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A Collective Case Study: Student Voice and the Implications for Partnership, Activism and Leadership

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore urban high school student and teacher perceptions of student voice, specifically in the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. This study addresses the *Civic Opportunity Gap*, which impacts urban youth and the disjuncture between the civic ideals of the United States and their day-to-day experiences within the civic institutions that shape their lives. This study was designed to examine the following three questions: What opportunities exist within the urban high school setting for partnership, activism and leadership? What are the perceived barriers that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership? What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools? A large urban high school in the Denver Metropolitan area was chosen for this study. Students were selected by purposeful stratified sampling, from three classes, Civics, American Government and Advanced Placement Computer Science. Six to twelve students comprised three focus groups, consisting of an equal balance of males and females, and ethnicities including at least one from the following sub-groups, Caucasian, black, Asian and Hispanic for a diverse sample. The teachers selected for the study were recommended by the site principal, and also demonstrated an interest in the study. They participated in individual interviews. These were the teachers of the classes from which the student sample was chosen. The data collected was analyzed and coded for reoccurring themes. Three critical themes emerged regarding the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership. In order to effectively enact opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership, the students and teachers similarly reported the importance of **(1) understanding what type of support students need, (2) openness to input and feedback from students and (3) advocacy and belief in student capacity**. Student voice, specifically partnership, activism and leadership has been linked to increasing ownership and motivation for students. Educators in urban schools would be well served to include opportunities in their courses for partnership, activism and leadership.

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First Advisor

Garrett Roberts, Ph.D.

Second Advisor

Alvaro Arias, Ph.D.

Third Advisor

Richard Kitchen

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activism and leadership.

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Presented to
the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Brian E. Duwe
November 2017
Advisor: Dr. Garrett Roberts

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Author: Brian E. Duwe
Title: A Collective Case Study: Student Voice and the implications for partnership, activism and leadership.
Advisor: Dr. Garrett Roberts
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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore urban high school student and teacher perceptions of student voice, specifically in the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. This study addresses the *Civic Opportunity Gap*, which impacts urban youth and the disjuncture between the civic ideals of the United States and their day-to-day experiences within the civic institutions that shape their lives. This study was designed to examine the following three questions: What opportunities exist within the urban high school setting for partnership, activism and leadership? What are the perceived barriers that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership? What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools? A large urban high school in the Denver Metropolitan area was chosen for this study. Students were selected by purposeful stratified sampling, from three classes, Civics, American Government and Advanced Placement Computer Science. Six to twelve students comprised three focus groups, consisting of an equal balance of males and females, and ethnicities including at least one from the following sub-groups, Caucasian, black, Asian and Hispanic for a diverse sample. The teachers selected for the study were recommended by the site principal, and also demonstrated an interest in the study. They participated in individual interviews. These were the teachers of the classes from which the student sample was chosen. The data collected was analyzed and coded for reoccurring themes. Three critical

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Lastly, I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my mother who recently passed away due to complications from pancreatic cancer. Her courage and grace throughout her battle with cancer will leave me forever inspired.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In the odd study of *what's not said* in school, it's crucial to analyze (1) whom silencing protects; (2) the practices by which silencing is institutionalized in the context of asymmetric power relations; (3) how muting students and their communities systematically undermines a project of educational empowerment (Friere, 1985; Giroux, 1988; Schor, 1980); and (4) how understanding the practices of silencing can make possible a public education that gives voice to students and their communities (Fine & Weis, 2003).

Introduction

Research has shown that the more educators give their students choice, control, challenge and opportunities for collaboration and partnership, the more their motivation and engagement are likely to rise (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). When students have voice, and an opportunity to truly collaborate, become partners in their own learning and have the chance to be advocates for change, they learn to be in charge of their own growth and future learning (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). One of the most powerful tools available to influence academic achievement is helping students feel they have a stake in their learning (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). New definitions of 'student voice' are intended to improve the engagement of students and the outcomes of learning, and have a positive impact on school reform where students actively help shape change (Mittra, 2004). Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) created a theoretical framework to analyze the continuum of student voice within school settings. The framework they created provides a visual

representation of the spectrum of student voice opportunities that exist within schools. Their framework reveals a progression of opportunities for students to participate within their school/classes ranging from the most basic level of expression where they can offer their opinion, to the highest level of leadership, where they are decision makers within their school (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). This framework leads into my overarching research question: what is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools? In my study my intentions were to shed light on the realities of student voice in action.

“The disconnect between what we know and what we do, between espoused goal of supporting student learning and the reality of ignoring students, points to a profoundly disabling and dangerous discrepancy between the claims behind federal legislation and the policies and practices that result from it” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 373).

In order to ensure the best offerings, school culture must focus on the students and investing in seeking their needs and interests; with students’ voices heard to drive whole school improvement (OECD, 2006, *Schooling for Tomorrow: personalizing education*).

Throughout the remainder of chapter one I will discuss the problem and equity issues that are at stake by marginalizing opportunities for student voice. I will briefly introduce the framework for which I utilized to guide my research questions and case study, as well as introduce the research questions. I will then illuminate relevant research that supports the significance of the study as well as discuss the implications and importance of the study. To conclude I will briefly introduce my methodology and study design.

Problem Statement

I was near the end of my third year as principal at Aurora West College Preparatory Academy, when I received a letter from two freshman students, Liliana Moran and Dulce Morales, regarding a project they were working on for their freshman literacy class. The assignment was a performance-based project within the global issue of human rights. The two students collaborated on a project to research and share ideas on how listening and respecting student voice impacts their engagement and motivation as students. The content of their letter divulged their beliefs that student voice should be more present within our school, which in turn reinforced a strong feeling of mine as a school leader that our systems and structures at AWCPA do not allow or create authentic spaces and opportunities for our students to be a part of school-wide decision-making and their voice is not evident within our school setting. This is especially unfortunate, as children are often more interesting and perceptive than grown ups, about the day-to-day realities of life in school (Kozol, 1991).

Existing collaborative structures (grade level cross-curricular meetings and professional learning communities by content areas) at AWCPA were intended to allow for staff to collaborate and problem solve to support the needs of our students based on student performance data, and we had a significant range of need at AWCPA. Our student population was comprised of over 1,300 students, ranging from grades 6-12. Ninety-five percent of our students were on free and reduced lunch and 72% of our students were considered Second Language Learners, with a growing population of refugee students with from parts of Asia and Africa. We had weekly meeting time for staff to plan and respond to student data within their content areas as well as by their

grade level team which were comprised of Math, Literacy, Social Studies, Science, Special Education and English Language Acquisition teachers, to problem solve and develop supports for their students. Within those structures, student voice was missing. As educators we were making decisions within our formal structures for students without their input. The letter from Lilian and Dulce, the two students mentioned above, was a critical piece of feedback on behalf of our student population, in regards to how they were feeling disempowered. The feelings students experience within their school day can provide valuable insight into significant classroom events (Oakes, 1985). Their letter reads as follows

Dear Administration of Aurora West College Preparatory Academy,
We are grateful for the education you provide us here at AWCPA. We as freshman enjoy the activities done for us here as we start our path in High School. We like many of our electives courses that we have, for example, I, Lily enjoy having a chance of trying piano. I have not only learned lots of new things this year but have had many opportunities to grow as a performer. Our only concern is the lack of students' voice in this school. I know that you have had the feeling either at work or someplace else that you are not being heard. Like you do not even exist when certain things are being said and that your opinion does not matter at all.

Research has shown that involving students in school decision-making increases their engagement and encourages their growth. For example, if you let us decide on decisions made, it not only helps the school from a student's perspective, but it also shows us responsibility and the way a mature adult has to deal with situations like this. We will have the opportunity of being something not only in the school, but this opportunity can give us the power of being a change in our community, and world. Isn't that what you always tell us? Every single day we are reminded that we can be the future of tomorrow, that we can be a change in the world. By giving us this opportunity we can make this happen.

All we ask of you is that you support our voices being heard and that you let us decide on things going on in this school. Like having the liberty of having free periods, the availability of deciding on electives that are not available, and having the freedom of going on college trips, or just fun field trips. I know that maybe it

is too much to ask for, but we beg you that you think about this. Please give us the opportunity of taking on our own decisions.

Sincerely, Lily & Dulce

Lily and Dulce granted me permission to use their letter in my study. The nature of this letter served as an impetus for my own personal reflection on the work I did as a principal at AWCPA, as well as inspiring the research questions for my dissertation. It is vital that students know that adults are also learners (Meier, 1995). Students develop a sense of trust and become more engaged in the learning process when adults reflect and respond to their voice (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). All of the school reform initiatives that had been a part of my work as a principal had been focused on the achievement gap, with efforts to raise low-income, and diverse populations' overall achievement, increasing attendance, and decreasing disproportionate discipline practices. Student voice was not a component to support our ongoing work in addressing the *civic opportunity gap*. Rather than using the lens of *achievement gap*, I approached this study from the lens of the *civic opportunity gap*. A “*civic opportunity gap*” marks the experiences of many young people living and attending school in urban communities (Abu El-Haj, 2007, 2015; Levinson, 2012; Rubin, 2007b). These youth frequently experience a disjuncture between the civic ideals of the United States and their day-to-day experiences within the civic institutions that shape their lives (Abu El-Haj, et al., 2007). Teachers in urban settings need to develop an awareness of the relationship between their own cultural backgrounds, and those of the students they serve, and to design a more culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Irvine & York, 1995). Focusing on the civic opportunity gap helps teachers understand the structural inequalities underlying urban education (Abu El-Haj, et al., 2007). More specifically the civic opportunity gap

addresses a lack of access to high quality civic educational practices for young people in underserved communities (Abu El-Haj, et al., 2007). In order to address the civic opportunity gap, space needs to be provided for students to share their voice around critical issues that impact their daily lives and engage in authentic and meaningful learning opportunities with their teachers (Kahne & Middaugh, 2009; Levinson, 2012). Cook-Sather (2006) concurs with Fielding's (2004a) assertion that there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together (p.361).

This led to my study of addressing the gap in the literature. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) developed a framework that reveals the spectrum of student voice opportunities within schools and classrooms. No research had been conducted regarding the usage of this framework. First, the framework had not been tested in schools to see where they specifically fall within the range of the spectrum. Second, it had not been tested or researched to see what the barriers are for each category of student voice. Lastly, the framework had not been used to investigate if students and teachers had any perceptions regarding the framework to determine if these concepts and ideas hold any significance for improving student motivation. My research questions attempt to fill the gaps in the literature and the absence of using this framework for a study in urban schools. For the sake of efficiency I focused my research questions on the upper end of the spectrum, specifically around partnership, activism and leadership. Also, these categories demonstrate the greatest potential for positive outcomes for students, i.e., greater levels of responsibility, increased trust between students and teachers, and improved motivation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

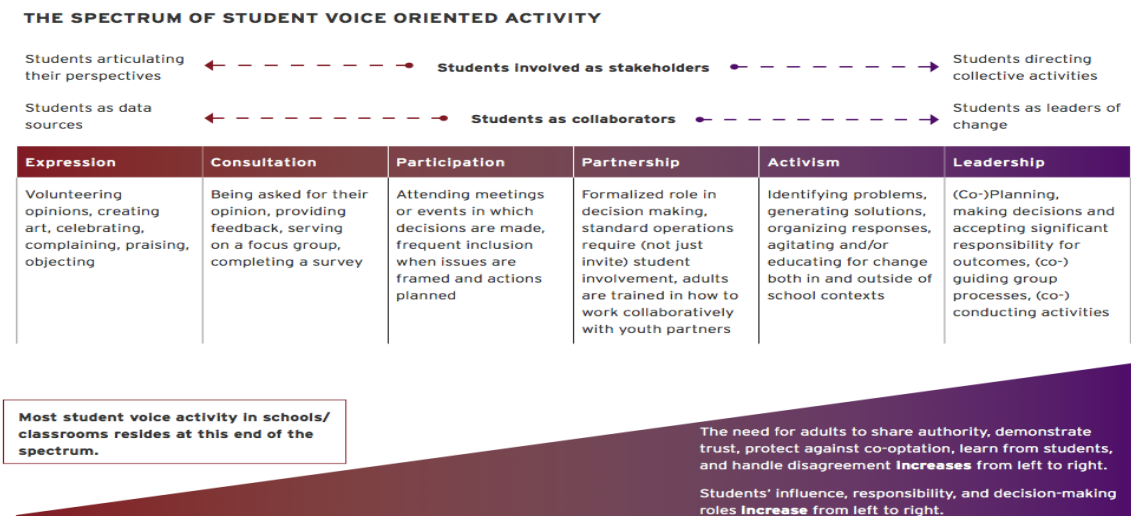
Research Questions

1. What opportunities exist within the urban high school setting for partnership, activism and leadership?
2. What are the perceived *barriers* that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?
3. What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools?

Framework of the Study

“Student voice signals having a legitimate perspective and opinion, being present and taking part and having an active role in decisions and implementation of educational policies and practices” (Holdsworth, 2000, p.355). Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) created a framework (*see figure 1.*)

Figure 1.



SOURCE: (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012)

that delineates the spectrum of student voice oriented activity. According to their research, the promotion of student voice has been linked to elevating achievement of marginalized populations, greater classroom participation, enhanced school reform efforts, better self-reflection and preparation for improvement in struggling students and decreased behavior problems (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Other studies have demonstrated similar results and positive outcomes for marginalized students. An Australian study reveals the growing gap between the lives of students who are successful and unsuccessful in education (Holdsworth, 2005). Holdsworth's (2005) study demonstrates that when schools engage student voice they facilitate a stronger sense of membership, respect, self-worth and agency. Principles of student voice have been effectively enacted within schools in different ways internationally for example in, Denmark, the government has emphasized student voice as a vehicle for creating democratic schools (Flutter, 2007). In the U.S., student voice has been about promoting diversity and breaking down racial and class barriers (Mitra, 2001). In New Zealand, voice has been one of several strategies used to foster active and widespread student participation within schools and the local community (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2003). In Chile, secondary students and university researchers co-investigated and designed innovative pedagogies and curriculum materials to develop education in democracy (Fielding and Prieto, 2002).

Student voice has strong links to constructivist theory, where learning is an active process in which students connect new learning to existing knowledge, to create new ideas of concepts (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). Bruner (1966) further emphasizes with constructivist theory the importance of student autonomy, including students determining

what they learn and having a role in the direction of learning. Toshalis and Nakkula's spectrum of student voice framework captures the essence of constructivist theory at various levels (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Along the spectrum of voice, student influence, responsibility and decision-making roles increase from the left to right (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Most student voice activity currently in schools consists of less-intensive involvement, in the forms of expression, consultation and some participation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Increasing partnership, activism and leadership has the potential to motivate more students to make an effort and ultimately, to succeed (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). I focused my research questions around the three elements along the upper end of the spectrum, partnership, activism and leadership.

