using Student Voice Data in the PD Process (Yes/No)	Reasoning	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Evaluation (Yes/No)	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Professional Development Planning (Yes/No)
Kim	Parkway	5	Yes	Good way to reflect on the impact you are having	No	No
Beth	Parkway	5	Yes	Feedback from students is valuable	No	No
Cindy	Parkway	4	Yes	Feedback from students is valuable	No	No
Laura	Parkway	1	Yes	Valuable in professional development planning	No	No
Carol	Parkway	2	Yes	Valuable in professional development planning	No	No
Rich	Parkway	3	Yes	Feedback from students is valuable	No	No
Conner	Parkway	11	Yes	Valuable for goal setting	No	No
Mike	Parkway	6-8	No	Concern for how younger students would be able to provide feedback	No	No
Loren	Parkway	6-8	Yes	Valuable for goal setting	No	No
Sally	Parkway	7	Yes	Valuable in professional development planning	No	No
Linda	Parkway	6-8	Yes	Feedback from students is valuable	No	No
Evan	Parkway	8	Yes	Valuable for goal setting	No	No
Adam	Lyons Creek	9-12	Yes	As part of my professional goal planning and important to work with other teachers	No	Yes
John	Lyons Creek	3	Yes	As part of my professional goal planning and important to work with other teachers	No	Yes
Robin	Lyons Creek	5	Yes	As part of my professional goal planning and important to work with other teachers	Yes	Yes
Brian	Lyons Creek	10-11	Yes	Valuable in professional development planning	Yes	Yes
Lisa	Lyons Creek	5	Yes	As part of my professional goal planning and important to work with other teachers	Yes	Yes
Nancy	Lyons Creek	5	Yes	Valuable for goal setting	No	Yes

Nearly all of the participants were in favor of considering student voice in the professional development planning process. The majority of teachers from Lyons Creek, 4 out of 6, identified the importance of working collaboratively with colleagues. Similar to the PETAL program developed at Oxford Brookes University, teachers shared that they would be eager to collect student input and share the input with their colleagues to collectively plan goals and ultimately improve programs (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). Adam and John discussed how they would like to use student voice data to collaborate both with administrators and colleagues. This brief dialogue is another example of the impact of focus group interactions. Comments or anecdotal stories from one participant often prompted others to further elaborate or respond:

Adam: I would want at least it to be for my eyes and shared with a few other people as well, no matter what hierarchy of administration they may be. Just so I can work with somebody else to get their ideas.

John: Yeah Adam, I agree and absolutely I would use it - just thinking about my own experience trying to become a little bit more tech savvy. Students have voiced their opinions about the lessons that they remembered the most or that they enjoyed the most were technology based. So I'd go out to professional development or I'd go across to Nancy's room and ask her to help. Hopefully things got better for the kids and better for me as well.

The teachers from Parkway School District were equally optimistic about using student voice data for developing professional goals. Kim maintained that she would be comfortable with sharing her feedback with others. She would encourage her principal to review the feedback as well. Kim believes there is value in a strong collaborative learning community and shared.

I feel like it's a good way to reflect. It's a good way to see where the students felt that you had strengths and weaknesses. I would even be okay with my principals reviewing the results. I feel like it's okay to kind of say, "You know what - I can understand the students' responses were maybe in regards to something that they just didn't understand why I did what I did, and that's okay." I would know that in my mind and I'd be able to kind of take that with a grain of salt. But I really feel like it would be interesting to see their perspective and it would be good in the planning process for me, the following year or the following unit, depending on when it's done. But I feel like it would definitely be beneficial to be able to help me to create better goals, or maybe even change my goals, based on their responses. (Kim)

Although the vast majority of perspectives were very positive related to integrating student voice into the professional planning process, a few participants voiced concerns. The following concerns were shared: 1) most students are not developmentally ready to provide feedback to teachers; 2) students may have difficulty interpreting the questions; 3) anonymous data is invalid; and 4) there is a lack of trust with some administrators.

Mike from Parkway shared his concerns with the developmental readiness levels of students, particularly primary students and concerns with how one survey could meet the needs of all teachers. As he explained:

I don't know how you could ask a first grader, "Hey how was Miss So and So's classroom management this year for you?" I've never seen one [survey] that would match and meet all of those things where every teacher would get feedback that would be useful to drive professional development. (Mike)

This minority view was not challenged, most likely because other participants mentioned student readiness level concerns at various points throughout the focus group discussions.

As the participants reflected back upon the *Spectrum* in considering how to integrate student voice into their professional development planning processes, they continued to consider students as data sources rather than leaders of change. Teachers were interested in hearing what their students have to say and willing to collaborate with colleagues and sometimes administrators to analyze the results in effort to modify their practices.

4.6.1 Teachers' perspectives of how other groups may respond to student voice

In an effort to gain an understanding of the focus group participants' perceptions of how they believe other key stakeholders may respond to the idea of integrating student voice into the professional development process, the question was posed: *What do you think the following groups would say about the use of student survey data as part of teachers' professional development planning: 1) Teachers' Associations, 2) Administrators, and 3) School Boards.*

Table 17 describes focus group members' perspectives. Kim, Cindy, and Sally discussed how having this data could help identify needs and guide the choices offered to teachers during professional development sessions. They also believed that the data from students' voices could reinforce teachers' areas of strength. Carol and Linda believed teachers' associations would favor considering student voice as long as teachers were actively involved in the development of the data collection tools and the analysis of the results.

Table 17. Teachers’ Perceptions of what Teachers’ Unions may say about Student Voice in Professional Development

Participant	District	Current grade level(s) Taught	Potential Favorable Statements from Teachers’ Associations	Potential Negative Statements from Teachers’ Associations
Kim	Parkway SD	5	I think they would be okay with it because it would provide them will data to plan appropriate in-service sessions.	If it were a requirement I do not think teachers’ associations would be interested.
Beth	Parkway SD	5	Teachers’ unions are very student centered and would be in favor of doing things to help kids.	Teachers’ unions may not put much value in this depending on the age of the child.
Cindy	Parkway SD	4	If you have useful data – why not?	
Laura	Parkway SD	1		Professional development should be directed by the curriculum not student-directed.
Carol	Parkway SD	2	If teachers were given a choice I believe they would embrace this practice.	
Conner	Parkway SD	11	As long as it is used for the right reason – professional development.	Teachers may be nervous about what could be the next step.
Mike	Parkway SD	6-8	If it could positively impact teacher performance then I think they would be for it.	Definitely not if it were part of an evaluation.
Sally	Parkway SD	7	As long as the data is only for the teachers to use.	
Linda	Parkway SD	6-8	Potential for building professional development sessions around the unique needs of teachers.	Some could look at it as a witch hunt.
Robin	Lyons Creek SD	5	With all of the stakeholders having an equal part in the planning and development it could be a win for everyone.	
Lisa	Lyons Creek SD	5	I think it would be a win for everyone as long as it is just one piece of the bigger puzzle.	

Although 9 out of 18 focus group participants shared positive comments related to their beliefs of how teachers’ unions may respond to the idea of student voice integration, when asked the direct question, “Yes or no, do you think teachers’ unions would support the concept of integrating student voice into your districts’ professional development program?”, 17 out of 18 participants answered “No” (Figure 15). Focus group participants shared a number of concerns related to how they perceived teachers’ unions would respond. The following themes emerged:

1) a concern that the data would be used in teachers' evaluations; 2) concerns related to students' developmental readiness levels in understanding the questions and answering truthfully; 3) concerns with how the survey is developed and if teachers would be involved in the design of the survey; 4) concerns with the amount of time it would take to administer the survey and analyze the results; and 5) fear and uncertainty of how the data may be used.

The same direct question was asked but this time administrators and school boards replaced teachers unions, "Yes or no, do you think administrators and school boards would support the concept of integrating student voice into your districts' professional development program?" Teachers' perspectives differed significantly. Cindy and Rich believed administrators and school board would "jump all over this". Rich stated, "I think administrators and school boards, especially administrators, are always looking for teachers to develop professionally. I think it's just a way to help them improve." Cindy commented, "I feel that administrators and perhaps school boards would jump all over this and perhaps be very quick to say, 'Yes, we should do this. This is very important.'" Figure 15 depicts the clear difference between teachers' perceptions of how they believe teachers' unions would respond to student voice in professional development compared to administrators and school boards.