Significance of the study

As the *civic opportunity gap* in low-income urban schools continues to be a critical issue for student success and performance (Abu El-Haj, et al., 2007), it is critical that school leaders think about their students and what they truly need to overcome gaps in their learning to master a complex educational system (Mitra, 2004). Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) identified that high school students accrue about 12,000 hours of seat time absorbing their surroundings and making informed judgments about success and failures with regard to their own learning and were sure to have a critical view about what works or does not work. Access to these critical student views could help inform decision-makers in schools and provide essential information on how to enhance systems and structures that potentially lead to increased levels of student motivation and engagement. Many urban schools have not developed clear structures that allow opportunities for student voice, especially those that empower students as leaders of

change (Cook-Sather, 2006). Student voice is relatively new in the educational field (Mitra, 2004). Mitra and Gross (2009) define student voice as the systemic inclusion and empowerment of students in the decision-making processes of schools. In its modern interpretation, student voice is focused predominantly on the design, facilitation and improvement of learning (Mitra, 2004).

Looking specifically at marginalized populations in urban schools, and the historical ties to the *civic opportunity gap*, Michelle Fine and Lois Weis (2003) identify the notion of *silencing* and how intimately it shapes low-income schools compared to relatively privileged ones. The concept of silencing removes any documentation that all is not well with the workings of the U.S. economy, race, gender relations, and public schooling as the route to class mobility (Fine & Weis, 2003). Silencing makes the lived experiences of students in these settings irrelevant, and creates a barrier between the world of school and community life, (Fine & Weis, 2003). Muting students and their communities systematically undermines empowerment (Friere, 1985; Giroux, 1988; Schor, 1980). If empowerment and opportunity were evident within urban schooling systems, the promise of mobility, equal opportunity, equal access and a participatory democracy would drive school reform efforts (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). The counter-narrative is *naming* which involves practices that facilitate critical conversation about inequitable distributions of power, which low-income urban students face disproportionately, (Fine & Weis, 2003). Sizer (1985) states that the typical classroom still values, silence, control, and quiet, which reinforces a system of asymmetric power relations, and quiets the voices of dissent and difference (Fine & Weis, 2003). In education, the highest form of power occurs when young people and adults' work

together towards the formers' desired goals (Bahou, 2011). "Student voice, in its most profound and radical form, calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also the presence and power of students" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p.363).

In the essence of *naming*, we know that all is not well in today's urban schools; by and large many urban schools are unhappy places (Kozol, 1991). Dunleavy and Milton (2009) point out that the transformation of today's educational structures would take courage and stamina to overcome the current systems that were created around the economic needs of the late 19th century. Much of today's curriculum stems from the work of Ralph Tyler. Tyler's approach to curriculum was both logical and rigid, proposing a hierarchy to address curriculum using four simple steps: (1) outlining purposes, (2) experiences, (3) organization, and (4) evaluation. Tyler's ideas did not necessarily involve the user or the student in curriculum design, rather his universal approach was to design curriculum and then apply that curriculum to all students in the classrooms (Tyler, 1975). These systems mirrored the social and economic history of the time and were created with a design to move students into various paths for careers and adulthood. Tyler however, did understand the need for student empowerment in curriculum planning. He recognized that students must be engaged in the content they receive and that:

If a school activity is perceived as interesting and/or useful for his purposes, he enters into it energetically, whereas if it seems irrelevant or boring or painful, he avoids it, or limits his involvement as much as he can. I have found that observing and interviewing students when they are actively engaged in learning things they think important help me to develop initial outlines for experiences that will help these students learn things the school seeks to teach. (Tyler, 1975, p. 28)

In the 1930's Tyler led the famous, *Eight-Year Study*, painstakingly documenting how students from experimental progressive schools were experiencing greater levels of academic success compared to their 1,475 peers from traditional schools (Aiken, 1942; Smith & Tyler, 1942; Chamberlin, Chamberlin, Drought & Scott, 1942).

Implications of the study

The National Commission of Excellence in Education proclaimed a “crisis” in its 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk* (Cummins, 2001). In response to this report, reform efforts began around school accountability on specific content standards, with the use of high-stakes tests to monitor schools and students (Cummins, 2001). These reform efforts are still evident today, and have not created the intended outcomes of alleviating the achievement gap (Cummins, 2001). Darling-Hammond (2010) identified that the amount of technical information is doubling every two years, and as a result education can no longer focus on the transmission of pieces of information demonstrated on standardized tests devoid of authentic student engagement, rather students need to be empowered to think critically and learn for themselves, so they can apply knowledge readily and manage the demands of changing information, technologies, jobs and social conditions. Ultimately, adults cannot give students’ personal engagement to them; too much giving breeds docility, which is a widespread reality in American high schools (Sizer, 2004). Student voice advocates challenge the passive role of students within schools to re-define student-teacher relationships as a joint endeavor in learning (Fielding, 2007).

In order to make further recommendations about how to proceed with the notion of student voice becoming enacted in schools and having an impact on engagement and achievement, we must, I believe, understand the perceptions of students, and teachers

about what opportunities exist that facilitate student voice, specifically; partnership, activism and leadership. One-way to do this was to investigate the opportunities that exist in schools and identify how partnership, activism and leadership are manifested within these structures. In utilizing Toshalis and Nakkula's (2012) framework "*spectrum of student voice*", I began to unpack the potential levels of student influence, responsibility and decision-making throughout the academic settings of a school.

It has been recognized that public schools do a good job of involving young people in community service activities (Flanagan and Faison, 2001; Honig et al., 2001), however, they tend to fall short in preparing youth to develop and lead such activities which creates passive participants rather than leaders (Kirshner, 2004; Larson, 2000; Westheimer and Kahne, 2003). The spectrum of student voice oriented activity sheds light on how schools are performing in relation to creating opportunities for students to collaborate with adults, and develop leadership to address problems within their schools (Mitra, 2005).

I also looked at the barriers that influence opportunities for student voice. As a working professional in public education, I can affirm that schools are tasked with many initiatives in raising student achievement. Research confirms that traditionally adults often overlook feedback and collaboration opportunities with their students on how to better meet their needs, discounting their views as being legitimate (Holdsworth, 2005). Many researchers have noticed that by not involving students, and particularly those who are failing subjects or rarely attending school, it is easy for school reformers to shift blame for failure onto students rather than look at problems within school culture that

reinforces student failure (Fine, 1991; Kelly, 1997; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

Importance of Study

This study was important for a variety of reasons. First, it advanced the spectrum of student voice created by Toshalis and Nakkula, and investigated the level of student participation in an urban high school setting and the impact it had on students. Second, there had been little empirical investigation of ways in which adults facilitate the development of student voice and subsequently, youth leadership, (Mitra, 2005). Third, because teachers often drive school-wide professional learning needs and decision-making (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) the study provided insights on how to develop clear systems and structures for teachers and administrators to facilitate and support student voice initiatives. Finally, by investigating the current opportunities for student voice and the perceptions that students, and teachers had, we may gain insight into whether or not these perceptions hold any value for education in general. These perceptions were assessed through describing what both teachers and students had to say about opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership, and if they had an impact on student motivation, and improved performance outcomes such as attendance, grades and student behavior.

Introduction to Methodology: Collective Case Study

For my dissertation, I explored questions that were directly connected to the higher end of the spectrum of student voice activity that includes, partnership, activism and leadership. Partnerships provide students with a formalized role in school decision-making, and are viewed as partners with educators. Activism allows students to identify

problems within the school setting and generate solutions, educating others for change. Leadership involves students in co-planning with staff to make decisions and guiding group processes and conducting activities.

Creswell (2007) defines a collective case study as one issue being explored, but the inquirer selects multiple cases to illustrate the issue. I conducted a collective case study at a large urban high school in the district I work for, but not within the specific building I served as principal. Due to potential bias and conflict of interest as a building principal, I chose to conduct this study at a different school within the district I work. The bulk of the research and literature review involved urban high schools, and I chose this location due to the principal's willingness to allow me access to his students and staff. I shared the letter written by my two students and the principal at the site where I will conduct my study, stated that his students express similar communication to him regularly wanting to have more opportunities for voice within their school day. I began by conducting focus group interviews with three different groups of students. Students were selected through a stratified sampling process. The students were selected from the classes of three teachers. The three teachers were selected to participate in individual interviews as well, based on their beliefs and practices around student empowerment. The building principal personally recommended the three teachers, after he heard about the basis of my study. The content areas they taught were Social Studies and Science, and each of them offered a range of courses from Advanced Placement, regular track, and concurrent enrollment courses through Community College of Aurora. A concurrent enrollment class is defined as a course offered to a high school student through a community college, and the students are able to obtain college credit. In order to gather

as much data as possible I conducted three focus group interviews involving six to twelve students who were chosen by stratified sample and who were enrolled in classes taught by the three teachers involved in the study. My intentions were to identify what opportunities were provided for partnership, activism and leadership with specific details regarding what it looks and sounds like. I also sought input regarding what students might like to see differently if they feel opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership were missing. I also interviewed the three teachers individually to gain their perceptions about opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. The intentions of the focus groups of students and staff were to inquire about student voice opportunities, specifically within partnership, activism and leadership. The interviews were helpful to identify what facilitates and/or creates barriers for opportunities for student voice, namely, partnership, activism and leadership. My intentions were also to see if there is a link to opportunities for student voice and motivation. In order to assess student motivation, I probed to see if performance outcomes such as attendance, grades and behavior were positively or negatively impacted by opportunities or lack of opportunities involving partnership, activism and leadership. Finally, I analyzed the emergent qualitative data to determine if there were any implications for teacher education, particularly those interested in equipping staff with meaningful and authentic educational practices that increase opportunities for student voice. With regards to the civic opportunity gap, research clearly states there is a disjuncture between the experiences of urban students and their teachers (Abu El-Haj, et al., 2007). The concept of silencing makes the lived experiences of students in urban settings irrelevant and creates barriers between the world of school and community life (Fine & Weis, 2003).

Through my student and teacher interviews, I revealed perceptions that encourage the compelling case for schools to enact more opportunities for student voice through partnership, activism and leadership.

Limitations

Limitations may impact the results of research or how the data is interpreted (Baron, 2013). Additionally, Baron reported this information is useful to the reader to describe issues that may not immediately be apparent. The following limitations were identified:

- (1)- A limitation of this study was a small sample size.
- (2)- The teachers for this study were recommended by the building Principal.
- (3)- The teachers and students alike were unfamiliar with the theoretical framework used, the spectrum of student voice.

Summary

Chapter one provided an introduction to the study, the problem statement and rationale for the study as well as the theoretical framework and research questions used for the study. I concluded chapter one by providing the significance of the study as well as the limitations. Chapter two examines the history of student voice as well as current research regarding student voice that reveals the potential impact on student motivation. Chapter three contains the methodology describing specifically the location, the participants, as well as the methods used to examine the data. Chapter four discusses the results and findings of the study. Chapter five provides the summary, implications, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

- 1. What opportunities exist within the urban high school setting for partnership, activism and leadership?*
- 2. What are the perceived barriers that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?*
- 3. What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools?*

Introduction

There are many definitions regarding student voice. West (2004) states, student voice is not simply about the opportunity to state opinions; it is about having the power to influence change. Cook-Sather (2006) asserts that at the most conservative level student voice means having a say when asked but without any guarantee of a necessary response, whereas in its most radical form it calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students. In its modern interpretation, student voice is focused predominantly on the design, facilitation and improvement of learning (Mitra, 2004). Mitra further elaborates that student voice is intended to improve the engagement of students and the outcomes of learning, and have a positive impact on school reform where students actively help shape change. In this review of the literature, I utilized Mitra's (2004) definition as the lens to highlight the background of student voice and then discuss the critical elements of student voice

specifically within the ‘spectrum of student voice framework’ developed by Toshalis and Nakkula including, partnership, activism and leadership. My intention was to show ways in which student voice can be facilitated in school settings to inform and potentially improve school reform as well as identify barriers that limit opportunities for student voice.

From the lens of students actively helping to shape change in school reform, student voice work must be seen as a work in progress, another step in an ongoing struggle to find meeting places for teachers and students and for researchers and students from which to effect cultural shifts that support a repositioning of students (Cook-Sather, 2006). Hargreaves (2004) asserts that in order to ensure that teaching and support is designed around a student’s needs, the most powerful way for this to occur is through facilitating student voice. Authentic student voice is not simply to inform decision-making; rather it should encourage student’s active participation in the decision-making process along with consequent actions (Holdsworth, 2005). Holdsworth further contends that research determines student voice and teacher voice need to be balanced, along with collaboration in order to enable students to take roles and responsibility for outcomes. Arguments against shared roles and responsibility for outcomes imply that student voice can present challenges that some may not be willing to face, particularly listening to things we do not want to hear (Cook-Sather, 2006). In order to understand the compelling cases for student voice, as well as barriers that exist, it is useful to look at its brief history.

The contents of chapter two begin with a brief history of student voice highlighting the foundational aspects as well as its evolution and current status in

research. I will then unpack the compelling case for student voice, where the research is grounded in equity supporting student empowerment. Next, I will reveal specific case studies highlighting the successful implementation of student voice. The final portions of chapter two discuss the spectrum of student voice framework, unpacking each element along the higher end of the spectrum, namely, partnership, activism and leadership which will be the focal points of my dissertation. Finally, I will discuss existing barriers to the implementation of student voice.

History of Student Voice

In the 1990s, it was noted by educators and social critics that student voice had been excluded from conversations about schooling (Cook-Sather, 2006). John Dewey called for teachers to listen to students and to be “alive” to their thinking, affect and learning (Dewey, 1933). Yet, in today’s system educators rarely ask students what they know and/or what teachers in particular, and schools in general, can do to help them learn (Mabry et al., 2010). In the United States, Kozol (1991) stated that student voice was missing as an integral piece of school reform. Kozol (1991) also exposed the inconsistencies of schooling in the United States where the national discourse of “equal education opportunities for all” masks the reality of grossly unequal education conditions for underserved communities. Weis and Fine (1993) encouraged the voices of students who have been silenced from school culture to speak. In Canada, Fullan (1991) asked a profound question, “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?” (p. 170). Levin (1994) indicated that the most promising school reform strategies involved the inclusion of young people in developing goals and

informing learning methods. In the United Kingdom, where early efforts were evident involving student voice work, Rudduck, Chaplain, and Wallace (1996) urged for the inclusion of students' perspectives regarding school improvement. In Australia, Youens and Hall (2004) asserted schools would be far better served by asking students what they think and actively listening to their answers.

By the early part of the 21st century, educational research in Australia, Canada, England and the United States promoted input and discussion on matters in relation to students, regarding school staff and the communities they serve, furthering the development of the term student voice (Fielding & McGregor, 2005). Cook-Sather (2006) calls this cultural shift in educational research and school reform “a retuning of ears and a rearrangement of players and process of research and reform” (p. 362). Work in Australia, involving students who drop out, Smyth (2004) presents students' critiques of schooling and argues that any school reform must be undertaken with student voice at the forefront. In the United States, Mitra (2004) pushes beyond simply honoring students' voices, but by placing them in a position to translate student explanations of why they struggle in school, into language adults would understand. Reform efforts in Canada, highlighted by Pekrul and Levin (2005) reveal that student voice can impact a critical mass to shift practices and culture of high schools.

Defining voice depends on the context between voice, and agency or action (Holdsworth, 2005). In relationship to people, institutions and practices, voice requires the presence and participation of students to be recognized and acted upon (Cook-Sather, 2006). Student voice ultimately is not just about being heard, and acknowledging its

presence, it also requires the power to influence the decisions around practices in school (Cook-Sather, 2006). Nagle (2001) articulated, voice allows students to be known, name their experience, and actively participate in the decisions that impact their lives. In relation to power structure, who gets listened to, is critical (Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003). Who is speaking to whom is equally as important, as the middle class voice historically dominates institutional decisions which marginalizes social justice discourse and basic needs for all students (Fielding, 2004b). Student voice is both an expression of voice, but also an involved act of participation where students can engage with institutions that shape their lives (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). Student voice radically calls for a cultural shift that opens not just spaces, but minds to the sound, presence and power of students (Cook-Sather, 2006). There is no simple, fixed definition for student voice, rather advocates agree that it is a crucial component in understanding teaching and learning, with a varied result as to what is done in response and how understanding is achieved (McCallum, Hargreaves, & Gipps, 2000).

Compelling Case for Student Voice

An absence of student voice in schools leads to resistance to learning (Smyth, 2006), and the way to turn this around is to place a greater policy emphasis on the relational work of schools. Young people can and should play a crucial role in the success of school improvement (Fletcher, 2005). “A number of recent accounts have featured educators refuting the misconception that engaging students as partners in school change is about “making students happy”, pacifying unruly children, or “letting kids run the school” (Fletcher, 2005, p.4). Teachers can improve their practice by listening to students

and building teaching around themes that are relevant to and emerge from students' own lives, which can be transformative both personally and politically (Friere, 1990; McLaren, 1989; Shor, 1987, 1992). It is no surprise, due to increase focused on test scores, that high school students frequently describe their school experiences as anonymous and powerless (Earls, 2003; Pope, 2001). Alienation results in 25-70% of students being disengaged from high schools (Cothran and Ennis, 2000; Marks, 2000; Newmann et al., 1992; OECD, 2003, Steinberg et al., 1996). "Increased demand for accountability and visible results of student achievement has narrowed the vision and purpose of schooling in recent years, not only in terms of pedagogy and content, but also in democratic partnership" (Mitra and Gross, 2009, p. 525). Because the accountability movement has been designed and implemented with little student input, one must question its ability to increase engagement of high school students (Mitra and Gross, 2009). Research supports that student disengagement is an international problem (OECD, 2003); data were gathered from the USA and Australian high school students (Gross and Burford, 2006). Both nations are experiencing similar problems of high school disengagement and increased mandatory high stakes testing (Mitra and Gross, 2009).

Curriculum that does not relate to students' lives, ineffective pedagogical practices, disconnection from school culture, interpersonal conflict, and lack of classroom support are some of the variables linked to lack of student success in school, as well as poverty, family challenges, mental health issues, forms of social discrimination or peer challenges (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; Hixson & Tinzmann, 1990). Although the voices of students are not often included in educational change initiatives (Cassidy & Bates, 2005;

Thompson & Holdsworth, 2003; Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, and Zine, 2000), scholars have reported benefits when students' perspectives are included (Bolmeirer, 2006; Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2006; Gardner & Crockwell, 2006; Nygreen, Ah Kwon, & Sanchez, 2006). Research has demonstrated that the power of students' description of their learning, as revealed to teachers in dialogue, can play a powerful part in meeting learners' needs and in building trust and community (Rodgers, 2006). Evidence also suggests that students' learning is enhanced when teachers pay attention to the "knowledge and beliefs that learners bring to a learning task" and use this knowledge to develop instruction by monitoring students' perceptions as instruction continues (Bransford et al., 2000).

Conditions conducive to learning in schools deteriorate through emphasis on accountability, standards, measurement, and high stakes testing, that increasing numbers of students of color, working class and minority backgrounds are making active choices that school is not for them (Smyth, 2006). If we want evidence that policies of testing, scripted and prescribed teaching, an ethos of competition, along with dehumanized and irrelevant curricula are not working for large numbers of students, then we need look no further than the 30-40% of students in most western countries who are not completing high school (Smyth, 2006). The reality in many US schools, particularly those serving adolescents put at a disadvantage, is that many youth are in despair, and feeling a lack of human connections (Jones, 1996). Osterman (2000) argues that, at a policy level, a focus on students' need for belonging is seldom the focus. What research is suggesting is that the need for relatedness and autonomy are generally ignored within schools and that

students with the greatest needs may be least likely to experience belongingness or autonomy. The group most affected by the direction of education policy, namely students, has no 'official' voice (Smyth, 2006).

Seeking student views on school problems and possible solutions reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate (Kushman, 1997; Levin, 2000; Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 1997; Thorkildsen, 1994). Increasing student voice in schools also has been shown to help re-engage alienated students by providing them with a stronger sense of ownership in their schools (Mitra, 2003). Young people are likely to be more motivated and engaged in activity when they feel they have a voice in how it is conducted and can affect how it concludes (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). If we believe that schools too often make students feel anonymous and powerless, disengaged and alienated, then it is crucial that any reforms seek to ameliorate rather than exacerbate these conditions (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Successful Implementation of Student Voice

Empirical studies in student voice research (Mitra, 2001; MacBeath et al, 2003; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Morgan, 2006; Pedder and McIntyre, 2006; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007; Thompson, 2009) have demonstrated important practical contributions of student consultation for school improvement among those teachers who have seriously considered students' perspectives. Listening and learning from student voices necessitated a shift from the ways in which teachers engaged with students and how they perceived their own practices (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). Across multiple studies,

teachers and students reported that their relationships, communication, and learning had noticeably improved. Students had mostly expressed a stronger commitment to learning and developed a sense of identity as learners (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). The qualitative impact of consultation on students' learning enhanced and improved their motivation, attendance, positive attitudes towards learning, capacity for responsibility and new roles, and perceptions of teachers (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014).

Student voice, when it involves students having a genuine say in their learning, has served as a catalyst for positive change in schools. Positive outcomes include: helping improve teaching and learning, and raising student self-esteem and efficacy (Fielding 2001; Mitra 2003, 2004; Rudduck & Flutter 2000). Student voice efforts can provide fresh or new ways of seeing problems that had previously been ignored or misunderstood (Mitra and Gross, 2009). Students have different positionality than adults in interacting with peers, and one's position can have a greater effect regarding reform (Mitra and Gross, 2009). A key reason that student voice can be so effective in drawing attention to issues in a new light is that students have a different positionality.

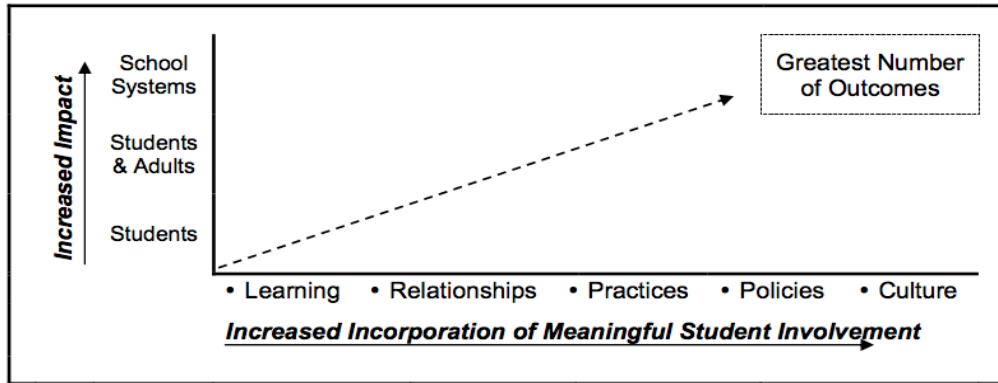
Student voice initiatives have led to new educational policy, structures, and processes (Thiessen, 2007); improved teacher practice (Ruddock & Demetriou, 2003); fostered youth agency, belonging, and competence (Mitra, 2004); enhanced student-teacher relations (Prieto, as cited in Thiessen, 2007); and fostered school improvement (Alberta Education, 2009). One specific case involved fourth year students as active partners in the research process. Researchers used strength-based perspectives which attend to students' capacities, resilience, agency, and "funds of knowledge" (see

Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), to honor and validate their expertise, knowledge, and meaning of being in the fourth year of senior high, and to contrast deficit-based and problem-focused perspectives of student returning to complete a fourth year of senior high (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007; Kim, 2006). Further findings revealed that learning environments that connected to “how they learn” and “who they are” better supported student engagement and learning. A desire was expressed for (a) hands-on and activity based learning, (b) smaller, multi-purpose classrooms, (c) respectful teacher-student partnerships, and (d) learning through open dialogue and group work (Kirby & Gardner, 2010). Participatory forms of student research are crucial to the study of expanding student success during the fourth year of high school, (Kirby & Gardner, 2010). This research initiative enabled researchers to engage students’ voices in ways that were flexible, meaningful, context relevant, and emergent.

Research shows that when educators work with students in schools- as opposed to working for them- school improvement is positive and meaningful for everyone involved (Fletcher, 2005). When more people are impacted by meaningful student involvement, there are a high number of outcomes (Fletcher, 2005). (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2.

Table 2. Outcome Connections



SOURCE: (Fletcher, 2005)

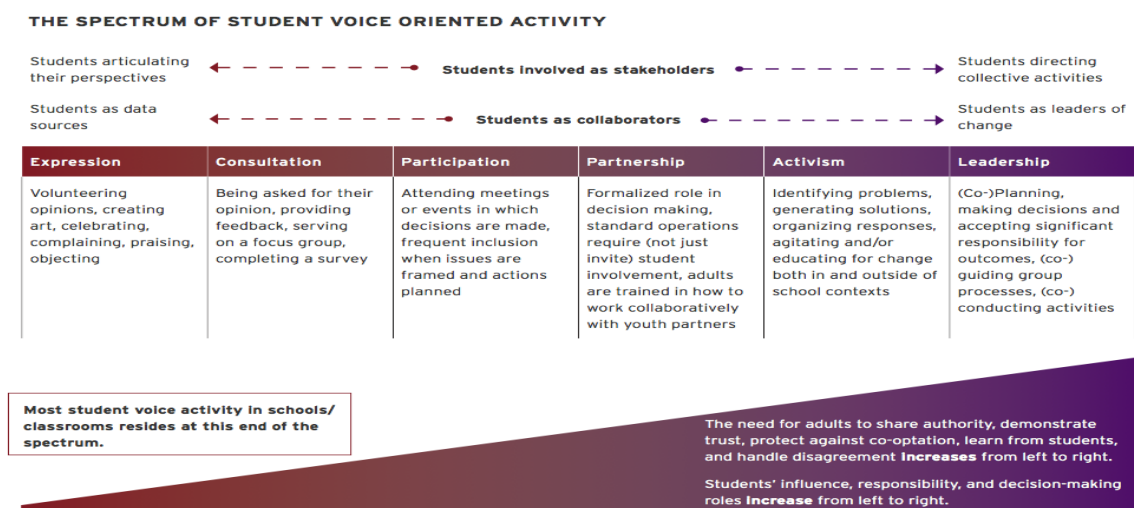
Spectrum of Student Voice

A curriculum that prepares students for the challenges of the twenty-first century needs to ensure students are supported to take increasing responsibility for their own learning, their physical, personal and social well-being, their relationships with others and their role in the local, national and global community (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). T.T. Aoki addresses, specifically the need for consideration of the curriculum as it is lived outside in the classroom. In order to move beyond the position of curriculum as plan, Aoki emphasizes the importance of educators shifting the perspective of themselves and others. “By shifting the perspective and language, education can move towards a curriculum that has room for the otherness of others” (Aoki, 1993, p. 44). One of the most powerful tools available to influence a meaningful curriculum and building a strong sense of belonging is helping students feel they have a stake in their learning and decision-making (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Research shows that increasing levels of self-determination gives rise to greater integration of students' own sense of purpose, interest, and desire with what may be required of them from outside forces (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Toshalis and Nakkula developed a typology called the spectrum of student voice. The figure displays the range of student voice activities. (See figure 1.)

Figure 1.



SOURCE: (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Moving from left to right, students' roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority grow (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). On the left, student voice activity is limited to students speaking their minds; on the right, students may be directing collective actions of both peers and adults (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Students provide sources of data on the left side, but are viewed as leaders of change on the right. The middle areas are where activities blend providing opportunities for collaboration, but limited leadership opportunities (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The headers signify what the students do at each level, (e.g., expression, consultation). It is critical to point out the shaded ramp on

the bottom, which provides visual representation of expectations of adults and students gradually increasing student empowerment and influence (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The left side provides opportunities for sharing opinions, and students are given public outlets for their perspectives (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). In these instances students are not exercising decision-making power, but these are still important examples of student voice activity and helping schools become more student centered (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The need for adults to share authority, demonstrate trust, and protect against co-optation, learn from students and handle disagreement increases as you move right on the continuum (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Also, students' influence, responsibility, and decision-making roles increase on the right side of the continuum (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). I will further elaborate on the higher end of the spectrum regarding, partnership, activism and leadership, highlighting specific cases for each.

Most student voice activities currently in schools consist of less-intensive involvement, in the forms of expression, consultation, and some participation; increasing partnership, activism, and leadership would motivate students to make an effort and ultimately succeed (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). When students believe that they are valued for their perspectives and respected, they begin to develop a sense of ownership and attachment to the organization in which they are involved (Mitra, 2009). Students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate, such as providing a bridge between the school and families reluctant to interact with school personnel, including first-generation immigrant families (Mitra, 2009). Given that real change typically requires participation by and buy-in from all stakeholders,

scholars have found considerable evidence that the creation of more formalized roles for students in school improvement leads to better, more sustainable outcomes (see, for example: Fielding 2007b; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Mitra, 2003; Smyth, 2006). Levin (2000) concludes that school reform cannot succeed and should not proceed without much more direct involvement of students in all its aspects.

Partnership

Adult-youth partnerships consist of spaces and activities in which participants develop a collective vision for their work and distribute meaningful roles for each youth and adult member, with shared responsibility for decisions and accountability for outcomes (Mitra, 2005). It's critical for adults to still guide and coach these partnerships, but youth are still understood to be indispensable rather than auxiliary in the work (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Numerous studies make it clear that partnering with students can greatly enhance the success of school reform efforts and lead to gains in youth development (Mitra & Gross, 2009). When students are involved in evaluating programs, conducting research as part of school reform efforts, or investigating issues in their communities, they experience growth in identity exploration, self-confidence, social capital, social competencies, civic competencies, research skills, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills (Zeldin O'Connor, & Camino, 2006).