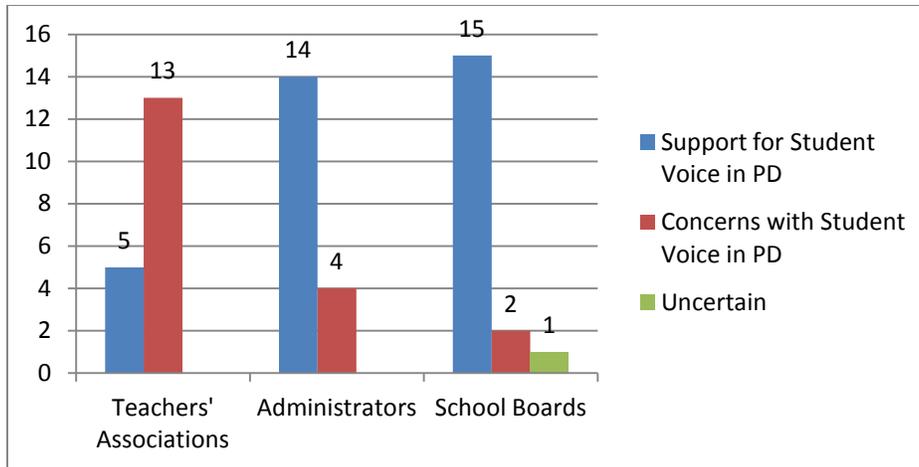


Figure 16. Teachers' perspectives of how other groups may respond to student voice

4.7 THE IMPACT OF THE FOCUS GROUP ON TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT VOICE

The final two questions were designed to capture teachers' overall perspectives related to the value of student voice and to gain additional understandings of teachers' perceptions of the role they believe student voice should play in evaluations and professional development planning. After hearing from their colleagues throughout the focus group, I was interested to learn if their thinking or perceptions were influenced by the focus group conversations. Simon (1999) identifies focus groups as an appropriate research design for gathering participants' perceptions of a topic or idea. The structure of focus groups provided participants with opportunities to influence each other by responding to ideas and comments during the discussions. These findings would support the importance of engaging in conversations about the impact of student voice with teachers and other educators.

The participants were asked to once again review the *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* and answer focus group question #8: *Is there a place where you believe student voice should stop or is there a place where students should no longer have a voice?* After each participant was given an opportunity to respond to this question, they were asked to consider one final question: *Has your thinking related to student voice as part of a teacher's evaluation or professional development planning process changed at all because of this discussion?*

4.7.1 Is there a place where student voice should stop?

The *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* was integrated into the conceptual framework of this study to identify where teachers find value in listening to students. The analysis of the first question posed to the focus groups found that all teachers value student voice. Every teacher shared at least one activity that integrates student voice into teaching and learning. However, out of the 18 participants, only 5 shared examples of how they consider student voice through partnership, activism, or leadership. The majority of teachers consider student voices as data sources (left side of the *Spectrum*) but were less likely to identify students as leaders of change (right side of the *Spectrum*) (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012).

As the focus group participants began to share their perspectives on where they believed student voice should stop, a number of themes emerged. The teachers consistently expressed the belief that student voice should continue across the *Spectrum* and 15 of the 18 participants stated clearly that they did not believe student voice should stop at any point. Linda commented, "I can't say there is ever a place where a student's voice should stop. I think the more ownership kids have, the more success they are going to have." Carol, a second grade teacher, expressed value in listening to students across the *Spectrum* but voiced some concern with moving too far

to the right when topics such as curriculum and instruction are being discussed, especially with younger students. She explained:

Okay, I just want to make sure we were not talking about them [students] making decisions about curriculum or anything academic. So if we are talking about activities and organizations, I think there's room for student voice across the whole continuum. We do however tend to stay more towards the left in elementary school and we see more examples on the right [of the *Spectrum*] in high school. (Carol)

Brian, an 11th grade English teacher, did not believe student voice should stop at any point across the spectrum but did express the need for some level of “quality control” and adult oversight. He stated, “I don't feel as though there is anything that I would shut out from students on the *Spectrum* but as far as leadership and activism there is a quality control element that an expert [the teacher] has to come in to provide boundaries and guidance.” He shared an example of when students planned and organized an assembly but without teacher oversight and input some of the ideas that the students were planning to implement could have caused significant problems.

Although the majority of teachers believed students voices should continue across the *Spectrum*, the following concerns were discussed: 1) students should not be involved in the budgeting process; 2) taking the time to listen to students and analyze their feedback would be a challenge based upon tight schedules; 3) some students are not developmentally ready to participate in activities especially on the right side of the *Spectrum*; 4) some decisions are most appropriate for adults; and 5) student voice should not be part of a teacher's evaluation. In effort to visualize the frequency of each concern, Table 18 was developed.

Table 18. Frequency - Concerns with Student Voice across the *Spectrum*

Concern	Number of Comments Across All Focus Groups
Students should not be part of the budgeting process	1
The process would take too much time	1
Some students are not developmentally ready to participate in some of the activities	14
Some decisions are appropriate for adults only	7
Student voice should not be part of a teacher's evaluation	10

The developmental readiness levels of students and students' input into teachers' evaluations were identified as the top two concerns from the study group participants. Mike stated his apprehension with using student voice to evaluate teachers and expressed:

I think if there's personal input on teacher performance, then that's where it should stop. I think if there's impersonal feedback that leads to instructional changes or professional development, then there is a place for student voice. But I think as far as the evaluation process, I think that's probably where it should end. (Mike)

Evan related a personal story concerning students providing anonymous feedback to a coach at the end of the season and the impact this experience had on the coach and him. The assistant moderator noted the impact this story had on other participants. Expressions of concern and sadness were on the faces of all participants. Evan recalled:

I'm reminded of a situation back when I was in 8th grade and I played baseball. Coaching, I think, can have a lot of parallels to teaching. At the end of the season, the coach gave the team a survey to evaluate his effectiveness and how he did as a coach. They were anonymous. The kids did not like the coach, for the most part. I would say we had 25 kids on the team; maybe 23 of them did not like the coach. They were honest,

brutally honest in the survey. I will never forget walking out of the locker room that day and the coach was reading them and he was bawling. It was just a scary sight to see. Someone who you thought could never be crying or emotional because you just don't view them in that way. I could see that happening to a teacher. (Evan)

4.7.2 Influence of focus group discussions on teachers' perceptions of student voice

Focus groups were selected as the method for collecting information related to teachers' perceptions of student voice because focus groups provide high levels of participant contribution, opportunities for interactions between the participants, and the non-verbal cues to identify levels of intensity (Sagoe, 2012). All of these strengths contributed to the rich data collected in this study. As the focus groups progressed, participants became visibly more comfortable and began to engage in conversations. Comments from one participant were often referenced by others. The final question was developed to determine if engaging in conversations related to student voice impacted teachers' initial perceptions.

Of the 18 participants, only 1 teacher answered no to the question: *Has your thinking related to student voice as part of a teachers' evaluation or professional development changed at all because of this discussion?* Mike, a special education teacher, spoke for others when he said that he never considered some of the student voice activities discussed during the focus group and is now thinking about ways he can listen to students who literally do not have a voice. He explained:

I had never considered an evaluation procedure and so this was the first that I had been exposed to it. In that sense, I think I would value it [student voice] in terms of professional development. That's something that I had never considered and it's

something that I wish I had looked into a little bit more. This is kind of an aside, but I'm thinking of our students with significant needs, communication needs, that don't have a voice – how do we give them a voice in this process? (Mike)

Carol shared that the interactions and discussions from the focus group encouraged her to consider opportunities for where she can integrate student voice further to the right on the *Spectrum*. She shared:

I still feel the same that it [student voice] would be really hard to put into an evaluation and probably wouldn't be wise. But it could be good for your own professional development. This discussion has me looking at the other categories and thinking about my kids. I think Kim mentioned that you can integrate different opportunities across the *Spectrum* even for younger students depending on the event. Keeping that in the back of my mind, I want to remember that even though my students are young, they could participate in activities on the right side of the *Spectrum*. I do not want to forget about these options just because of their age. (Carol)

During a follow-up conversation, Robin from Lyons Creek shared the impact that the focus group conversation had on her perception of integrating student voice into her classroom. As a result of this experience, she reinstated a process for collecting feedback from her students. The focus group reminded her of the value of listening to students whether we are listening to gather data or providing students with opportunities to lead. She described:

I think because our 360 degree evaluation went away, there have been a few years that we haven't asked the students or I haven't asked the students for their true feelings. I brought that back in a non-threatening way. For me, for my partners [students], talking to

my partners about what is working and what is not I do think it's valid. And I think it has been a missing puzzle piece. (Robin)

4.8 DO PERCEPTIONS DIFFER BASED UPON PAST, FORMAL EXPERIENCES WITH CONSIDERING STUDENT VOICE?

The final research question was designed to determine how participants' responses compared and contrasted based upon their past experiences with student voice integration. The teachers from Parkway School District did not have any formal experiences with integrating student voice into their evaluations or professional development plans. Through the 360 Degree Feedback Model, teachers from Lyons Creek had formal experiences. Table 19 identifies that 3 of the 6 Lyons Creek teachers had formal experiences with evaluations and the other 3 teachers had formal experiences with integrating student voice into their professional development planning processes.

Table 19. Formal Experiences with Student Voice

Participant	District	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Evaluation (Yes/No)	Formal Experience with Using Student Voice as Part of Professional Development Planning (Yes/No)
Adam	Lyons Creek	No	Yes
John	Lyons Creek	No	Yes
Robin	Lyons Creek	Yes	Yes
Brian	Lyons Creek	Yes	Yes
Lisa	Lyons Creek	Yes	Yes
Nancy	Lyons Creek	No	Yes

4.8.1 The impact of past experiences on teachers' perceptions of student voice

Teachers across both school districts expressed the value of listening to students across the *Spectrum*. When asked to share specific examples of how they are listening to students, the majority of teachers from both districts shared examples on the left side of the *Spectrum* (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Only 4 out of 12 participants from Parkway and 1 out of 6 participants from Lyons Creek identified activities on the right side of the *Spectrum*.

Common, positive, “left side of the *Spectrum*” themes emerged from both districts. Examples included improving the classroom environment through rapport building between students and teachers, increased opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning, and teachers’ understanding of the whole child. Through student voice, teachers better understand the learning modalities, social/emotional needs, and academic abilities of their children. Nancy from Lyons Creek shared how listening to students impacted students academically and socially and stated:

By listening to students I learned that these five kids didn’t understand - they had a challenge with this particular language arts concept today. So then the next day I would pull that small group to kind of touch base with them. And if we saw that there was like a social issue or something based on the reflection that they made at the end of the day, then we would address that issue the following day. (Nancy)

Teachers’ perceptions of student voice from both school districts were not all positive. Teachers voiced concern with student voice being a fair way to measure teacher effectiveness, they shared concerns with students’ developmental readiness levels, and participants from both districts believed that decisions related to teaching and learning should be made by adults, not children. Beth from Parkway commented, “Whether they are kids or adults, we are collecting

their input but this does not necessarily mean things are going to change, the adult makes the final decision.”

4.8.2 The impact of past experiences on teachers’ perceptions of student voice in evaluations

When asked to discuss their perceptions for integrating student voice into the evaluation process, differences emerged between the two districts. All 6 of the teachers from Lyons Creek were in favor of considering student voice in the development of the elective data portion of their evaluation compared to only 3 of the 12 Parkway teachers. The elective data is identified through student learning objectives that are created by teachers and approved by administrators (Pennsylvania Bulletin, 2013). The focus group question asked teachers’ to identify their perceptions of using formal student surveys as a resource for guiding the development of their student learning objectives.

Brian from Lyons Creek believed there was value in sitting down with an administrator to discuss his students’ feedback, “the idea that I could take my survey results, sit down with an administrator, talk about areas that I could improve and if they actually care to make me a better teacher, then I’m all for that.” Lisa from Lyons Creek shared how student voice data could positively impact conversations between teachers and administrators, “If you are bringing that kind of data to an administrative meeting at the end of the year to determine your elective score that could be a good way to go, if [the data] is clear and concrete.” The Lyons Creek teachers identified a number of reasons for supporting the integration of student voice into their evaluations, including identifying professional growth needs, increasing teacher and

administrator professional collaboration, teachers taking ownership of their evaluations, and gathering feedback directly related to their teaching.

Parkway teachers identified a number of concerns with considering student survey data in the development of their student learning objectives, such as: 1) concern with students' abilities to fairly assess their content knowledge and instructional strategies; 2) a concern that student input is not an appropriate measure of their effectiveness; 3) students are often not developmentally ready to provide input about their teachers; and 4) the design of the survey may confuse some students leading to unintentional results. Mike from Parkway shared his concerns about the survey design and related:

I think if we were to use a survey and allow student input that it would have to be carefully designed. And it would have to be objective. It would have to be objective feedback because I don't think that students are qualified to provide subjective feedback on teachers it could turn into them playing favorites. (Mike)

Sally from Parkway shared her concerns with using student survey data as part of the evaluation due to the age of the students, reliability of the survey, and state regulations by stating:

If you're asking if a survey from students would be acceptable, I think absolutely not. For several reasons -- it depends on the age of the child. It depends on what level you're teaching whether you're teaching a higher level course or a lower level course. And my experience with the state of Pennsylvania is that it would be a mandated, one of a kind survey that everyone would have to use and I do not trust the Pennsylvania Department of Education to create a valuable, reliable survey. (Sally)

4.8.3 The impact of past experiences on teachers' perceptions of student voice in professional development planning

The integration of student voice data into the design of independently identified and developed professional goals was widely supported across both school districts. The *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment and Learning* (PETAL) model developed at Oxford Brookes University was presented to the focus group participants. PETAL integrates student feedback and peer collaboration into the professional development process (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). All but 1 of the 18 participants believed that student voice should be considered in professional development planning. Teachers across both school districts identified the following reasons for supporting a model similar to PETAL in their district: 1) a well developed student survey could provide valuable information to teachers; 2) student feedback can improve teachers' abilities to help students; and 3) student feedback can guide professional development planning for individual teachers, schools, or entire districts.

Nancy from Lyons Creek identified the potential impact on her classroom management as a result of student input by explaining:

I mean especially if it were for my eyes only and giving me feedback on my professional goals. I think it's going to help me to improve. It goes back to what everyone around this table has been saying - we utilize these tools because we have a desire to grow and to get better. Maybe something related to classroom management keeps coming up, I can learn from it and work to improve. (Nancy)

Laura from Parkway shared how she can identify ways to better support her students through student feedback and described:

I often will ask students after literacy stations, “Well, how did this go? What worked, what didn’t work?” They are honest. They are on. They know. “Well, how can we change it?” As a result of what they say I may learn that I need to do some more research on how to do literacy stations or whatever it is. (Laura)

The teachers from Lyons Creek and Parkway identified the value of listening to students. They believe student voice can impact both the climate of the classroom, the learning experiences for students, and their own personal growth.

4.8.4 Summary

This study revealed several important findings related to teachers’ perceptions of considering student voice as part of their comprehensive evaluations or professional growth plans. A three part conceptual framework for this study was referenced when developing the focus group questions. Questions were asked first about teachers’ perceptions of integrating student voice into teaching in learning, then about considering student voice, specifically student surveys, as part of a teachers’ evaluation program, and finally about considering student input as part of the professional development planning process.

The findings revealed that regardless of teachers’ past formal or informal experiences with integrating student voice into teaching and learning, their content area focus, teaching experiences, or the grades they are teaching, teachers value student voice. They believe student input can help them to better support students, improve classroom and school climates, and guide their professional development decisions.

The concept of integrating student voice, and more specifically student survey data into a teacher’s evaluation process was met with some resistance from teachers without any formal

experience in using student input as part of their evaluations. Teachers were concerned with fairness, students' readiness levels, survey designs, and how the data may be used.

A strong desire to continuously improve their crafts was shared by all of the teachers in this study. They used phrases such as “teaching is my passion” and “this is my life’s work, students get excited and I get excited” to describe their desire to find new and better ways to help children. Teachers from across both districts shared their interest and willingness to consider student voice while planning their professional goals or selecting professional development opportunities. The potential impact that these and other findings could have on future research or policy and practice implications will be discussed in the following chapter.

5.0 DISCUSSION

This study was conceived through my personal experiences with teachers taking the time to not only listen to students but to modify their practices based upon what they heard. The results of those changes were often positive for the teachers, students, and schools. My goal was to discover opportunities to further integrate students' voices into K-12 schools. I believe there is value in listening to students. How we gather their input will be an important aspect of the process but there is a place for student voice in helping teachers, administrators, and school boards improve the learning experiences for students. However, prior to considering any practice and policy implications, it is my belief that understanding teachers' perceptions of considering student voice in the teaching and learning process is important in effort to develop a trusting partnership with teachers. As administrators, we must listen to our teachers as we expect our teachers to listen to our students. This research study was guided by a central question: *What are teachers' perceptions of considering student voice as part of their comprehensive evaluations and/or professional growth plans?*

Through the review of literature, I found that over the past 40 years evaluation models have evolved very slowly. The traditional single observation by an administrator followed by a brief discussion related to general teaching and classroom management strategies have been in place for decades (Alexandrov, 1989). Educators continue to pursue ways of measuring effective teaching in effort to replicate best practices. In the state of Pennsylvania, Act 82 of

2012, the Educator Effectiveness Project, introduced some additional components for measuring teacher effectiveness. In addition to the teacher/administrator observations, student growth, achievement, and *elective data* were included (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). It was within the *elective data* section of this evaluation system that this study was further refined. If teachers and administrators could “elect” the data, would teachers be willing to consider feedback from the people that they spend the most time with each year, the students? The concept of including student input into a teacher’s evaluation has begun to emerge in states such as Colorado, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Utah, and Pennsylvania (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). A number of studies were reviewed to understand how integrating student voice into teachers’ evaluations has changed and improved pedagogy. The studies revealed that in most cases teachers’ perceptions of this data determined how or if changes to instructional practices were considered (Aleamoni, 1999).

Although this study references metrics for identifying teacher effectiveness, it is not a metrics study. This study identifies how teachers can construct meaning for improving learning experiences for their students through student voice activities, collaboration between teachers and administrators through developmental evaluations, and cyclical professional development programs that include both student and teachers’ voices.

5.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social constructivism, the theory that the world is without meaning prior to one’s experiences, aligned directly with this study providing the overarching context to the conceptual framework. Teachers’ perceptions of student voice were likely established based upon past experiences with

integrating student voice into educational practices. A study on teachers’ perceptions of considering student voice is important because it identifies teachers’ beliefs, concerns, and possible misconceptions. Once identified, the findings may guide additional research or encourage policy and practice recommendations.

In order to understand teachers’ perceptions of student voice in general and then specifically related to evaluations and professional development plans, three program models were linked and combined (Figure 16).