To categorize partnership into generalizable categories, research identifies partnership where students are educational planners, and learning evaluators (Fletcher, 2005). In review of the literature Grace 1999; Gordon 2003; Cruddas 2005 provide examples of schools using student voice for education planning and improvement

including: students as participants in curricular planning meetings; co-creating new school designs; planning the school day; and planning and constructing learning units with the assistance of teachers. Other aspects of student partnership include reform efforts including, curriculum and assessment development, such as by students offering instant feedback during staff development sessions (Fielding, 2001; Ruddock and Flutter, 2000). Classroom practice has also been directly impacted by teachers working with students to co-create curriculum and to engage in dialogues about ways to shape the learning occurring in the classroom (Flutter and Ruddock, 2004; Rubin and Silva, 2003). A case study in the Bay Area, involving a Student Forum at Whitman High School highlighted more examples of student and adult partnerships including teacher-focused activities, where students joined alongside in staff development regarding inquiry-based research and reading strategies (Mitra, 2005). Student Forum served as “experts” on their classroom experience by providing staff feedback on how students might receive new pedagogical strategies (Mitra, 2005). Student Forum inspired some teachers to partner with students, and place a strong emphasis on including students with the implementation of professional development strategies (Mitra, 2005). In order to ensure success in the Student Forum model, it was critical to establish common norms, language and skills (Mitra, 2005). Five sets of skills were deemed necessary for the students at Whitman: (a) how the schooling system works, (b) how to address problems through creating action plans and delegating tasks, (c) how to plan and facilitate meetings, (d) how to feel comfortable sharing opinions and how to speak publically about them, and (e) how to get along with others (Mitra, 2005). Without developing common language in the community

of practice, slipping back into a traditional teacher-student pattern of interaction becomes too easy (Mitra, 2005). To help alleviate the power imbalance and create communities of practice that include students, values also must be reified within the school culture (Mitra, 2005). Constructing true partnerships with students requires that youth have the space to stumble at times while being provided with enough support so that they succeed more often than fail (Mitra, 2005).

Activism

For systemic change to occur, students sometimes organize and apply pressure from the outside (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). This form of student voice is best understood within the spectrum as activism. These activities center around issues youth seek to change, sometimes within schools or out in their communities (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). In general, youth activists are instrumental in identifying concerns, mobilizing others, and building campaigns to achieve objectives (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The distinguishing factor for activist models is the way youth are understood as agents of change not just informational resources (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Meaningful student involvement for activism is highlighted through students as researchers and advocates (Fletcher, 2005). The students as researcher model, includes issues for investigation that are identified by students who receive training in the skills and values of research and inquiry (Fielding, 2004). Students are supported with their research alongside their teachers (Fielding, 2004). Young people have served as researchers and witnesses documenting school policies that exacerbate achievement gaps and identifying ways in which detrimental school conditions can adversely affect

students' psychological, social and academic well-being (Fine et al., 2007). At the highest level of activism, students are enabled to criticize and question issues such as structural and cultural injustices within schools (Fine, 1991; Mitra, 2007b). "When students research their schools, they become critical consumers of the institutions that affect them most" (Fletcher, 2005, p.11). One such way scholars and educators have conducted research with young people to address inherent power imbalance is through (YPAR) youth-led participatory action research (Fine & Cammarota, 2008). Through this form of research, students participate in research design, execution, analysis, and writing about schools, environments, the teaching and learning process, as well as injustices that exist (Fletcher, 2005).

Student advocacy is another form of activism (Fletcher, 2005). When students are advocates they work within the system and throughout their community to change schools (Fletcher, 2005). Many cases involve students participating on committees, panels and in functions to help raise awareness or interest in educational issues (Fletcher, 2005). Fielding (2001) and Holdsworth (2005) link the importance of 'voice' to 'action', stating the central issue of student voice is not simply to provide data, but should be encouraging student's active participation in shared decisions, with consequent actions about their own present and futures. "Student advocacy can help to increase the tension and focus on pressing issues when needed; it also can help to calm turbulence occurring within individual adolescents and also in school contexts that need resolution" (Mitra and Gross, 2009, p. 522). One specific case from Sierra High School, students produced videos to dispel negative stereotypes of teens in a 'last chance' high school. Sierra

provided a safe space for students to take time out if they were unable to concentrate, (Mitra and Gross, 2009). The Sierra initiative demonstrates benefits of social capital for youth and can yield opportunities for further education and enrichment opportunities, (O'Connor and Camino, 2005) providing legitimate opportunities for youth to take on meaningful roles, including to be change-makers in their schools and communities so they can experience making a difference- especially helping others in need (Mitra, 2003).

Leadership

The farthest right on the spectrum is leadership. Programs that prepare students to lead view students as problem solvers, with the acumen in which schools and communities would greatly benefit from (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Leadership is what Toshalis and Nakkula consider being the highest representation of student voice, as well as what Fielding (2006) refers to as “radical collegiality” and what Philip Woods and Peter Gronn (2009) label “distributed leadership”. In this form of student voice, supports and growth opportunities are embedded into schools with gradual increases in influence, responsibility and decision-making authority, in which adults and youth work in tandem to impact change (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). “When student leadership is a part of the program, youth show deeper commitment to their communities, greater self-confidence, increased ability to take on governance roles and responsibilities, and a strengthened sense of organizational commitment” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 27).

Leadership involves students as systemic decision-makers and leaders for organizational change (Fletcher, 2005). In a decision-making model, students partner with educators to make decisions throughout the school system, from curricula, calendar

year planning, building design, as well as budgeting and hiring (Fletcher, 2005). On the organizational change level, research has revealed students working with adults to improve schools, calling for social, economic, racial and environmental justice in schools (Fletcher, 2005). Grace 1999; Gordon 2003; Cruddas 2005 provide literature of schools involving students in co-planning and improvement including; students participating in curricular planning meetings, co-creating new school designs, planning the school day, developing learning units, all with the assistance of teachers.

Further elaboration on opportunities for student leadership, Glatthorn et al (2009) argue that adoptive and instructional practices demand students' involvement in curriculum by developing their own curriculum. Glatthorn et al (2009) further maintain that involving students in curriculum development encourages them to explore the topics they study deeply and allows them a voice of their own as well as opportunities to share their learning with community and makes them revitalized as they experience the benefits of their own initiatives. Eisner (2001) has written more directly about the role of the student in curriculum development. His questions grow out of a reflection regarding how factors such as external assessments influence a classroom teacher's decisions regarding curriculum (Jagersma & Parsons, 2011). Too often decisions are made based off of external assessments rather than the needs or desires of the students (Jagersma & Parsons, 2011). Eisner asks, "What opportunities do students have to formulate their own purposes and to design ways to achieve them?" (Eisner, 2001, p. 371). If students are not allowed leadership within curriculum development, they will become their own barriers to learning (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Students need to be encouraged and supported to

take on leadership for their own learning and participation. This involves developing as individual learners who increasingly manage their own learning and growth, by setting goals and managing resources to achieve these (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014).

Barriers to Student Voice Implementation

Meaningful opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership require a great deal of investment from the students and adults involved (Fletcher, 2005). Alfie Kohn has identified three types of barriers to student participation and decision-making in schools (Kohn, 1993). Structure is identified as the first barrier. The structure of a school includes the policies, rules, laws, and beliefs that inform the way the people interact within that school. Kohn (1993) notes that school culture may create a climate in which teachers do to children what is done to them. “Classroom teachers frequently protest that they would love to open up the decision-making process but for the fact that a significant number of decisions are not theirs to give away or even make themselves” (Fletcher, 2005, p.21). Student voice initiatives need to support the whole school with the whole school culture supporting the process and follow up around student voice (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). Depending on the level of support, a lone teacher in a classroom using this approach may become frustrated and so too might the students if they see no general support for what they have to say, and no opportunity to influence school decisions and decision makers (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). (See figure 3.)

Figure 3.

Structural Barrier	Possible Solution
Despite an individual teachers' enthusiasm for meaningful student involvement, their principal denies their request to do an activity in their school.	Discuss meaningful student involvement with other educators online and identify who is successful at it. Seek information and materials that will encourage meaningful student involvement in your school. Develop networks among peers to develop interest and support with other adults.
Little encouragement, incentives, or recognition of meaningful student involvement in school currently exist.	Develop lesson plans to integrate meaningful student involvement into classes, allowing students to earn credit.

SOURCE: (Kohn, 1993)

According to Kohn (1993), adults are the second barrier. “Personal attitudes, past experiences, and negative perceptions can all serve as roadblocks. Adults do things for- not with- students” (Fletcher, 2005, p. 21). Kohn explains, parting with power is not easy, if only because the results are less predictable than in a situation where we have control (Kohn, 1993). Students are also aware that some educators attempt to be empowering, but offer too little structure in their classrooms (Fletcher, 2005). (See figure 4.)

Figure 4.

Adult Barrier	Possible Solution
Adults are threatened when they learn from students that they aren't doing what should be done. They might also feel threatened dealing with the ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experiences of students.	Adults should learn new roles, language & behaviors in order to “walk the talk.” Reading about meaningful student involvement and being trained in Student/Adult Partnerships can help.
Adults assume that they easily understand the attitudes and challenges of students today.	Students could offer workshops for adults on their cultures, heritages, and backgrounds. Students can also create “tip sheets” and other tools for teachers.

SOURCE: (Kohn, 1993).

The last barrier Kohn (1993) identifies is students. Kohn further elaborates for students there are three primary types of student resistance. The first is simply refusing; students protest that decision-making is the adults' job (Kohn, 1993). The second is testing, where students offer outrageous suggestions to test if the teacher is serious about participation (Kohn, 1993). The third and final resistance is parroting, which serves as a way to placate the adult, or a way to guess what the adult wants to hear (Kohn, 1993). (See figure 5).

Figure 5.

Student Barrier	Possible Solution
Students feel that they are being pushed to be involved and do not like it.	Adults can integrate meaningful student involvement into classroom activities, offering students an opportunity to experience learning without additional commitment.
Students are inhibited when adults are involved in discussions.	Create a "safe space" for an open discussion about stereotypes that adults and youth have of each other. Continue to have check-ins that allow students and adults to share their honest thoughts with one another.

SOURCE: (Kohn, 1993)

Outside of barriers identified by Alfie Kohn, other perils of implementation exist around student voice initiatives. Research emphasizes student voice can do more harm than good in if poorly implemented (Mitra & Gross, 2009). Despite best intentions, efforts to increase student voice are often clumsy and poorly defined (Bragg, 2007; Fielding, 2004; Holdsworth & Thompson, 2002). Student voice efforts in poorly implemented situations could increase disengagement, distrust, and alienation rather than helping to resolve these problems (Braff, 2007; Fielding, 2004; Silva, 2003). Even in

healthy school climates, the sharing of power with students can be perceived as threatening to teachers (Mitra & Gross, 2009). For adults to empower students, they need to be empowered themselves by their broader institutional environment (Mitra, 2005b; Muncey & McQuillan, 1991). The state of turbulence in a school can affect the ability of a student voice initiative to become established and yield a positive result (Mitra & Gross, 2009). If the focus is on gathering information, and less about creating change, the initiative proves to be less problematic (Mitra & Gross, 2009). Muncy and McQuillan (1991) found in their study that most attempts to involve students in decision-making of a school are not well thought out and have limited positive outcomes. Most schools are not structured in ways that encourage student voice; instead they often conflict with adolescent needs (Mitra, 2003).

Difficulties can emerge, namely the need to alter traditional structures, practices, beliefs and values to allow student voice to flourish (McQuillan, 2005); dangers can arise from co-opting student voices rather than learning from them (Fielding, 2004; Fielding, 2007a); the tricky business of cultivating “respectful disagreement” between youth and adults (Denner, Meyer, & Bean 2005); the challenges associated with “surface compliance” (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006); and time limits, levels of administrative support, worries about teachers losing power, the authenticity of voices, and whether full inclusion of all voices is being achieved (Rudduck, 2007) (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 30).

Absent growth opportunities and peer networks that sustain teachers’ motivation, engagement and voice, it is likely teachers will avoid student-centered techniques and regress to far easier, far less productive “stand and deliver” sorts of pedagogies (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Summary

As I stated in chapter one, my study addressed a gap in the literature. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) developed a framework that reveals the spectrum of student voice opportunities within schools and classrooms. No research has been conducted regarding the usage of this framework. First, the framework has not been tested in schools to see where they specifically fall within the range of the spectrum. Second, it has not been tested or researched to see what the barriers are for each category of student voice. Lastly, the framework has not been used to investigate if students and teachers have any perceptions regarding the framework to determine if these concepts and ideas hold any significance for improving student motivation. My research questions attempted to fill the gaps in the literature and the absence of using this framework for a study in urban schools. For the sake of efficiency, I focused my research questions on the upper end of the spectrum, specifically around partnership, activism and leadership. Also, these categories demonstrate the greatest potential for positive outcomes for students, i.e., greater levels of responsibility, increased trust between students and teachers, and improved motivation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Chapter Three: Methodology

1. *What opportunities exist within the urban high school for partnership, activism and leadership?*
2. *What are the perceived barriers that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?*
3. *What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools?*

Overview of Study

Mitra (2007) offered a critical stance in her research regarding student voice, namely where student engagement and motivation is positively affected through active participation in school reform and decision-making. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) developed the spectrum of student voice framework, which provided specific language as to how students can participate in school reform with increasing levels of responsibility and impact. The upper end of the spectrum includes partnership, activism and leadership, all including advanced levels of student involvement in the decision-making process and school reform initiatives. Research supports that the more responsibility and decision-making students have, the more their motivation increases to perform in school (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Increasing student voice in schools also has been shown to help re-engage alienated students by providing them with a stronger sense of ownership in their schools (Mitra, 2003). Young people are likely to be more motivated and engaged in

activity when they feel they have a voice in how it is conducted and can affect how it concludes (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). When students believe that they are valued for their perspectives and respected, they begin to develop a sense of ownership and attachment to the organization in which they are involved (Mitra, 2009). By asking schools where they fall within the spectrum of student voice oriented activity, Toshalis and Nakkula led me to investigate my overarching question: what is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools? For my dissertation, I explored that question through a collective case study. Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system i.e., a setting or context (Stake, 2005). For this study the type of case study used was a collective case study. Creswell (2007) defines a collective case study as one issue being explored, but the inquirer selects multiple cases to illustrate the issue. Collective case study involves more than one case, which may or may not be physically collocated with other cases (Goddard, 2010). A collective case study may be conducted at one site (e.g., a school, hospital, or university) by examining a number of different departments or other units at that one site (Goddard, 2010). Each unit is studied as part of a collection, regardless of whether the units themselves are located at single or multiple sites. The term *collective case study* is sometimes referred to as *MultiSite case study* or *MultiSite study*. Yin (2003) suggests that the multiple case study design uses the logic of replication, in which the inquirer replicates the procedures for each case. For this collective case study, I investigated both student and teacher perspectives at one site, regarding opportunities that exist for partnership, activism and

leadership. A stratified purposeful sampling of students was selected to participate in three focus group interviews, exploring their perceptions regarding partnership, activism and leadership. Patton (2001) describes a stratified purposeful sample as samples within samples, and suggests that purposeful samples can be stratified or nested by selecting particular units or cases that vary according to a key dimension. Patton further states stratified purposeful sampling is useful for examining variations in the manifestation of a phenomenon (2001). To truly examine partnership, activism and leadership in a school setting, a stratified sample allowed me the opportunity to examine variations across race and gender. I purposefully selected three classes, a regular track civics course, a concurrent enrollment American Government course and an Advanced Placement Computer Science course. These courses were selected, as the teachers who teach these courses also are participated in the study. Purposeful samples of three teachers were individually interviewed seeking their perceptions on partnership, activism and leadership. The Principal at the site where I conducted the study recommended the three teachers, and for the sake of convenience, the three teachers were willing and able to participate in the study. By interviewing students in these courses, and using a stratified sample of students from within these courses, I was best be able to examine as many variations as possible with regards to students having access to partnership, activism and leadership.