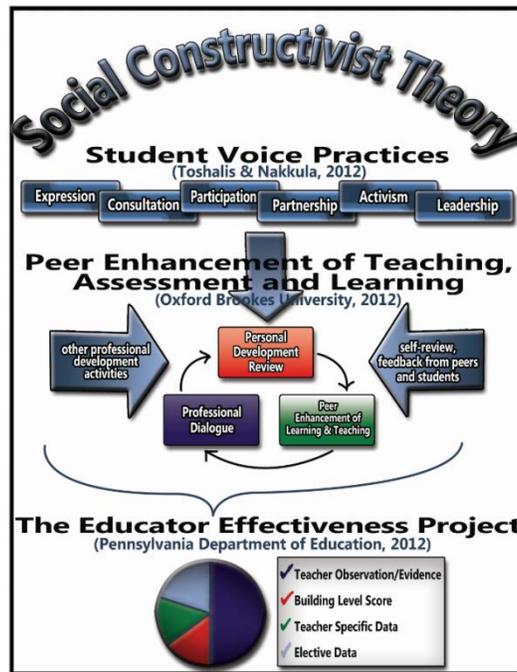


Figure 17. Conceptual Framework

Toshalis and Nakkula’s *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* (2012), the top part of the conceptual framework, provided the context to understanding teachers’ general views of where student voice should be considered across a continuum. The continuum ranged from students as data sources to students as leaders of change. The *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment, and Learning* (PETAL) model from Oxford Brookes University, the middle part of

the conceptual framework, was used to understand teachers' perceptions of integrating student voice into their professional development programs (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). The bottom section of the conceptual framework, the *Educator Effectiveness Project* from the Pennsylvania Department of Education was introduced to identify teachers' perceptions of how student voice could or should be integrated into their evaluation programs (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012).

The major finding of this study was that social constructivist theory did ground teachers' perceptions of considering student voice in teaching and learning and as part of their comprehensive evaluations or professional growth plans. Opportunities were identified for student voice integration within each component of the framework. I believe student voice is often diminished, if considered at all, in our current system of accountability and effectiveness measurements. The *Spectrum* provides teachers with a reference for determining not only how they consider student voice but how those opportunities may enhance the learning experiences for students. Teachers will construct their understandings of the influence that the continuum of activities have on students based upon their intentional experiences of integrating student voice across the *Spectrum*.

Through my experiences, most professional development programs are designed around school or district initiatives or state and/or federal mandates. Rarely does student voice drive professional growth planning. In this study, I discovered the potential for teachers and administrators to construct their understandings for professional development needs through the combination of self-reflection, collegial input, and student voice.

Traditional evaluation programs infrequently engage teachers in the process and rarely consider student voice (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013). In this study, I suggest that administrators and

teachers work together to construct their understandings of what students are saying and integrate those constructs into teachers' developmental evaluation programs. In this model, student voice serves as a resource for developing appropriate student learning objectives, not a direct metric for rating effectiveness.

Within all three components of this study's conceptual framework, opportunities for adults to construct meaning for improving the teaching and learning process exist through interacting with, and listening to students. Each component within this study places greater control into the hands of teachers and encourages collaboration among teachers, administrators, and students. I believe building this culture of trust and collaboration may alleviate some of the anxiety associated with accountability focused, evaluation measures.

5.2 INTEGRATING STUDENT VOICE ACROSS A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

Student voice is a term often used interchangeably with student participation, student agency, or student action. The literature reviewed identified a number of definitions and interpretations for the term student voice that encompassed everything from students as data sources to students as change agents (Anderson, 2011). A common definition of student voice was determined so that a consistent starting point in probing teachers' perceptions of the general use of student voice in education was established. The term student voice was 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* (Gentile, 2014).

I used the *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* (as presented in Figure 2) developed by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) to understand teachers' perceptions of the value of student voice and to decide at what point across the *Spectrum* student voice should stop. My findings indicated that all teachers, regardless of certification areas, grade levels taught, or teaching experience find value in listening to students. Although they expressed value in listening to students, rarely did specific examples of student voice activities cross the threshold from students as data sources to students as leaders of change. Out of the 18 participants, only 4 teachers described examples of how they partner with students or encourage students to advocate for change.

These findings may indicate that teachers have not considered students as leaders or partners for change but rather as formative assessment resources for understanding students' instructional needs or guiding lesson planning. Teachers' perceptions of how to consider student voice could be a result of lack of experiences with considering students as partners, activists, or leaders. Models similar to the *Spectrum* may help teachers identify potential extensions of student voice activities. All of the teachers across both school districts identified specific examples of how they encourage student expression and the majority of teachers consult with their students. These common approaches for eliciting student voice are taught in pre-service training programs. As a result, teachers are very comfortable integrating these levels of student voice into their daily instruction. Formative assessments examples such as "exit tickets", "thumbs up/thumbs down", and "student conferences" were often cited by teachers as ways they listen to students. I do not believe teachers are intentionally suppressing students' voices, the finding are more likely a result of lack of experience with integrating student voice or concerns with relinquishing some control.

Additional professional development opportunities about how to listen to students may assist teachers in identifying other options for integrating student voice beyond expression and consultation. The *Spectrum* could be used as an instructional resource. Generating developmentally appropriate activities for listening to students across the *Spectrum* could be followed by learning how to integrate those activities into practice. In addition, teachers may need support and reinforcement from administrators to assist them in transitioning from the classroom leader to the classroom facilitator. As a result, students' roles may begin to transition from sources of information to collaborators and advocates for change. Through a post focus group follow-up question, Evan from Parkway reinforced this need when he said:

I think many teachers will need guidance or education on how to best incorporate student voice into their practice. I think student voice is more contemporary and many teachers may feel uncomfortable incorporating it since they weren't taught how to and it wasn't integral to their own educational background. (Evan)

5.3 WHO BENEFITS FROM STUDENT VOICE?

Research supports a direct correlation between student engagement in the learning process and student achievement (Hargreaves, 2004). As students become more engaged in the learning process, they take additional ownership of not only their learning but the environment in which they learn. As students and teachers partner, the general culture and climate of the school changes, students are treated differently and they become ready to participate actively and responsibly in matters of high importance and consequence. Focus group participants shared

their perspectives on the value of soliciting student voice across the *Spectrum*. Benefits for both students and teachers were identified.

5.3.1 Benefits for students

An analysis of the extensiveness of teachers' perceptions of the impact of student voice on students found all 18 teachers in favor of considering student voice to help children. The teachers understood that listening to students helps build rapport, trust, student leadership, and, directly or indirectly, student achievement. As Anderson (2011) suggests, when students believe their teachers value their input and make changes as a result of their input, they begin to take ownership of their learning. Evan from Parkway described the potential impact that listening to students can have on students by stating:

Consistently giving students a voice has a really strong, positive impact. Student voice helps students to take ownership - not only in their learning, but also in the climate and environment in which that they spend most of their time during the week. If they feel like they have an impact on how the classroom is being facilitated - I think that motivates them. (Evan)

Listening to students to benefit students is natural for teachers. They are trained to consider formative assessments such as facial gestures, general comments and questions, and body language to gauge their students' needs and understandings. The challenge for the teachers was identifying student voice activities that shifted the leadership from the teacher to the student. Activities of partnership, activism, and leadership were only shared by 4 different participants with little direct impact on students. These findings may indicate that although current research in instructional practices supports students' increased roles in taking ownership of their learning,

classrooms teachers are still not comfortable releasing the control (Danielson, 2013). Social constructivism helps to explain why teachers may struggle with this concept because their perceptions were partially formulated from their own experiences as students. As Rich from Parkway stated, “When I was in school I can’t image my teachers ever asking me my opinion”. Integrating student voice activities into pre-service programs may provide future educators with the experiences needed to encourage the continuation of this practice into their professional careers.

As an example of how he believed additional professional development for integrating activism and leadership experiences could help students, Adam from Lyons Creek shared:

I plan to seek more information on the "leadership scale/activism". It is important to challenge students and develop a sense of responsibility during their high school years; this will allow better preparation for post-graduate experiences. (Adam)

5.3.2 Benefits for Teachers

Through the findings of this study teachers clearly identified how student voice could be used to help teachers. The frequency of reference to the positive impact of student voice on teachers was second only to the positive impact of student voice on students. Focus group participants commented on the value of student voice for teachers with phrases such as “Students can give us something to self-reflect upon and allow us to grow as human beings”, “As teachers we get used to a way of doing things and sometimes given a new perspective [from students] that is current or fresh we may make changes to liven things up a bit.”, and “I think that is how you gain respect from your students, through informal, impromptu discussions to hear how they are thinking and then adjust accordingly” (Rich). Although teachers stated that they value student voice, they

often stopped short of using student feedback in considering pedagogical changes. Most likely, this is due to lack of experience and comfort with this level of student voice integration.