The rest of chapter three includes an explanation of the collective case study methodology for my investigation. I describe the purpose of the study and provide granular details of the research questions and how they will be investigated through the

collective case study methodology. I also unpack the data collection process for each research question, as well as describe the analysis process once the data has been collected. Lastly, I describe the setting, participants and location for the collective case study.

Case study research investigates an issue through a bounded system, which is defined as boundaries consisting of time, setting or context (Creswell, 2007). For my research, the bounded system is the school setting involving three teachers and a stratified sampling of students from their classes. The purpose of this collective case study was to investigate urban high school students' and teachers' perceptions regarding student voice and discover what opportunities exist that allow for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as identify what barriers exist. Gillham (2010) asserts that a case study investigates whoever is involved in the study, to answer specific research questions. For the sake of this collective case study, I sought out perceptions from both students and teachers regarding opportunities for student voice, and case study provides an effective structure to gather that evidence. Gillham (2010) further states, with case study no one kind or source is sufficient (or sufficiently valid) on its own. "The multiple sources of evidence, each with its strengths and weaknesses are a key characteristic of case study methodology" (Gillham, 2010, p.2). Creswell (2007) recommends no more than four to five cases in a single study to provide ample opportunity to identify themes. Finally, Gillham asserts that you do not start out with a priori theoretical notions, whether derived from the literature or not, because until you collect data, and understand the context, you won't know what theories make the most sense (2010).

The first phase of my study involved three student focus group interviews. Beck, Trombetta, and Share (1986) describe the focus group as “an informal discussion among selected individuals about specific topics relevant to the situation at hand” (p. 73). In a permissive atmosphere, focus groups foster a range of opinions, which aids in more thorough understanding of the issue being studied (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). The purpose of focus groups is ultimately to obtain a range of opinions (Vaughn, et al., 1996). Vaughn et al. (1996) discuss the core elements of focus groups as, 1. Informal assembly of target persons whose points of view are requested to address a selected topic, 2. The group is small, six to twelve members, 3. A trained moderator with prepared questions, 4. The goal is to elicit perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and ideas about a selected topic, 5. Focus groups do not generate quantitative information that can be projected to a larger population (p. 5). I conducted three focus group interviews consisting of six to twelve students. Through the stratified purposeful sampling process, my intentions were to interview a diverse group of students with a range of perspectives on their school experience. Diversity of the groups serves a critical purpose to, “capture major variations” as referenced by Patton (p. 240). To begin the focus groups, I introduced student friendly definitions for partnership, activism and leadership so students are familiar with the concepts and topic for the interview. Initially I wanted to seek to understand their perceptions regarding what opportunities exist, and have them to describe those opportunities. If they stated opportunities did not exist, I asked them what they believed the barriers were. I also wanted to gather evidence to see if they felt that their level of motivation was positively impacted by opportunities involving partnership,

activism and leadership. I had them discuss measures such as grades, attendance and classroom behavior and discipline. I also conducted interviews with three teachers; seeking their input on opportunities they provide for student voice and again see if there is a correlation to opportunities for student voice and increased student motivation. I sought the teacher's perspectives on students' grades, attendance and behavior to measure student motivation. I also wanted to understand their intentions and actions if they provided opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as what prevents these opportunities. In order to explore how student voice is enacted within a bounded system or the boundaries of the classes being studied, my intentions were to seek out multiple student and teacher perspectives on the issue of student voice.

Purpose of the Study & Research Questions

In this collective case study I investigated the opportunities that students are given for partnership, activism and leadership, from both a teacher and student perspective. I purposely selected a stratified sample of six to twelve students per group, totaling three focus groups across the classes of the teachers participating in the study, again, Vaughn et al., recommend this number for focus group interviews (1996). I ensured a range of student participation in the interviews, including an equal balance of males and females as well as multiple races to gain a deeper understanding and a range of perspectives and variations within this particular school. If time permitted I would have sampled a larger size and included more subjects, however given time limitations and access to a large population base, I used the classes of three teachers who were willing to participate, and were interested in the study. Based on the principal's recommendation

from the site for the study, I chose three teachers, who were willing to participate in the study, and potentially had insights to offer from their practices in terms of student partnership, activism and leadership. In a discussion with the participating school's principal, he highly recommended these three teachers for the study based on their practices and beliefs regarding student leadership and empowerment. In all cases, the teachers had expressed an interest in this study regarding student partnership, activism and leadership, but were not exactly familiar with the framework.

1. *What opportunities exist within the urban high school for partnership, activism and leadership?*

My intentions for question one was to gather student perceptions around the opportunities that exist within their school day for partnership, activism and leadership. I provided them with the basic definitions of each term and reference the questions in student friendly language so they could provide meaningful responses in the focus group interviews. I conducted three focus group interviews the week of May 8th, and selected a stratified sample of students from the following courses, Civics, CCA American Government and AP Computer Science. Students participated in the focus groups within the class they are selected from, not across the three classes. This at the minimum provided a comfort level in the interview, as the students were familiar with one another. These courses were purposefully selected, as they were the courses of the teachers participating in study. I moderated the focus group interviews, first introducing myself as a doctoral student at the University of Denver. I provided a brief explanation of the study, so they had a context for the questions. This process led to my purpose statement, and

established the overall summary of my research interests. Ultimately my purpose was to identify within the school setting opportunities that exist for partnership, activism and leadership, and through perceptions collected by both students and staff, see if there was a link to student motivation when these opportunities are provided. Motivation will be measured by student attendance, grades and behavior. Vaughn et al., states that it is best to limit the scope of the focus group to a specific topic, then attempt to accomplish too much (1996). With this in mind, I narrowed the student voice concepts down to the essential ideas regarding student partnership, activism and leadership. My next step for the focus group interviews was to clarify what I wish to obtain through their input. Vaughn et al. states for focus group research there are two types of goals, first determining how information received will be used and second, describe the outcomes required for the group to be successful (1996). For the first goal, I explained to the students that the information collected supports my dissertation and graduation from a Doctoral program at the University of Denver. I briefly described my interest in student voice and my interest in hearing their thoughts and ideas regarding this topic throughout their school day experience. I then discussed the guidelines we used for a successful focus group. For my focus groups I emphasized the following elements I derived from (Vaughn et al., 1996); 1- we do not need to speak in any particular order, 2- when you have something to say, please say it, 3- please do not speak over one another, 4- it is important to respect each other's point of view, and avoid judgmental or negative language, 5- due to limited time I may need to re-direct the conversation, 6- ask for clarification and provide opportunities for questions before beginning. I then began with

my interview questions by asking the students what opportunities exist within their school day for partnership, activism and leadership. A sample question from the focus group interview reads as follows, *tell me about any opportunities that exist for partnership throughout your school day? Give specific examples of what this looks and sounds like, and talk about what your teacher or adult does to make partnership possible?* (see Appendix D). Subsequent questions in the interview connected to my other two research questions. I continued this process until I went through all of the questions. At the very end, I asked if there was anything else they would like to add, and then expressed my thanks for their participation and reminded them that the information they provided is confidential. To show thanks and gratitude towards the students I provided light snacks and water throughout the time of the interview.

Data collection for focus group interviews, question 1. After receiving approval by the Institutional Review Board, along with district and building administration, I selected participants for inclusion in the study. I conducted three student focus group interviews in the following courses, Civics, CCA American Government, and AP Computer Science. Again, these were classes taught by the teachers participating in the study, and my intentions were to have focus groups from a range of courses. There could be potential findings that reveal more rigorous courses such as Advanced Placement offer more opportunity for student voice. I also sought to gather as much baseline data from students regarding opportunities for student voice, specifically in the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. Brief definitions were provided in student friendly language to ensure equal access to all students to provide input to each question.

Students provided responses to the questions; sharing what opportunities they have throughout their day for partnership, activism and leadership.

Data collection for teacher interviews, question 1. For the three staff members, I conducted individual interviews. The interviews took place the week of May 8th, during one of the staff members' two planning periods for approximately fifty-five minutes, which was determined by the teacher's preference. I sought to gain insights on the opportunities they provide their students partnership, activism and leadership. My intentions were to understand each teacher's intentional actions on how they provide opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. A sample question from the teacher interview reads as follows; *please tell me throughout the school day, what opportunities do you provide your students to express their voice, what opportunities do you provide that allow for partnership with your students?* (see Appendix D).

2. What are the perceived barriers that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?

Within the focus group interviews I dove deeper into the conversation to understand what they perceived to be the barriers in their classes that prevent or limit opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. They also discussed what they perceive their teacher does that allows/facilitates opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. If students provided information that was unclear, or if I felt that I missed a critical piece of information, a follow up email with individual students may have been necessary to gain clarification to questions. I had students sign in and collected their email addresses in order to ensure potential follow up if needed. Through this interview

my intentions were to inquire about the actions of their teachers and gain their perceptions regarding the opportunities and supports that allow for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as seek their beliefs on why they may not exist. I also wanted to gain their perceptions on whether they felt partnership, activism and leadership opportunities had any impact on their motivation. A sample question from the student interview reads as follows; *tell me more about the opportunities that are provided for partnership throughout your school day, give specific examples of what this looks and sounds like and talk about what your teacher or adult does that makes partnership possible, if you disagree why do you think student partnership does not exist, what are some barriers, does the opportunity for partnership have an impact on your motivation?* (see Appendix D).

Data collection for focus group interviews, question 2. Students were selected through a stratified purposeful sample for focus group interviews. Interviews serve as the basic information-gathering tool of the social sciences (Denzin, 2001). Creswell (2013) recommended focus group interviews when there is sufficient information to believe that interviewees are comparable and identifiable with one another and a comprehensive conversation would develop, hence my reasoning for selecting students for focus group participation within the classes they were selected from. Interview questions were designed to elicit candid responses, by being open ended and allowing students to describe their experiences. The questions served as starting points to establish a systematic method of gaining responses and to ensure all participants are afforded equal opportunity to provide their insights into what opportunities were

provided for partnership, activism and leadership, and if these concepts hold any value for their level of motivation in their classes. Again, motivation factors measured were student grades, attendance and behavior. Sets of open-ended questions were used in an informal structure to encourage honest and open feedback between the participants and the researcher. I adhered to Vaughn et al., focus group structure to ensure an effective focus group process. All of the interview questions were recorded on my I Phone, while the researcher took minimal notes in a Microsoft word document. The recording was uploaded onto the researcher's MacBook Air.

Data collection for staff interviews, question 2. I interviewed the individual teachers the week of May 8th during their individual planning time. I sought out the same level of understanding from the teacher's perspective on what barriers may exist that prevent opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. For their participation in the study I gave each of them a ten-dollar gift card to Starbucks. My intentions were to gain insights into their actions and identify why or why not students would be given opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. They provided a description and insights into why they do or do not provide opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. A sample interview question for staff is; *what are some barriers to providing students opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?* (see Appendix D). Again, the three teachers were selected for individual interviews, based upon the Principal's recommendation and his understanding of their style of teaching that empowers student voice. All three staff members have at least twenty years of experience. Two teach in the social studies department and one in the science department.

In order to gather purposeful data from staff members, pertaining specifically to the upper end of the spectrum of student voice, it was my intention to seek out staff members who hold a belief system in empowering student voice in their classes. Metrics were not established to confirm their beliefs, however they expressed an interest to participate in the study. I scheduled times to meet with the staff members during one of their planning periods, in their classrooms to ensure privacy and no interruption. I had previously worked at this particular school as a building level administrator, so I was familiar with the three teachers on some level, which created a more natural and comfortable interview setting. I did not oversee their specific departments, nor did I evaluate them, so I was unfamiliar with their instructional practices through formal observation. The interviews were structured individually to accommodate the complexity of their schedules, and also to provide an opportunity to dive deep with each open-ended question. Definitions of student partnership, activism and leadership were provided in advance to ensure each teacher has a basic understanding of the framework and essential elements of the literature review. This process permitted the teachers to make connections to their actions and intentions and provide detailed responses to the questions.

3. What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for student, teachers and administrators in urban high schools?

Through the student and teacher interviews, my intentions were to determine if there were patterns and themes that emerged regarding opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership and an increase in student motivation. Much of the literature emphasizes the need for student voice in school reform, specifically at the level of

student partnership, activism and leadership (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Sample interview questions that inform implications from the students' perspective include; *does the opportunity for partnership, activism and leadership have an impact on your level of motivation?* And similarly, for teachers, a sample interview question is; *do you feel that students are more motivated when provided opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership, provide specific examples?* By interviewing both students and teachers, I hoped to gain insights into ways student voice can become infused into school professional learning as well as in classroom settings to have a positive impact on student motivation in a meaningful way. Information gleaned from these two cases could provide information and build a case as to why partnership, activism and leadership are necessary to think about in school reform. Information collected could also address the barriers and provide data on how to address barriers to effectively work through any barriers to activate partnership, activism and leadership.

The Setting and the Participants

Setting. The site for the study was conducted at a large urban school district located in the Denver metropolitan area. The total student population of the school is 2,375 students' grades 9-12. The student population is 0.9% Native American, 5.4% Asian, 23.8% Black, 36.6% Hispanic, 27.0% White, 0.8% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and 5.4% two or more races. Almost 9% of the students attending the school are English Language Learners, 12.5% are Gifted/Talented, 9.6% Special Education and 45.6% are Free or Reduced Lunch. The school resides in one of Colorado's largest and most diverse

school districts. The students in the district come from 131 countries and speak 140 different languages.

Sample. The request for approval for Human Subjects Review Board was submitted to the Institutional Review Board used by the University of Denver for authorization (Appendix A). After gaining permission from the Institutional Review Board, the district and school level administration was contacted to gain entry into the district. Upon approval by the Chief Accountability Research Officer, the school campus principal was contacted to gain permission to teachers and students (Appendix B). The purpose for choosing the three courses was to survey a wide range of students. The three teachers who participated in the teacher interviews also teach the courses that the students were purposefully selected from. This provided the opportunity to make connections between the teacher and student perceptions and to see where there was alignment as well as disconnect between their perceptions. The three courses consist of mostly juniors and seniors, with a few underclassmen in the AP Computer Science course. The study could have expanded out further to other grade levels and contents, but again for the sake of efficiency and time to complete the project, the researcher narrowed the focus to three specific classes involving teachers who were most accessible and willing to participate in the study.

The established relationship with the gatekeepers i.e., the teachers participating in the study as well as the school principal allowed for efficient access to the course rosters for the three classes, to generate student lists for the focus group interviews. Using the class roster, I was able to identify student gender and ethnicity in order to purposefully

select a stratified grouping of students to participate in the study. I purposefully selected students until I had at least six males, six females, and representation from the following race/ethnicities as determined in the student database, Infinite Campus: White, Hispanic, Black, Asian, and other. These are the representative sub-groups of the student population at the site for the study. Once I finalized the list I attended each of the classes for the study the last week of April and personally invited the students to participate in the study the week of May 8th. At that time, I provided consent forms to the students, as well as the parent permission forms. I received a verbal confirmation from the selected students, and requested that they provide their consent forms on Friday, May 5th. Students were informed that their participation was completely voluntary. Even if they decided to participate, they could change their mind and stop at any time. There were no consequences if they decided to withdraw early from the study. Again, my intentions of purposefully selecting a stratified sample comprised of balanced gender and ethnicity was to generate a diverse group of students that would provide a wide range of perspective and background.

The teachers were purposefully selected based upon a recommendation from the principal for their specific beliefs and practices that align with providing opportunities student voice. Based on the Principal's insights, the three teachers all held recognized beliefs regarding student empowerment and ownership in their courses, and shared an interest in participating in the study. Each teacher was provided a consent form the last week of April and I collected his or her consent forms that day. I emailed them an electronic copy of the form for their own records. Teachers were informed that their

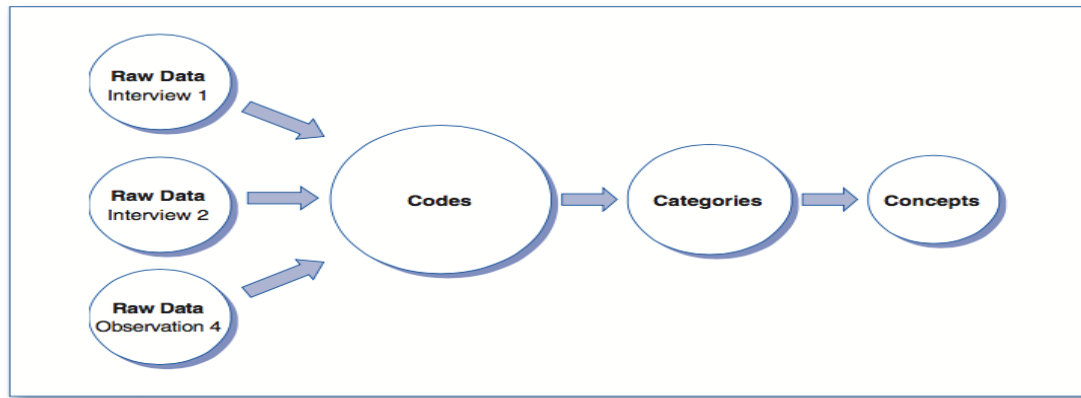
participation was completely voluntary. Even if they decided to participate, they could change their mind and stop at any time. There were no consequences if they decided to withdraw early from the study.

Location. To assure a formal and consistent location for interviews, the administrative conference room located by the counseling office was the chosen location for completion of interviews for students. This location best accommodated the focus group interviews with ease and comfort and was a quiet and relaxed setting for participants. The location for focus group interviews was also located in the center of the building, providing a central location, which was easy and convenient to get to in a large comprehensive high school. To accommodate the teachers and their busy schedule, I chose to host their individual interviews in the privacy of their own classroom.

Analysis of the Data

Data analysis is an ongoing process that requires continual attention as the vast amounts of data is coded and checked for recurring themes (Creswell, 2013). Bazeley (2009) states that analyzing qualitative data is more than just looking for themes and supporting with quotes. She further contends that a deeper analysis should be involved that includes interpreting and naming categories and looking at pattern analysis. Utilizing the premises identified in the literature review my intentions were to collect the raw data, and follow the six-step process (See figure 6.)

Figure 6.



SOURCE: (Lichtman, 2005)

of 1- initial coding (going from responses to summary ideas of the response), 2- revisiting initial coding, 3- developing an initial list of categories and sub-categories, 4- modifying initial list based on additional re-reading, 5- revisiting your categories and sub-categories, 6- moving from categories to concepts (Lichtman, 2005). Recordings from the interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document for analysis. The data was compared for similar or related concepts to assist with classification of coding, and finally organized around central concepts. Data accumulated by different methods is considered the multi-method approach, (Gillham, 2010). For my study, I collected data from student focus group interviews and individual teacher interviews. Different studies have different strengths and weaknesses. If they converge (agree) greater than 50% of the students and teachers in alignment, then we can be reasonably confident that we are getting a true picture (Gillham, 2010). If they don't agree then we have to be cautious about basing our understanding on any one set of data (Gillham, 2010). The following tables were created for sample data collection and analysis for the interviews. The researcher wanted a clear

template for data collection, as well as an organic process using hard copies of the transcripts to review and develop initial codes.

Student Focus Group Table Data Collection. (See table 1.)

Table 1.

Examples of Partnership, Activism & Leadership
Barriers to Partnership, Activism & Leadership
Initial Codes
Impact on Student Motivation
Relevant Quotes
Research

Teacher Interview Table Data Collection. (See table 2.)

Table 2.

Examples of Partnership, Activism & Leadership
Barriers to Partnership, Activism & Leadership
Initial Codes
Impact on Student Motivation
Improved Teaching Practices
Relevant Quotes
Research

Along with the six-step process Lichtman discusses for data analysis, it's also important to reference Creswell's (2010), data analysis process specific to the case study methodology. Along with Lichtman's six-step process for developing codes and concepts, Creswell goes more in depth on the process to generate and analyze the raw data. Creswell (2010) emphasizes the following for data collection and analysis, 1- *data management, organizing files for data*, for this process I utilized my iPhone as a recording device, as well as my MacBook Air to type notes for efficiency and accuracy 2- *reading and memo making, making notes and forming initial codes*, using hard copies of the transcripts, I began bracketing important information and formulating initial codes, 3- *describing, describe data and its context*, after the interview I revisited the recordings and read through my notes to describe the responses and provide the context based on what both the students and staff members state to provide a clear picture of their story, 4- *classifying, using categorical aggregation to establish themes or patterns*, as well as cross-case synthesis to look for similarities and differences among the cases, I began to uncover similarities and differences that existed between the students and teachers and provided language that described the two cases narrative's in detail, 5- *interpreting*, for my collective case study I used naturalistic generalizations which Stake defines as the interpretation of the case to make the case understandable, this interpretation is what the reader learns from the case or its application to other cases (Stake, 1995), and 6- *representing/ visualizing*, present an in-depth picture of the case using narrative, tables or figures. This was the specific process I utilized to collect and process the raw data, create

codes, categories and concepts, in order to capture the essence of partnership, activism and leadership within the setting I conducted my collective case study.

Summary

This chapter presented the process for how I conducted the study including, the purpose, the design, the sample and location. The specific design of data collection and process for analysis was also discussed. The next chapters will review the findings as identified in the analysis phase of the project. The final chapter will include a summary as well as implications and other recommendations for future research.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

- 1. What opportunities exist within the urban high school for partnership, activism and leadership?*
- 2. What are the perceived barriers that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?*
- 3. What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools?*

Analysis of Data

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore urban high school student and teacher perceptions of student voice, specifically in the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. Chapter IV reviews the analysis of data organized by major research questions. Research question one discusses the opportunities provided and themes that arose for partnership, activism and leadership revealed by the student focus groups and teachers. Research question two reviews major themes that emerged as barriers reported by the research participants regarding opportunities for partnership, leadership and activism. Research question three reveals major themes indicating the significance partnership, activism and leadership have on student motivation, as well as some considerations provided by the research participants regarding opportunities for student voice in the high school setting.

Research Question One

1. *What opportunities exist within the urban high school for partnership, activism and leadership?*

Research question one investigated the opportunities that exist within an urban high school for partnership, activism and leadership. I will reveal the information provided by focus group one, focus group two, focus group three, teacher one, teacher two, and teacher three.

Focus Group and Teacher Composition

The students in focus group one were selected from a Civics course. The group was comprised of two males and four females. The group demographics were one White, three African-American and two Hispanic. One male was a senior and the rest of the students were juniors. The students are represented in the study by ‘focus group one, speaker one-six’, i.e., focus group one, speaker one, focus group one, speaker two, focus group one speaker three, focus group one, speaker four, and so on.

The students from focus group two were selected from a Community College of Aurora (CCA) American Government concurrent enrollment course. The group was comprised of three males and five females. The group demographics were two White, two African-American, one Hispanic and two African and one Asian. This focus group had four juniors, one sophomore and three seniors. The students are represented in the study by ‘focus group two, speaker one-eight’, i.e., focus group two, speaker one, focus group two, speaker two, focus group two speaker three, focus group two speaker four, and so on.

The students from focus group three were selected from an Advanced Placement Computer Science course. The group was comprised of six males and three females. The group demographics were two White, one African-American, two African, three Hispanic, and one Asian. This focus group had one freshman, five sophomores, two juniors and one senior. The students are represented in the study by ‘focus group three, speaker one-nine’, i.e., focus group three, speaker one, focus group three, speaker two, focus group three, speaker three, focus group three, speaker four, and so on.

The first teacher taught the Civics course. He is represented in the study as teacher one. The second teacher taught the CCA American Government course. She is represented in the study as teacher two. The third and final teacher taught the AP Computer Science course, and is represented as teacher three. All three teachers have over 20 years of teaching experience.

Focus group findings. The following themes were revealed across the three focus groups as opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership.

Partnership- teachers or counselors conferred with students on ways to improve grades, as well as teachers seeking input from students on how to better teach and improve their practices.

Activism- students were given opportunities to listen and respond to district officials discuss budget issues, and they wrote persuasive essays in classes around social justice themes.

Leadership- a Leadership club exists at the school, as well as opportunities to lead projects in specific classes.

Partnership. Across the three student focus groups, opportunities for partnership were consistent with regards to teachers and counselors consistently checking in and providing real time support. Students felt motivated and supported when they knew what their grade was and how they could improve. They also consistently agreed that teachers who sought input and feedback from students, with regards to how they teach were supportive and motivating.

I immediately recognized a gap in opportunities between the three focus groups. Focus group one was unable to reference strong examples of partnerships with their teachers, whereas the other two groups of students could clearly articulate opportunities where they perceived partnership with their teacher or counselor. Speaker six in focus group one did have this to state about partnership however, “I feel like class has to be interesting for students to want to go. I’m not going to go to a class where I’m just looking at a board and listening to the teacher talk.” Both focus group two and three cited clear examples where their teachers created opportunities for them to partner with other students to complete projects, or partner with their teacher on how to make adjustments within their classes. Four students in focus group two spoke of their biology teacher and how she responded to their performance and grades. Speaker five in focus group two stated, “Our Biology teacher has meetings with all of her students at the quarter to track progress, review assignments and grades, and set goals and make plans for the rest of the year.” Speaker two in focus group two also referenced their computer science teacher stating, “my Computer Science Teacher knew I could do things on my own, and he didn’t always need to provide feedback, I could figure some things out by

myself.” Students in focus group three also spoke of their AP Computer Science teacher regularly conferring with them about their grades and performance, and went even further to state how he provided students with freedom on how to complete projects and also sought feedback on how his course could be improved for the following year. Speaker two in focus group three stated, “we all appreciated the opportunity to give input on how to improve the courses, but since we never have done that before, we never considered it or really thought about it.” Speaker three from focus group three continued stating, “In AP Computer Science I feel I have a lot more voice. I can say, hey, I need a more time to complete this, or I need help with this and need more support to understand this.” Although focus groups two and three had clear examples to speak of, they were not aligned with Toshalis and Nakkula’s (2012) definition of partnership, which according to their definition requires students to have a formalized role in decision-making. The forms of partnership referenced fall within the second step on the spectrum of student voice, consultation. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) determined consultation happens in some instances when students are providing or receiving feedback and working in groups. Students in focus group one did not provide tangible evidence of partnership, but a few students in the group did express a need to have more partnership.

All of the students in focus group one expressed a need that was unmet in their classes. Speaker three began by stating, “my teachers personally don’t care about my education.” Speaker two in focus group one stated, “I feel like teachers are willing to listen when you reach out to them, but you have to be the one to reach out first or else they’re not going to help you.” Speaker three in-group one stated similarly, “I’d like to

see teachers just reach out a little bit more than they do. They really don't help until you are begging for help." Lastly, speaker seven stated, "I would like to see teachers open up more, open up about themselves and also find out more about our personal lives. Why can't we connect with them and they connect with us?" This discrepancy in opportunity leads me to a conjecture that students in lower level courses are provided with less opportunity to partner with their teachers and may have been seen as incapable of offering insights to their teachers on how to improve their teaching practices. The practice of privileged persons speaking on behalf of less privileged persons results in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for (Fielding, 2004). Also, skills could be missing by both students and teachers on how to give and receive feedback. A common set of skills, including common language and norms are paramount in any group effort for student voice activities (Mitra, 2005).

Activism. Each focus group spoke specifically to the school district budget cuts, and explained that there was a forum for students to attend and listen to a district official discuss and answer questions in relation to the budget cuts. There were also opportunities provided for students to write persuasive essays in their literacy classes around social justice themes of their choice.

There was consistency across the three focus groups in relation to opportunities for activism. All three groups were aware of the district officials conducting student forums to communicate about the budget cuts, and field questions. Students communicated that they felt unheard and that the experience was inauthentic. Only two students from the focus groups attended the event, and speaker one from focus group

two stated, “students had opportunities to speak their voice at the budget meeting, but it wasn’t really heard, because the district official wasn’t really answering the questions.” Similarly speaker two in focus group three stated, “with the district administration coming out to discuss the 31 million dollar debt, I feel like we missed an opportunity to take an activist approach as a school.”