The findings of this study aligned with most aspects of the literature with the exception of one area, curricular design. Czerniawski and Kidd (2011) identified a number of themes related to why teachers engage with student voice. They identified opportunities to evaluate lessons, consider new ideas, shape the curriculum, and build trust and relationships with students as the most common ways student feedback could help teachers. This study supports teachers' perceptions of student voice impacting lesson design, considering new ideas, and building trust and relationships, but does not support teachers' beliefs that student voice can or should shape curriculum. Two themes emerged related to their concerns: students' developmental readiness levels and teachers' professional experience and responsibility. Echoing other participants, Laura from Parkway related her feelings of student voice as part of curricular design and summarized:

They're [students are] not developmentally sophisticated enough to realize the impact that I've had on them or how curriculum is designed. And that we are the professionals and they're still children. So, even though I may ask their opinions about certain things, it doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to change or curriculum is not going to change because I know I'll pull that professional trump card. (Laura)

Professionally certified teachers and administrators will likely continue to lead the curriculum design process. However, developmentally appropriate levels of student engagement in the process could be explored. Schools may benefit from learning how specific courses or learning activities impacted students. This information could help guide decisions related to course offerings at the secondary level and differentiated learning opportunities across all grades.

5.3.3 Benefits for classroom, schools and school districts

The frequency of positive comments related to student voice impacting classrooms, schools, and school districts was extremely low compared to the potential impact for students and teachers (Figure 17).

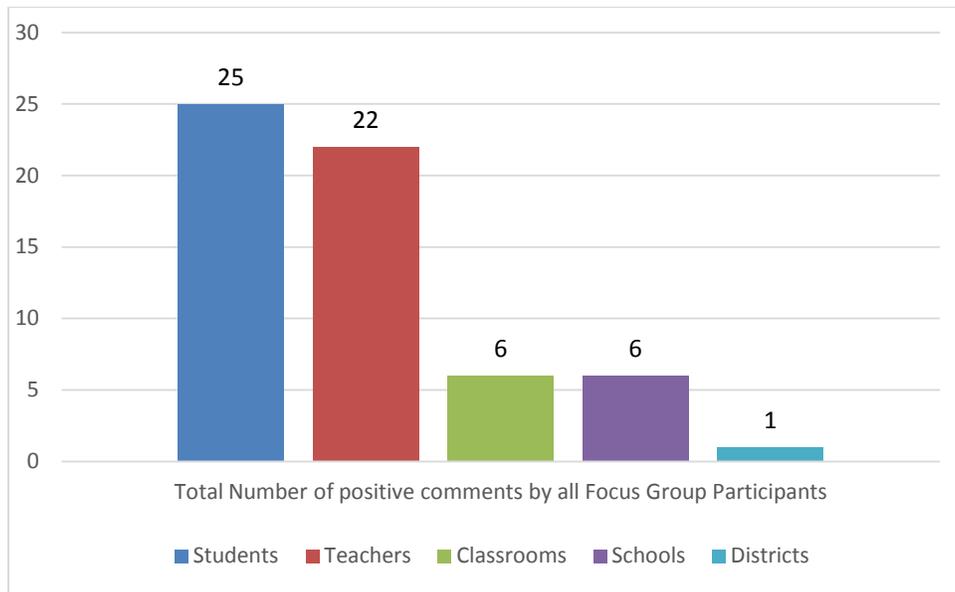


Figure 18. Frequency - Positive Impact of Student Voice on a Group or Area

The limited references to the impact of student voice on schools and school districts may be a direct result of teachers’ narrow focus. If teachers are not engaged in initiatives outside of their classrooms or departments, they may find it challenging to envision some of the potential “big picture” impacts of student voice across a school or school district. Providing teachers with additional opportunities to serve on district and school-based committees may help broaden their perspectives. If student voices are considered in a school district’s implementation of the Educator Effectiveness Project, teachers’ active engagement in the discussions will be important.

In addition, students' active engagement outside of classrooms may help teachers understand the potential impact of student voice. As students are provided opportunities to participate in school improvement projects such as school advisory committees, strategic initiative planning teams, and serving as school board student representatives, teachers' confidence levels in providing students with additional opportunities may increase. The results of these school and district-wide experiences for students may provide teachers with opportunities to see the potential broader impact of student voice.

5.4 STUDENT VOICE IN TEACHERS' EVALUATIONS

Throughout the discussions of integrating student voice into teaching and learning, the tone of the focus groups were very positive and all 18 teachers shared examples and support for student voice in education. As the discussions moved to considering student voice in teachers' evaluation programs the tone of the focus groups shifted. All focus group participants had informal experiences with student surveys and three of the Lyons Creek teachers had formal experiences with student surveys as part of their evaluations. The majority of the Parkway teachers were not in favor of considering student voice as part of their evaluation programs. Lyons Creek teachers were in favor of this practice only if they could be directly involved in the development of the surveys and the analysis of the results. The most common concerns teachers from both districts shared were: 1) fear of how the data would be used by administrators; 2) fear of what students would say; 3) the amount of time it would take to complete the process; and 4) students were not developmentally ready to provide feedback to adults especially in areas related

to curriculum and instructional techniques. Laura from Parkway shared a personal story to support her concern for the readiness levels of students when she related:

As a high school student, I had probably one of the most intimidating teachers on Earth. She could have been part of the Steel Curtain. She put the fear of God into everybody. But to this day, she is still the one teacher who made the greatest impact on my life. “How would I have responded to a survey on her?” I would have crucified her, even though I knew very well that what she was teaching me, even at the time, I knew what she was teaching me was good stuff. But I was so naïve, so young, at eighteen. I had no idea that the things that she taught me then would serve me my entire life. So, even as a sixteen or seventeen-year-old, you don’t have a clue, you know, the decisions teachers make. (Laura)

Follman (1992) described similar concerns that students have a lack of knowledge of the full range of teaching requirements and responsibilities, such as curriculum, classroom management, content knowledge, and professional responsibilities. The teachers in this study agreed with Follman and would be reluctant to support the integration of student voice into their evaluation programs. I believe historical evaluation systems in which teachers received an evaluation instead of participating in the process have influenced teachers’ perceptions. The fear of how student voice data may be used against them was a recurring theme. Teachers may reconstruct their perspectives of evaluation programs as they experience a more collaborative process between teachers and administrators with a focus on professional growth over measurement.

This study found teachers are not in favor of integrating student voice, specifically student surveys, into their evaluations. However, considering student voice in the student

learning objective (SLO) development process may be considered. The review of literature found that some believe SLOs should be used as part of a set of multiple measures in determining teacher effectiveness (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013). This study found that the teachers from Lyons Creek with formal experience in using student voice as part of their evaluations or professional development processes were willing to consider student voice in their evaluation provided they were directly involved in the development and analysis of the results. Student learning objectives are designed by teachers based upon students' needs. Teachers use student achievement and other measures to determine learning objectives that align to school and district goals. I believe the teachers from Lyons Creek were willing to consider student voice in SLOs because they have experienced the direct integration of student voice into their evaluations without any control over how the data was collected or used. Due to their prior constructs, the idea of taking an active role in how student voice is considered in their evaluation design likely influenced their support for this concept. Nancy from Lyons Creek, considering how using student voice could be helpful through the development of SLOs, expressed:

I do see that that could be a good place for student voice in the elective portion [SLOs], if it's done correctly. I think that it needs to be something that's not just collected one time at the end of the year. And also to have, maybe, a group of teachers that work together to create that survey. If teachers aren't involved in that process - again, I think it's just like the 360 data where a lot of it was invalid. You know, you have the kids that are mad at you and the kids that really like you and there's nowhere in between. Having teachers involved in that process definitely would make it more valuable. (Nancy)

The process of developing SLOs is new across the state of Pennsylvania. Teachers and administrators collaborating to develop meaningful SLOs using relevant data should increase the

impact that this activity has on instruction and student achievement. Student input could be part of that relevant data.

The limitations of student survey data described by Burniske and Meibaum (2012) were supported by the participants in this study: 1) students as raters; 2) students' abilities to distinguish between teachers' instructional behaviors and student/teacher interactions; and 3) the reliability and validity of the results. How the student survey data results would be used was also identified as a concern by focus group participants.

School districts interested in introducing the concept of student voice into the evaluation process are encouraged to work closely with their teachers' associations to develop a balance between student input and teacher input. Frequently, teachers shared their desires to participate in the development of surveys. They did not believe general surveys would serve any purpose. Teachers from Lyons Creek with formal experiences with the use of student survey data supported this belief. Surveys developed in collaboration with teachers, specifically designed for teachers, may find a place in schools. Training teachers and administrators how to write survey questions tailored to individual courses and teachers would provide teachers with the control and specificity they desire.

Study participants from Parkway had never seen a formal student survey. As a result of their lack of experience with formal surveys, I believe teachers are fearful of what questions may be asked, how the questions may be worded, and if students will follow the procedures correctly. Parkway teachers' prior experiences with informal surveys found students misinterpreting the questions and not paying close attention to directions. Opportunities for teachers to view and pilot well developed and highly vetted student survey instruments may alleviate some of their concerns. These surveys have been administered to thousands of students and undergone

numerous iterations. Sample student surveys such as *My Student Survey*, *The Gallup Student Poll*, and *Tripod Surveys* could be considered (Potemski et al, 2011). This could be an important first step before developing student surveys locally.

5.5 STUDENT VOICE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

A common phrase used throughout the focus groups discussions was “student voice for my eyes only”. Teachers’ perceptions of using student voice as part of their individualized professional development planning processes was widely accepted across all focus groups. In a follow-up question about the use of student voice in professional development that was posed after the participants were given time to reflect on the focus group discussions, Nancy from Lyons Creek said:

I believe that student voice should be a key component for determining professional development plans for teachers. However, I hesitate to tie it to a teacher evaluation model. Rather, I feel that this data is a powerful resource for determining areas of strength and opportunities for growth within a teacher's current skill set. Just as we differentiate instructional practices and resources to meet the needs of our students, I believe that our professional development options should be individualized to meet the needs of our teachers. Student voice provides a key piece of information, and one that is rarely considered, in developing these plans for our teachers. (Nancy)

This finding aligns with the review of literature. Teachers are more supportive in considering student voice as part of an ongoing collaborative process rather than an end-of-year, summative evaluation. Combining students’ voices with teachers’ voices can provide teachers

with opportunities to use the input from their students along with their own personal goals to plan opportunities for growth and development (Flutter, 2007). Across all 3 focus groups, 17 of the 18 teachers supported the concept of integrating student voice into teachers' goal setting and professional development planning. Participants believed that there is value in listening to students. They discussed using student voice collection procedures that are developed by teachers, specifically aligned to individual courses, and reviewed by "teachers' eyes only" as the most appropriate ways to integrate student voice into teacher development.

The positive results of this study related to teachers' perceptions of student voice as part of their professional development planning processes are exciting. Opportunities for school district leaders to collaborate with teachers' associations exist. Teachers will likely support a student voice in professional development initiatives provided the data collection procedures are developed in part by teachers and teachers are afforded the flexibility of sharing results with others or using the results for their own personal reflections. Professional development models such as Continuing Personal and Professional Development (CPPD) could be used as a framework for districts to update and modify their professional development programs (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). The cyclical process of reviewing and updating professional goals based upon input from self-reflections, peers, and students may assist teachers and school districts in identifying differentiated professional development options.

5.6 LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings and lessons from this study were based upon a review of existing literature and the perceptions of 18 teachers across two school districts. Data was collected through focus groups

and follow-up questions. This qualitative study may encourage others to conduct further research on some of the findings and analyses or it may inspire teachers' unions, administrators, and school boards to consider student voice in evaluation programs or professional development planning. Although I believe the conceptual framework and methodology for this qualitative study were sound, limitations exist.

External validity is defined as the degree to which results of research accurately generalize to other individuals and/or situations (Heiman, 2001). Since focus group samples are typically small they do not allow for generalization to larger populations. Although this limitation exists in this study, actions to prepare for the focus groups in the areas of question development, group size selection, recruitment procedures, and moderator skill development were taken to improve the validity and reliability of the research. For example, each question was vetted based upon its correlation to each of the research questions. A matrix was developed (see Figure 9) to ensure each research question was adequately addressed (Anfara, 2002). Most social scientists agree on a range of 4 to 12 participants for homogeneous focus groups and 6 to 12 participants for heterogeneous focus groups. The three homogeneous focus groups in this study each consisted of 6 members. The group sizes aligned with best practices for focus group research (Sagoe, 2012). Research supports recruiting focus group participants by providing the candidates with the goals of the study in effort to ensure they are interested and willing to participate. A podcast was developed in advance of the focus group to describe in detail the purpose and goal of this study. Candidates for the focus groups viewed the podcast prior to volunteering to participate.

To prepare for my role as moderator, I reviewed best practices for focus group moderators and integrated those suggestions into each focus group. Suggestions such as not

showing too much approval of any one response, avoiding personal opinions, being a good listener, and helping to create a relaxed, comfortable environment were integrated into each focus group session (Krueger & Casey, 2000). A practice focus group was conducted with staff members of a local school district prior to the first focus group. The practice focus group provided me with opportunities to make minor adjustments to my behavior as moderator and to improve the quality of the interviews.

Participants in the focus groups volunteered to participate and were not randomly selected. Voluntary response samples are often biased because they only include people who choose to volunteer and often have a strong opinion of the discussion topic. The school districts were only willing to consider this study if the participants were volunteers. Although this limitation exists, a range of experience levels and certification areas were considered for organizing the focus groups and selecting volunteers. Most literature recommends homogeneity within each group to capitalize on shared experiences (Kitzinger, 1995). The focus groups in this study were grouped by grade span at Parkway and by experience with formal use of student voice at Lyons Creek. During the recruitment process, participants with various levels of teaching experiences across all grade levels and certification areas were invited to volunteer. The participants' demographic information found in Table 6 shows the diversity of the teachers across all of these areas. Those differences provided for a broader range of perspectives. As a result, the combination of homogeneously grouped focus groups comprised of teachers with a range of background and experiences increased the validity and reliability of this study.

The school districts selected for this study were both high performing districts with similar student demographics. The absence of a wide range of student demographics could be considered a limitation of this study. The consistency between school districts was an intentional

aspect of this study's design. I wanted to eliminate differences that may have impacted teachers' perceptions such as student demographics and focus only on the differences between teachers' formal experiences with student voice. Others may want to use the framework of this study to compare school districts with student demographics that differ significantly from Lyons Creek and Parkway by race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, or student achievement. Findings of research using districts with different demographics could further support or challenge the results of this study.

Finally, one focus group question asked participants to share how they perceived teachers' associations, administrators, and school boards would respond to the idea of integrating student voice data into professional development programs. This question could serve as a foundation for future studies. Additional qualitative or quantitative studies focusing on administrators' and school boards' perceptions of the place for student voice in teaching and learning may guide additional policy and practice implications.

5.7 PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this research study indicate a need for professional development for teachers on integrating student voice across a range of opportunities, as described in the *Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Teachers are interested in considering student voice but mainly as data sources. The teachers in this study did not have any prior experience with the *Spectrum*. Many of the teachers indicated that they had never considered students as partners, activists, or leaders. School and district initiatives designed to introduce and provide teachers with specific examples of opportunities for listening to students

across the *Spectrum* could benefit teachers, students, and school districts. As the use of student voices moves across the *Spectrum*, students, teachers, and schools may benefit from the information shared and the positive cultures established.

Teachers' perceptions of how they listen to students versus their actual practices may differ. To understand if these differences exist, administrators may consider conducting formal and informal observations to compare the finding of this study to current practices. Observation data combined with this research may set the benchmark for where the teachers' learning activities of integrating student voice should begin.

Teachers reported that they are not comfortable considering student survey data as part of their evaluation programs. They would benefit from being exposed to some of the highly vetted student surveys that are currently being used across the country. Potemski et al. (2011) described three of the most common student surveys, *My Student Survey*, *the Gallup Student Poll*, and *Tripod Surveys*. Teachers shared concerns with not understanding how the surveys would be fairly developed and the types of questions students would be asked. Opportunities to see sample student surveys and perhaps pilot student surveys through a non-threatening process, outside of evaluations, may alleviate some concerns. However, teacher input into the development of the survey will likely be important. Teachers in this study were generally supportive of surveys if they were designed by teachers and questions are specific to a course, lesson, or learning experience. Based upon this study, general, third party surveys would not be considered valid or useful.

The connection between student voice and teacher evaluation was a concern for all participants of this study. This finding was supported with a review of the literature. Teachers were concerned that student voice data may become a primary evaluation instrument and be used

by administrators for punitive purposes (Aleamoni, 1999). Relationships between teachers and administrators will likely determine if student voice is considered in teachers' evaluations. If administrators consistently use a variety of information to assist teachers with the development of their professional practices, instead of using the data only to measure teacher effectiveness, student voice may someday find its place in evaluations. As administrators understand the importance of developing trusting, respectful relationships, teachers are likely to be more agreeable to non-traditional evaluation techniques. I believe a collaborative evaluation process will alleviate many teachers' concerns. Trust will likely increase the more teachers and administrators work together to grow and develop their practice.

The findings of this study support the concept of integrating student voice into teachers' professional development programs. Provided that the information was for "teachers' eyes only", teachers believed that listening to student input was a valid measure for guiding professional development. Professional development programs such as the *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment, and Learning (PETAL)* developed by Oxford Brookes University may serve as a model for K-12 school districts to follow (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012). The combination of student voice and teacher collaboration could help align professional development opportunities to teachers' interests and needs. Initially, school districts may consider collecting aggregate student voice data from across larger populations of students in order to avoid aligning the data to individual teachers. Collecting student voice data by grade level, department, or school may provide groups of teachers with information related to professional development needs without singling out any one teacher. This could be an important first step in incorporating student voice in professional development.

The majority of teachers discussed the beneficial impact considering student voice can have on students and teachers. Much rarer was the understanding that student voice could impact whole classrooms, schools, and districts. This finding is not surprising given the isolated nature of the teaching experience. Teachers best know their own classrooms and will need opportunities to develop broader perspectives. Teachers, administrators, and school boards working collaboratively to develop strategic initiatives may help teachers to gain a wider perspective of the entire district. Administrators who practice integrating teacher voice across schools and districts may act as models for teachers in the value of listening to others to make improvements. As teachers perceive their own voices are heard, they will likely feel valued and take ownership of district initiatives outside of their classroom walls. Their broader experiences could lead to a new appreciation of incorporating student voice as well.