Outside of the conversation around the district budget forums, focus group one made strong connections to the need for activism. Speaker eight in focus group one stated, “I would say activism would impact more students to be successful, because you would be able to state your opinion about an issue and take action, instead of holding your tongue not doing anything, and the teacher would actually listen instead of being insulted by what the student said.” Lastly, speaker two stated, “I feel like activism would motivate more students, because it gives you the opportunity to speak your mind. Having an opportunity to get outside of the textbook and have some freedom with the topics being taught would be more motivating for kids.” Levin (1994) suggests that we “must make it normal, even expected, that students would have a reasoned, informed and respected voice in school decisions” (p. 96).

Another consistent theme for activism across the three focus groups were the opportunities provided in classes to write a persuasive essay around a social justice topic of their choice. There was variance in how far they went with the essay, some expressed opportunities to debate in class, and others stated that they simply wrote the paper and received feedback from their teacher on grammar. All of the students in focus group one referenced their sociology teacher and how he motivated and engaged them. More than

simply writing a paper, they felt that he created a liberating classroom environment where students were able to be open and express ideas. Speaker three in focus group one stated, “in sociology class you tend to learn about people, and why they act a certain way. You learn about people on a personal level, and it changes how you think about things.” Focus groups two and three shared similar comments about their American Government class, and the opportunities provided to have open dialogue and go deep with controversial topics. According to Toshalis and Nakkula, for true activism to be present students need to be organizing responses, agitating for change, generating solutions and taking action (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The examples of activism provided by the focus groups are forms of expression.

Leadership. Each focus group referenced the Leadership club that existed within their school. There were inconsistencies regarding other opportunities. Two of the focus groups alluded to opportunities to lead projects within their classes. Only two individual students had strong examples of actually leading an effort that aligned with Toshalis and Nakkula’s (2012) definition of leadership. Again, they define leadership as student co-planning, making decisions and accepting significant responsibility for outcomes and guiding group processes (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

All of the focus groups knew of the Leadership’s club existence, as well as what the club did for the school and the requirements to get into the club. In order to be in the Leadership club, you needed a 3.0 grade point average, two teacher recommendations a complete application and then support of students in an election. Leadership was both a class during the day and an after-school club where students organize events, fundraise,

and conduct charity within the school and community. The class had a sponsor to provide oversight and assign grades, however the students organize and execute all of the specific activities throughout the school community. This club aligned with Toshiaki and Nakkula's (2012) definition of leadership; students working alongside an adult to co-plan, make decisions, guide group processes, and conduct activities. Students from focus group one and two both expressed the exclusiveness of the Leadership club. All of the students in focus group one expressed an interest in leadership, but felt like outsiders because they did not meet the bare minimum requirements to participate in the club. Speaker three in focus group one stated, "Leadership feels like favoritism. The leadership students get more opportunities to do stuff around the school. Our school would benefit if more kids had access to leadership opportunities." Speaker six concluded the leadership conversation by stating, "they tell seniors were about to graduate and be out in the real world, but we don't get opportunities to experience the real world. They don't teach us things that would really benefit us, like opportunities to lead and take control." The one example of leadership that focus group one referenced, had a significant impact on the students. He stated, "I was chosen to be a leader and I'd never been chosen before, and I took pride in being one of those leaders and helping younger students."

Only focus group three provided other examples of leadership outside of the Leadership club, and they all spoke of opportunities to lead projects within their AP classes. In AP Computer Science students were given opportunities to design applications and lead other projects. Speaker nine in group three explained, "my

computer science teacher made me the leader to develop an application that we had to design, and he pushed me and really helped me and motivated me from a leadership standpoint.” Speaker five in focus group three also stated, “upper level AP and honors classes tend to have teachers who assign more self-guided projects. You either assume leadership, or they assign leadership and you take it in the direction you see fit.” Speaker three in group two felt that the student to teacher relationship played a role in who gains access to leadership stating, “I feel like when it comes to teachers choosing, it’s usually because that student is able to have a strong connection with the teacher. If the student has partnership with the teacher and shows them they’re a good leader, they’re going to be appointed to leadership.” This is again a pattern that reveals a conjecture of mine, that students, who are perceived to be more capable academically, are provided more freedom and opportunity for leadership within their classes. All of the AP students could clearly articulate opportunities for leadership within their AP classes and the students from focus group one could only reference the Leadership club. School contexts greatly influence the type of influence a group can have (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). The main difference between the advantaged and the disadvantaged is that the latter need such flexible schools even more (Meier, 1995). Again, these findings reveal a potential gap in both student and teacher skills to enhance leadership opportunities in the classroom. Many teachers’ preparation has not taught them how to create situations in which learners can have real breakthroughs in understanding or how to evaluate learning and adapt their teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Ngussa & Makewa (2014) state that students need to be encouraged and supported to take greater responsibility for their own

learning and participation. This involves developing as individual learners who increasingly manage their own learning and growth, by setting goals and managing resources to achieve these (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014).

This concludes the focus group findings regarding opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. I will continue to reveal findings from the teacher interviews for question one.

Teacher findings. The following themes were consistently revealed across the three individual teacher interviews as opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. As I stated in chapter three, the site principal originally recommended the teachers in the study. When asked if they would be willing to participate in the study they all graciously accepted the offer. With that in mind, the three teachers had limited understanding of the spectrum of student voice framework and had limited examples regarding specific elements of partnership, activism and leadership. Most student voice activities currently in schools consist of less-intensive involvement, in the forms of expression, consultation, and some participation; increasing partnership, activism, and leadership would motivate students to make an effort and ultimately succeed (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The teachers did however offer insights into their practices and areas they consider opportunities for student voice. I will highlight the general themes that arose from the areas they identified as opportunities for student voice, more in broad general terms, versus specific aspects of partnership, activism and leadership.

Relevant projects- all three teachers spoke of student projects within their content areas

that were somehow connected to students' lives and interests, and allowed students to collaborate and support one another.

Student feedback- all three teachers implemented opportunities for students to provide feedback on how they taught and how they could improve to better meet the students' needs.

Relevant projects and collaboration. All of the participating teachers expressed a need to connect their content to meaningful and relevant project opportunities for their students. Teacher two spoke of activating the content and making it as life like as possible, she stated, "finding entry points with the curriculum to real world opportunities makes their voice stronger. If it is something that affects them and their life, they are more active and engaged." The three teachers also believe in providing opportunities for students to take the lead on how the project is completed, as well as providing support to one another when they encounter challenges. Teacher one stated, "kids have choice in how those topics are covered and different projects they can do within those topics." Teacher three cited that his students needed more support with understanding technical content prior to collaborating on group projects. He stated,

My computer science classes have a unique perspective; there is a lot of complex material so it relies on me to fill in blanks. If you can't do it in terms of the content, the voice that they have would become limited because they don't understand the content. I have to introduce them to the vocabulary and help them develop that so they can have a voice.

This teacher also relies on student partnerships to support one another when they get stuck; this empowers student voice and leadership within the class environment. Teacher one similarly stated, “kids make the class, but if they are unwilling to speak, someone has to speak for them.” Both teacher one and teacher two believed that in order for student voice to happen consistently, there is a need to speak for them and support their content understanding to build their confidence. All of these examples fall within the participation range of the spectrum of student voice. Toshalis and Nakkula define participation as the frequent inclusion of students around relevant issues and some action planning takes place (2012).

Student feedback. All three teachers have implemented a process to garner feedback from students regarding their teaching and areas upon where they could improve. There are differences in how they conduct the process and what specific information they receive, but essentially, they all believed that feedback and input from students was critical to improving their teaching. Teacher one conducts a simple questionnaire at the end of the year asking his students what worked and what did not. Teacher two conducts her feedback in the form of student learning preferences. She seeks specific information from students rating their reading and writing skills, what teaching style they prefer, and concludes with goal setting for the year. Teacher three experiments with a circle activity, where he allows students to open up and give him specific feedback on how he teaches. He described the circle activity as, the teacher is in the middle, and students stand in a circle around the teacher. He asked his students what they like about his teaching, what they didn’t like and open-ended feedback about his

teaching in general. The process and specific feedback varied across the three teachers, however the act of receiving student feedback is critical to building partnership with their students. This process models openness to feedback that all student groups expressed as important. Students need to know that grown-ups are also learners (Meier, 1995). Simply put, understanding the perspective of high school students and being sensitive to profound learning experiences are critical elements in fashioning a responsive and engaging education experience (Mitra and Gross, 2009).

Research Question Two

2. What are the perceived barriers that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?

Research question two investigated the barriers to partnership, activism and leadership as reported by the research participants. I will reveal the major themes that arose, highlighting the students' perceptions and the staff perceptions. Given the volume of information from student focus group and staff interviews, I codified the common barriers stated by students and by staff, and compiled those into major themes. In the analysis, I compared the cases, revealing where there is alignment and disconnect between the students and staff perceptions.

Student focus group findings.

The student focus groups consistently identified three themes as barriers to partnership, activism and leadership: (1) Teacher attitude towards listening to what students have to say; (2) Teachers do not have enough time to provide balance to both teach material and appropriately meet the individual needs of their students, and (3)

Students lack skills to articulate voice appropriately. These three barriers were common among the three student focus groups.

Teacher attitude. All of the student focus groups revealed a common theme that in some cases, their teachers were not open to feedback or input from students. Two big ideas arose from the student interviews; (1) teachers teach how they were taught, and (2) fear of losing control. Students' perspectives were dependent on personal perceptions of the teachers' actions (Bearisto, 2012).

Teachers teach the way they were instructed. Several students mentioned the idea of teachers teach how they were taught. Speaker three in focus group three reported, "teacher attitudes can make it difficult, there's just some teachers who prefer unbelievably controlling classes, because that's how they were taught." Speaker four in focus group three similarly stated, "Speaking as a quiet kid, teachers are afraid of listening to students, partly due to how they were taught. Since they were taught a certain way, that's how they think we have to do it." Darling-Hammond (1997) states, many teachers' preparation has not taught them how to create situations in which learners can have real breakthroughs in understanding or how to evaluate learning and adapt their teaching. Thus, they teach as they remember being taught, creating a flow of lessons and activities aimed at fairly superficial coverage that moves along comfortably oblivious to student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Speaker three in focus group two reinforced the idea of needing to listen to better support students stating, "teachers should ask students if they understand."

Students are failing the class, and it seems like more pressure is put on students to understand, than the teacher.”

Other students referenced teacher’s fear of giving up control, leading to student failure. Speaker seven in focus group one reported, “If you give a kid too much freedom, they’re going to take advantage of you, run you over and not listen to you.” Speaker six in focus group one shared similar sentiments reporting,

There are some teachers who are set in how they are going to teach. If a student has a different idea or way of doing something, the teacher gets scared, because they don’t know if the student is going to succeed, or it may upset the learning environment.

Speaker two in focus group one stated,

There are teachers who see students as irresponsible and not being able to take care of stuff. I feel like as you go through classes you show that you’re responsible and they trust you a little bit, but there is still an unrealistic bar set, and you can’t get past that bar.

Lastly, speaker one in focus group two reported,

I think that kids would be motivated to speak their mind more, but it could lead to more riots or protests about

subjects, which is actually beneficial for society, but I don't know if it's beneficial for a school system. It seems like teachers want a peaceful environment, not an argumentative one.

Speaker three in focus group three similarly shared, “find a way to get teachers who are truly effective, by listening to students and their perspectives.” Evidence of educators’ fear, rather than neglect, grew apparent when students (activated by curiosity and rebellion) initiated conversations of critique, which were rapidly dismissed (Fine, 2003). One of the most positive and profound aspects of the term voice is its insistence on altering dominant power imbalances between adults and young people (Cook-Sather, 2006). In Oldfather’s (1995) words, “Learning from student voices... requires major shifts on the part of teachers, students, and researchers in relationships and in ways of thinking and feeling about the issues of knowledge, language, power and self” (p.87). Allowing students a voice around things that are important were all agreed upon by each focus group. They stated the importance of being heard and teachers actually listening and not being insulted or taking offense and having a fear of losing control of the class. Student friendly, collaborative classrooms were found to be critical to discover and motivate learners, which led to improved behavior and success (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012). Student voice can present challenges that some may not be willing to face, particularly listening to things we do not want to hear (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Time. Another common theme across the student focus groups was a concern regarding the time teachers dedicated to student voice and support in general. Students

were well aware of the pressure and demands on teaching large class sizes, supporting a wide range of learning styles, covering the content in either a semester or a year, and lastly preparing students for required exams. This awareness did not assuage their frustrations with a perceived lack of support and opportunity to be heard. Students expressed frustration, anger, fatigue, and angst, mixed with hope, sincerity and confidence with a declared need to be understood (Mitra and Gross, 2009). Speaker six in focus group one reported, “They never have time when you have time, so they don’t actually schedule around when you can do it, it’s either on their time or none at all.”

As a collective group, focus group one articulated that trying to balance the number of kids in a class to provide leadership opportunities is difficult. It’s hard to make everyone feel welcome and appreciated. Speaker three in focus group two took a proactive stance with regards to time stating,

One of my best teachers always paid attention, when you have that strong relationship with a teacher you realize they are taking time to help you, and really want to make sure you are reflecting an accurate grade. That way you want to prove to them that they are not just wasting their time by helping you.

Speaker eight in focus group one also stated a suggestion, “all of our teachers should be more organized to where they do have time to listen to the kids and still do what they need to do.” Williams (2012) reflected that teachers felt they should set aside more time for content instruction and must be encouraged to give students more time for voice in their classroom design. Speaker two referenced the pacing of courses, especially in

Advanced Placement classes where there is a lot of content to cover. He reported, “in AP classes, it seems like everything’s a set format and a set style, we have to rush to get through the content and never seem to have enough time. AP classes have a very restrictive curriculum and a set format for pacing and coursework.” In the same vein, taking time to support students instead of rushing through to the next topic or standard resonated across all focus groups. The groups reported, if teachers took the time to help students on how they can exactly identify a problem and go about responding to the issue that would be a big motivator for students and would save time in the long run. Speaker four in focus group three continued along this line reporting, “teachers have to make sure they can teach all these things in a year, but they have to take the time to make sure that people get it.”

Students in focus group one all discussed the idea of students supporting students to assist teachers and be efficient. They had concerns when teachers did not allow students to help struggling students in class. It was a significant concern in some cases regarding a lack of teacher awareness in using students as resources to help one another and moving on without ensuring everyone understands. The dominant culture of schooling and insistence upon outcomes “prevents practitioners from listening to students’ own creative ideas about how systems can change and meet their needs” (Cruddas & Haddock, 2003, p. 6). With an increased focus on test scores and outcomes, the broader democratic mission of schools to prepare students to be engaged and contributing citizens (Dewey, 1916 [1966]) is fading into the background (Mitra and Gross, 2009).