The interactions of focus group participants, along with their responses to follow-up questions, identified the importance of discussions when potentially controversial initiatives are being considered. If school districts are contemplating formalizing the use of student voice data, it may be wise to spend time talking in small groups with teachers. Conner from Parkway shared how experiences like focus groups could be helpful:

If they [administrators or state officials] do decide to integrate student voice into evaluations or professional development, small group conversations like this may be helpful for people that are resistant, worried or nervous about it. (Conner)

As teachers shared anecdotal stories of how they consider student voice, other teachers were often observed taking notes or commenting on how they would like to do something similar with their students. Focus groups or other small group settings may alleviate some concerns and inspire others to consider the impact of student voice. Incorporating student voice into a greater

range of opportunities that have the potential to challenge the status quo demands a thoughtful, careful approach that can be supported by all.

5.8 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The study revealed a concern with integrating student voice into teachers' evaluations. School districts in states such as states Colorado, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Utah, and Pennsylvania have begun to integrate student surveys into teachers' evaluations (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). This negative perception of student surveys as part of teachers' evaluations could impact policy decisions in these states and others. Aleamoni (1999) described the importance of teachers placing trust and value in survey data. If teachers are concerned with the validity and how student voice data will be used, they are unlikely to use the information to improve their practice. Opportunities for teachers to review well designed student surveys and collect sample data through pilot projects may help move the conversation of student voice in teachers' evaluations forward.

Policy discussions related to measuring teacher effectiveness are common across the United States due in large part to federal programs such as Race to the Top (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). States are consistently moving away from single measures such as teacher observations and are considering multiple measures to include student achievement data, student growth data, and other elective data. The findings from this study support the need for further research on the potential impact of student voice on teachers' evaluations. All focus groups shared the sentiment of Kim from Parkway who commented:

For students to actually evaluate what a teacher has done professionally and gone to school for and studied, I don't really feel like that's the place of any student from age five to 18. How would they know what they're supposed to be looking for? I don't know how they would word the questions to keep them from being too personal. So, I guess no, I don't really see a place for student survey data in evaluations. (Kim)

Teachers were opposed to integrating student voice *directly* into their evaluations. Policy discussion related to student voice in the development of student learning objectives (SLOs) however, may exist. This study differs from others. Teachers were asked to share their perspectives of considering student voice in the development of their SLOs. This *indirect* evaluation measure combines student voice with teacher and administrator input. This type of policy may be supported by all stakeholders.

Policy decisions related to the general integration of student voice and student voice in professional development may find support from teachers. A strong partnership between administrators and teachers through the design of professional development programs will be important in making any policy recommendations. Teachers value student voice but want to be involved in the process of determining how they listen to students and how the information is used.

In countries such as the United Kingdom and Denmark, governments have established policies related to integrating student voice into schools. They have stressed the importance of creating democratic schools where student voice is an integral right for children (Flutter, 2007). Although this top down approach has increased student voice opportunities in these countries, I would not recommend this type of policy requirement in the United States. The teachers in this study expressed interest in student voice but want the control to determine how and when they

are listening to students. A bottom up approach may be much more effective. A policy requirement from a school board, state, or federal agency would likely meet with resistance and the intended result of understanding how students learn best may be lost.

5.9 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand teacher's perceptions of considering student voice as part of their comprehensive evaluations or professional development programs. Teachers from across two high performing school districts with different background and experiences participated in three focus groups. The focus group questions were designed to answer three research questions: *1) What are teachers' perceptions about considering the use of student voice; 2) What part do teachers believe student voice should have in the development of the elective portion of their evaluations and/or their independently developed annual professional goals; and 3) How do teachers' perceptions differ based upon past experiences with using student voice as part of their evaluation or professional development plans?*

Teachers' perceptions for considering student voice in teaching and learning were positive. All 18 teachers shared examples of how student voice can positively impact students and teachers. Comments similar to Rich's from Parkway who said, "I'm not just educating them [students], I am learning from them", were shared across the focus groups. The findings indicate that teachers were interested in hearing what student have to say and valued student input. Opportunities exist for school districts to consider providing professional development for teachers to understand how to further integrate student voice into daily practices. Teachers

shared many examples of considering students as data sources but will need more support in developing activities around students as leaders of change.

The findings from this study indicate that teachers were concerned when asked to consider student voice as part of their evaluation programs. Common concerns expressed included: 1) fairness; 2) developmental readiness levels of students; 3) flawed designs of student surveys; and 4) administrative use of data. The findings from this study could guide policy implications related to the information used to measure teacher effectiveness. Teachers may benefit from opportunities to review and evaluate student surveys and other student voice instruments. Lack of experiences with well-designed and vetted student voice instruments was discovered through this study. States and local school districts may want to pilot the use of student voice data in teachers' evaluations before making any policy decisions. Survey questions designed in collaboration with teachers, specific to courses and instruction, are more likely to be supported than general, third party, survey questions.

This research study found that teachers were consistently in favor of considering student voice as part of their professional development planning processes. Models such as the *Peer Enhancement of Teaching, Assessment, and Learning* developed by Oxford Brookes University may provide school districts with a design for combining student and teacher voices into professional development programs (Marshall & Deepwell, 2012).

Regardless of their backgrounds and experiences in using student voice in evaluations or professional development planning, teachers' perceptions of student voice were similar. One exception was identified. Teachers with formal experiences with student voice were more likely to support student survey data as part of the development of their student learning objectives. This support was contingent upon surveys being developed by teachers and for "teachers' eyes

only”. This is most likely a result of their experiences with formal requirements for considering student voice in evaluations or professional development. Those experiences provided Lyons Creek teachers with opportunities to understand the potential value and impact of student voice. School districts may benefit from providing teachers with opportunities to gain this perspective through voluntary student voice initiatives.

This study was unique in design. Research studies related to teachers’ perceptions of considering student voice in evaluations and professional development planning are limited. The potential influence of student voice can continue to be studied through further research. Extending the sample from a small volunteer population to a larger random sampling may allow other researchers to generalize these findings. In addition, considering school districts with student demographics that differ from Parkway and Lyons Creek may provide other researchers with opportunities to compare their findings with this study.

Practical implications exist for school districts, through professional development, to understand how student voice can impact not only students, but teachers, classrooms, schools, and communities. Such professional development is worth doing. Listening to those who learn can only help improve those who teach. Incorporating student voice may become part of both the art and science of teaching.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. 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* (Gentile, 2014). Researchers Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) developed a range of student-voice oriented activities (Figure 19). The spectrum ranges from students “speaking their minds” to students working with adults to research, implement, and evaluate school related programs or activities. Please take a moment to review *The Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity*:

Students articulating their perspectives		←————→		Students directing collective activities	
Students as data sources		←————→		Students as leaders of change	
Expression	Consultation	Participation	Partnership	Activism	Leadership
Volunteering opinions, creating art, celebrating, complaining, praising, objecting	Being asked for their opinion, providing feedback, serving on a focus group, completing a survey	Attending meetings in which decisions are made, frequent inclusion when issues are framed and actions planned	Formalized role in decision making, adults are trained in how to work collaboratively with youth partners	Identifying problems, organizing responses, advocating for change in and out of the classroom	Co-planning, making decisions and accepting significant responsibility for outcomes
Examples					
Conversations with teachers, principals, peers – differentiated projects	Student surveys, classroom rules planning	Member of a school improvement team	Clubs or organizations (NHS, Interact)	Student government	Service learning programs

Figure 19. The Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity – Focus Groups Question

What experiences have you had with soliciting student voice across this spectrum?

(Follow up: What was your purpose in soliciting student voice?)(If you do not have a formal way of soliciting student voice, what are some informal ways that you listen to your students' input?)

As a result of your experience(s), what value was added for:

- a. students;
 - b. you the teacher;
 - c. the classroom;
 - d. the school?
2. Is there value in eliciting student voice? Why or why not? *(Follow up: does student voice matter? – When, and in what ways?)*
 3. What are your personal experiences with conducting or participating in general surveys *(for example, after a college course, after eating at a restaurant, after purchasing an item online, after hiring a contractor)*? Where the outcomes positive? Why or why not?
 - a. Student surveys are on the “students as sources of data” end of the *Spectrum*. What are your personal experiences with conducting or participating in student surveys? Were the outcomes positive? Why or why not?
 4. Why do or why do not teachers use student surveys to collect information about the impact they had on their students? *(Follow-up: What are the barriers, concerns, hesitations with using student surveys?)*
 5. Pennsylvania passed the Educator Effectiveness Project as part of Act 82 of 2012. The current configuration of a teacher’s evaluation is displayed below:

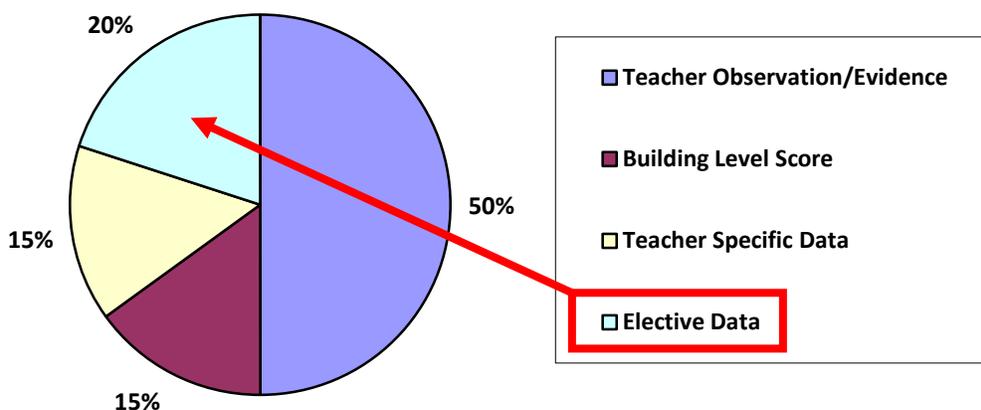


Figure 20. Educator Effectiveness Project – Act 82 of 2012 – Focus Group Question

Moderator statement: The 20% Elective portion of Act 82 provides teachers and administrators with opportunities to collaborate on student learning objectives that are directly aligned to the learning goals of a course. Teachers can develop these learning objectives based upon school, district, or personal goals. Student survey data could guide teachers in determining where to focus their professional development goals.

Do you see a place for student survey data in the development of the elective portion (20%) of this model? Why or why not?

Moderator statement: Some school districts require teachers to write annual professional goals and some districts leave this process up to the professional judgments/decisions of their teachers. The following two questions are related to using student surveys as part of the planning process in developing individualized personal goals or professional development plans outside of the formal evaluation process.

6. Looking across the *Spectrum*, have you, or would you consider using student voice data when planning your professional development goals if this data were for “your eyes only”? Why or why not? (*Follow up: Where specifically across the spectrum have you used student voice in the professional development process – how is this impacting your teaching?*)
7. What do you think the following groups would say about the use of student survey data as part of teachers’ professional development planning:
 - a. Teachers’ Associations
 - b. Administrators
 - c. School Boards
8. As you look across *The Spectrum of Student Voice Oriented Activity* (figure 3). Is there a place where you believe student voice should stop (a place where students should no longer have a voice)? Why or why not?
9. Has your thinking related to student voice as part of a teachers’ evaluation or professional development planning changed at all because of this discussion?

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT “PARKWAY SCHOOL DISTRICT”

Email Script for Teachers (Parkway):

My name is Michael Pasquinelli; I am currently the Assistant Superintendent for Pine-Richland School District. Act 82 of 2012 has encouraged school districts across the state to focus their attention on educator effectiveness. The question of how we measure great teaching and more importantly how we help educators improve their practices are common goals for all schools. I am currently completing my doctoral work through the University of Pittsburgh. I am interested in speaking with a group of Parkway teachers through a focus group regarding their perceptions of using student survey data and how they believe this information may impact their pedagogy, classroom environment, curricula, and/or overall classroom/school climate.

The use of student voice is the focus of my study. The usefulness of this information, however, is greatly impacted by teachers’ perceptions of the reliability and benefit of the data collected. I am interested in learning how gathering feedback from students may or may not impact quality teachers’ practices or professional development selections. My hypothesis is that student feedback has a place in K-12 professional development, but if quality teachers perceive this practice as unfair or invalid then the impact on professional improvements will be minimal. The question of how teachers perceive this feedback from their students will be explored through a qualitative study.

The focus groups would involve two sets of teachers from two different southwestern Pennsylvania school districts. My hope is to have a group of teachers volunteer about two hours of their time. Ideally, I would like teachers from across all grade spans and various content areas. The other school district has integrated student voice into their evaluation or professional development program in the past. I would like to pose questions to you related to your perceptions of the reliability of this type of data and the impact the data may have related to your approach to teaching and learning. The name of your school district along with your name will be kept in strict confidence throughout this study. Your district will only be referenced as “Parkway School District”.

I understand the value of your time. The [attached podcast](#) will provide you with an overview of this study and the focus group process. The actual focus group will last approximately 90 minutes (food and drinks will be provided). The focus group will be recorded using an audio recorder. Each participant will be assigned a number to ensure all comments are held in strict confidence. The audio recording will be transcribed. After the audio recording is transcribed, it will be destroyed. After the focus group, I may request a brief follow-up with a few participants to further elaborate on some responses. This would likely take 30 minutes or less.

The cost to you and your district is time - which I understand is extremely valuable. My hope is that the knowledge gained from this study may guide future research related to the integration of student voice into professional development programs. I would like to schedule the focus group for some time in February. Please respond to this email if you are interested. I have already spoken to and was given permission to conduct the focus group by your superintendent. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Michael Pasquinelli

INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT “LYONS CREEK SCHOOL DISTRICT”

Email Script for Teachers (Lyons Creek):

My name is Michael Pasquinelli; I am currently the Assistant Superintendent for Pine-Richland School District. Act 82 of 2012 has encouraged school districts across the state to focus their attention on educator effectiveness. The question of how we measure great teaching and more importantly how we help educators improve their practices are common goals for all schools. I am currently completing my doctoral work through the University of Pittsburgh. Through my research, I discovered that Lyons Creek has taken innovative steps in helping teachers improve both the art and science of their teaching through the use of student voice. I am interested in speaking with a group of Lyons Creek teachers through a focus group regarding their perceptions of using student feedback data and how your model has impacted your pedagogy, classroom environment, curricula, and/or overall classroom/school climate.

The use of student voice is the focus of my study. I am interested in learning how gathering feedback from students may or may not impact teachers’ practices or professional development selections. My hypothesis is that student feedback has a place in K-12 professional development, but the usefulness of information is greatly impacted by teachers’ perceptions of the reliability and benefit of the data collected. If teachers perceive this practice as unfair or

invalid then the impact on professional improvements will be minimal. The question of how teachers perceive this feedback from their students will be explored through a qualitative study.

The focus groups would involve two sets of teachers from two different southwestern Pennsylvania school districts. My hope is to have a group of teachers volunteer about two hours of their time. Ideally, I would like teachers from across all grade spans and various content areas. The other school district has never integrated student feedback into their evaluation or professional development program. I would like to pose questions to you related to your perceptions of the reliability of this type of data and the impact the data had on you related to your approaches to teaching and learning. The name of your school district along with your name will be kept in strict confidence throughout this study. Your district will only be referenced as “Lyons Creek School District”.

I understand the value of your time. The [attached podcast](#) will provide you with an overview of this study and the focus group process. The actual focus group will last approximately 90 minutes (food and drinks will be provided). The focus group will be recorded using an audio recorder. Each participant will be assigned a number to ensure all comments are held in strict confidence. The audio recording will be transcribed. After the audio recording is transcribed, it will be destroyed. After the focus group, I may request a brief follow-up with a few participants to further elaborate on some responses. This would likely take 30 minutes or less.

The cost to you and your district is time - which I understand is extremely valuable. My hope is that the knowledge gained from this study may guide future research related to the integration of student voice into professional development programs. I would like to schedule the focus group for some time in February. Please respond to this email if you are interested. I have already spoken to and was given permission to conduct the focus group by your superintendent. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Michael Pasquinelli

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT

Focus group introductory script:

Good afternoon everyone. I want to thank you again for volunteering to participate in this study. As you saw and heard in my podcast the focus of the study is on teachers' perceptions of using student voice as part of either their evaluations or professional development plans. My hypothesis is - there is place in either teacher evaluation or professional development planning for student voice. Students spend more time with their teachers than any other group but they are rarely asked for their opinions related to how their teachers impacted their learning and development. I believe student feedback is a missing piece of data that could be used in evaluating teacher effectiveness or creating professional development plans.

I also believe that teachers' perceptions of the data used to measure effectiveness or to determine professional development needs play an important role in the impact this information could potentially have on instruction or behaviors. If teachers do not trust or believe the data is valid then they are less likely to modify their behaviors or consider professional development opportunities based upon the results.

Today I am going to ask each of you a series of questions. Each person will have an opportunity to respond to each question. We will modify the order after each question to ensure you are not always first or last. In front of your seat is a number. Please state your number before answering each question. This focus group is being audio recorded. Once the recording is transcribed, the audio tapes will be destroyed. Your identity and the identity of your school district will be held in strict confidence. If you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please respond "no comment" after stating your number.

In order to be respectful of your time, the electronic timer will be visible to ensure responses do not exceed two minutes. This will provide everyone with equal opportunity to speak and I will be able to maintain my commitment to ending this focus group within the 1.5 hours that you have graciously given to me. After the focus group, I may request a brief, follow-up with a few participants to further elaborate on some responses. This would likely take 30 minutes or less.

The assistant moderator is here to gather some general notes and address any of your needs throughout the process. My goal is to complete this study in the early spring. I will contact your administrators when the study is published if you are interested in reading the results.

I want to make is very clear. Your district is not considering incorporating student voice into your evaluations or professional development program designs. They were simply willing to offer their assistance to me. My hope is that the results of this study may encourage others to continue to this conversation with teachers, administrators as well as state and local officials.

Please consider sharing your honest perspective of integrating student voice into teaching and learning regardless of the views of other participants. A comfortable, rich dialogue will help me in gathering a clear picture of teachers' various perspectives.

Are there any questions?

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