Lack of skill. The final theme across the three focus groups regarding barriers to partnership, activism and leadership was a perceived lack of skills. Their perceived lack of skill included the following big ideas: (1) the feeling of ‘marginalization’ and ‘favoritism’ where opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership are only for the elite students, (2) a lack of understanding how to navigate the system and determine which teachers are open to student voice, (3) a lack of skill on how to articulate voice, and in turn a lack of confidence to enact their voice, (4) teacher perceived as the authority figure and students rely on teachers to give them voice. The feeling of favoritism was referenced in several instances.

Marginalization. The first was in relation to the perception students had around the leadership club. Speaker three in focus group one reported, “Leadership feels like favoritism. The leadership students get more opportunities to do stuff around the school. Our school would benefit if more kids had access to leadership opportunities.” Speaker one in focus group two stated, “it can also be beneficial, because it allows more people to experience leadership and see where they want to go into a leadership position and what they are truly interested in.” Focus group one continued to state regular students do not have access to that level of leadership. The social contexts create conditions that can marginalize and mark them as different or “other” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Students were aware of relationships at school and how different individuals from various social groups were treated (Mitra and Gross, 2009). Speaker three in focus group two did offer a suggestion in relation to students being excluded stating, “maybe if we were able to be shown different types of leaders. If you think about someone who isn’t your typical

leader and not as well spoken, it would be helpful to see what other types of leaders exist.” Speaker one from focus group one also spoke to overcoming obstacles and taking action, stating specifically, “actions speak louder than words. So if you really care about something then you probably want to go on and take action, because you want to change what’s happening.”

Lack of systems understanding. In relation to not understanding the system, students spoke of not knowing who they could turn to, to support their voice. They want allies to support them in articulating their voice. The example with the budget cut conversations left students wanting more say and opportunity to have an impact on the situation. Given the counter-normative nature of student-voice efforts, youth need advisors to serve as allies who can help them navigate the political system of schooling (Mitra, 2005). Speaker two in focus group four made a recommendation about this topic, “if students bring something to a teacher, regarding an issue, could the teacher be mandated to support the student? If students knew that if they went to someone and would receive support, then I think that would encourage it more.” Levin (1994) suggests that we “must make it normal, even expected, that students would have a reasoned, informed and respected voice in school decisions” (p. 96).

Lack of confidence. Several students spoke of not having the skills and confidence to articulate their voice. Students referenced quiet, reserved students who lack confidence to have a voice, and others spoke of students who lack academic skills. In the first instance one student was from another country and stated she lacked the confidence to speak and have a voice due to the language barrier. Speaker two in focus

group two reported, “when I came to Colorado, I didn’t have a voice at the time because I was quiet. I knew at a certain point I had to talk for myself. I relied on my friends to talk for me. I’ve gotten more comfortable with myself.” Speaker three in focus group also stated,

Leadership in the classroom, it’s the quieter people who don’t get the ability to speak as much. One person who is vocal gets the leadership opportunity, because they’re able to voice exactly how they feel.

Sometimes students, who want to be leaders but aren’t as vocal, miss out on opportunities.

Silence can mean that a voice is not speaking because it is not worthwhile or safe to speak- out of knowledge of one’s inability in a particular situation to transform silence into action (Lord, 1984). Students tend not to choose avoidance behaviors and maladaptive strategies when alienating experiences are minimized (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Teacher as the authority. The last area in relation to lack of skills involved the notion that the teacher is the authority, and students need skills academically and how to articulate their voice, as well as a space where they feel it’s welcome. Speaker one in group two stated, “It’s helpful and motivating for students to learn the basis of that class with the teacher’s help, because they are the experts in the academics.” Speaker seven in group one stated, “It’s just that teachers don’t give the opportunity to every student. They don’t give opportunities to kids who are slow in class. Teachers shoot students down when they don’t get something, and don’t give them opportunities.” Speaker three in

group three stated something similar, “If you struggle in math it can get really confusing really quick and you watch people struggling, and wonder why can’t you just explain it and listen to the students, rather than just teach it the way they teach it.” The disconnect between what we know and what we do, between espoused goal of supporting student learning and the reality of ignoring students, points to a profoundly disabling and dangerous discrepancy between the claims behind federal legislation and the policies and practices that result from it (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Fielding and Ruddock (2002) maintain that students are ‘consumers’ and have expectations that there is flexibility in meeting their needs, rather than conformity to someone else’s needs. They stress the importance of schools responding to the voice of students for responsibility, as well as opportunities to contribute to decision-making around the conditions of learning (Fielding & Ruddock 2002). Listening and learning from student voices necessitate a shift from the ways in which teachers engage with students and how they perceive their own practices (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014, p. 23). Students in all of the focus groups emphasized a need to have more opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership at a younger age to develop the skills to enact their voice effectively. Speaker four in group three stated, “If there was a process in the younger grades on how to provide productive criticism to teachers, this would be more motivating for students as they get older to be more proactive. If there were more opportunities at a younger age, especially in elementary school, it would really help at a later age. Getting people to do more partnership and activism alone gains leadership skills.” Speaker two in group three agreed and further reported, “when you are younger

you really start to lose or gain skills, and keeping your voice and having more opportunities, especially in middle school would really be beneficial. In middle school, you start to spread out from your peers, so focusing in middle school would be really important.” To conclude, Wolk (1998) argues that everyone has a voice and, therefore, this is not something that can be “given”, and he asks, “What do we do with it? And to what conscious degree have we developed it and continue to develop it?” (p. 186).

Teacher findings

The teachers consistently identified two themes as barriers to partnership, activism and leadership: (1) Students lack of content knowledge, and (2) Structure, management and expectations precede opportunities for student voice. These barriers were common among the three teacher interviews.

Lack of content knowledge. The three teachers all expressed that time was a significant issue, and that within their classes they had a range of student needs, even within higher-level classes. Time becomes compounded by the skill sets students need to learn the content, improve reading and writing skills, and to be able to articulate their voice. Teacher one emphasized that there is a heavy focus on content knowledge, and not enough on skills sometimes. He reported,

Reading and writing skills precede being able to have a voice. I do think there is a correlation as far as reading and writing skills go, as well as verbal skills, that idea of expression and how you express yourself is a big piece. Reading and writing skills are most critical to articulate your voice. This reading is going to be hard, but how can you use what you

read to articulate your voice and express yourself. This expression is going to help you become a better citizen, get a job and do other things.

Teacher two reinforced similar ideas, and where she believed her content to lend itself to student voice she had this to say about content knowledge,

Kids sometimes lack the background knowledge, so they struggle articulating their voice around content related questions. Balancing giving them a voice, while building their skills and political knowledge is challenging. The bottom line is, I get them as juniors and it's the first time they remember certain concepts, even though they're supposed to have it in fifth and eighth grade. They don't have the political knowledge to articulate.

She also went on to state, "kids aren't seen as the experts, and so teachers have to provide the information."

Lastly, teacher three also had this to say in relation to content knowledge, "my computer science classes have a unique perspective, and there is a lot of complex material so it relies on me to fill in the blanks. I have to introduce them to the vocabulary and help them develop that so they can have a voice." Perhaps the single biggest obstacle maintaining progressive reforms is the extensive skill needed to teach both subjects and students well (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Teacher two reinforced this idea by Darling-Hammond stating, "teachers need support on how to increase rigor, and while being able to support a wide range of student needs."

One thing all three teachers practice on a regular basis, is receive feedback from students on how they learn and how they as teachers can improve instruction. Implicitly, the teachers expressed a need to improve and increase opportunities for student voice. Teacher three emphasized this idea stating, “Students probably need more opportunities for voice. Thinking about what it would take to get teachers to think more from that perspective of, let’s take a fresh stance here, lets really hear from students what might be more impactful.” Teacher one also stated, “we know that student voice is important and that students like to express their voice. It is helpful when they give me feedback on my teaching and how I can improve, especially in the areas of reading and writing skills.” Teacher three similarly stated an increased need for student voice stating, “I want students to be able to contribute something to the overall goal, whatever that may be. From the respect issue, honestly I believe if I’m a dictator and just tell them what to do, they have no voice.”

Most educators struggle to figure out how to meaningfully involve students (Fletcher, 2005). Teachers can improve their practice by listening to students and building teaching around themes that are relevant to and emerge from students’ own lives, which can be transformative both personally and politically (Friere, 1990; McLaren, 1989; Shor, 1987, 1992). McNeil (2009) supports that students’ voice has much to contribute in what is taught and what takes place in schools. Student voice initiatives need to support the whole school with the whole school culture supporting the process and follow up around student voice (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014).

Structure, management and expectations precede student voice. In the teacher interviews barriers arose around a range of student abilities to clearly articulate their voice in class. Barriers such as language issues, and student skills in reading and writing were alluded to. Similar to the discussion around student lack of content knowledge and skills, teachers expressed that students need structure, management and expectations preceding opportunities to voice. Teacher one stated, “I think probably the most fundamental feature of teaching is the organization and structure, and classroom discipline.” He also emphasized, “it’s important to ask kids, what does this structure and routine look like to you?” Teacher three reported, “I have to establish firmly that I’m in charge, and I’m going to make the rules. Once we get that out of the way, then students can speak. Then I can let them say what they can contribute.” Teacher two also emphasized that in cases outside of her classroom; teacher personality and lack of student management could hinder opportunities for voice. She also spoke of student emotions impacting opportunities for voice specifically stating, “teenagers are emotional, so sometimes you have to really work on, are they thinking emotionally or are they thinking academically?” Because schools are set up on premises of prediction, control and management, anything that challenges those premises is hard to accomplish within formal education contexts (Cook-Sather, 2006). Rosenthal & Jacobson (1968) conducted research on teacher expectations and found that when teachers expected their students to perform at high levels they did. The term became known as the Pygmalion Effect, or self-fulfilling prophecy.

When teachers believed their students were able, they interacted with them in ways that promoted their academic development (Rubie-Davies, 2010).

Teachers' expectations for their classes may well have far more effect on students than the well-researched effects of teachers on individual students (Brophy, 1985). One important challenge is how to cultivate collaborative relationships between teachers and students in an educational structure that does not practice the value of dialogue and in a context driven by testing (Bahou, 2011). Ultimately, teachers do feel that they benefit when students become partners and are empowered because they positively changed their perceptions of students' capacities, and gained new perspectives on their teaching and enhanced their pedagogies (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). All three teachers revealed similar beliefs that structure, management and expectations precede student voice, but similarly, they found value in feedback from students around their practices. Teacher three reported, "what I thought was interesting was they knew more than I thought they did, and so when I read their feedback, I wanted to conduct the circle activity every year, it helped me reach more students." Lastly teacher one emphasized a need for teacher evaluation to be connected to student voice opportunities. He stated, "instead of simply using test data, use another form of data, like student feedback and improvements made on their feedback to rate their growth."

Implicitly, the teachers felt taxed by the volume of content standards and limited time they have to teach large class sizes. Where they all revealed examples of partnership, activism and leadership, there is a theme of doing the best they can with the resources they have available. Student voice work will not release us from the

constraints under which we currently work, but it can help us deal with the problem more thoughtfully (Cook-Sather, 2006). For adults to empower students, they need to be empowered themselves by their broader institutional environment (Mitra, 2005b; Muncey and McQuillan, 1991). The movement to raise standards may fail if teachers are not supported to understand the connections among motivation, engagement and student voice (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012). Teachers need to feel competent, related, autonomous, and authentic, and they need to develop self-regulatory skills that sustain focus, despite the inevitable challenges classroom teaching presents (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012).

Research Question Three

3. What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools?

Research question three investigated the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators. For my last question I codified the responses reported by the students and teachers and developed three major themes that serve as the facilitators for the successful enactment of student voice as well as highlight the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership through the student and teacher narratives. The opposite of barriers are the facilitators to student voice and they emerge in question three. Facilitators describe what teachers do that enables opportunities for student voice, and the teacher and student narratives reveal the significance they have on student motivation.

I will begin by introducing the themes, and then elaborating on how those themes facilitate opportunities for student voice, as well as how they motivate students and help teachers improve their practice.

Question three major themes: (1) Understanding what type of support students need, (2) Openness to input and feedback from students, and (3) Advocacy and belief in student capacity. There is alignment between the students and staff across the three themes and I will illustrate how their input aligns to form the three themes. I will also identify where any discrepancies exist.

Understanding the needs of students. All of the student focus groups reported they feel most motivated when their teachers have an understanding of what they need to be successful. Teachers also expressed confidence in their teaching when they were able to identify gaps in student learning to provide support. Students from focus group one spoke of their Sociology class, where the teacher created activities that allowed them to share about themselves. The fishbowl activity was both motivating, and gave opportunities to students to speak their voice in a meaningful way. They indicated that this was meaningful because they were able to help and support their classmates, and also learn concepts at a higher level. They reported that this structure and the class itself allowed them to develop a relationship with their teacher. Speaker two in focus group one reported, “I feel like when you build a relationship with a teacher on a personal level, you’re more willing to listen to them. You are more willing to respect what they have to say.” Speaker three in focus group one continued, “in Sociology class you tend to learn about people, and why they act a certain way. You learn about people on a

personal level, and it changes how you feel and how you think about things.” Speaker seven reinforced their belief reporting, “in sociology we had more freedom and the environment was more open, I just loved that class to the point where I wouldn’t mind taking it again.” This teacher was reported as a good and authentic listener and was responsive in his teaching to what his students needed. It is such an essential part of youth culture to be authentic and honest (Silva, 2003). Listening to students can counter discriminatory and exclusionary tendencies in education (Banks, 1996; Hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000).

Students in focus group one also expressed concerns when not allowed to express their needs. They recommended that teachers should identify where students struggle, allow them the voice to express what support for them looks like and what would be most meaningful. Students in focus group two continued with the idea of their needs being understood, and their teacher checking in with them to discuss goals and next steps. The perception of teachers and counselors partnering with students to check in on grades, plans and goals, was motivating for students and kept them focused on what they needed to accomplish. The regular communication and understanding what they needed to do, was motivating for the students in this focus group. Speaker three in focus group two reported, “one of my best teachers always paid attention, when you have that strong relationship with a teacher you realize they are taking time to help you, and really want to make sure you are reflecting an accurate grade.” Teachers received the most appreciation when they were perceived to be authentic, (Mitra and Gross, 2009). Students frequently recalled experiences from teachers who were interactive, and

provided personalized learning that was supportive and challenging (Mitra and Gross, 2009). Speaker three in focus group three also reported, “in AP Computer Science I feel I have a lot more voice. I can say, hey, I need a more time to complete this, or I need help with this and need more support to understand this.”

Research has demonstrated that when students are engaged, their teachers tend to provide them with more motivational support and assistance (Furrer & Skinner 2003). All three of the teachers reported providing students with surveys and opportunities to express where they need the most support and what style of teaching best suits them. They all specifically provide a student learning survey, which determines student goals for the class, rating their writing and reading skills, and what kind of teaching style they prefer. They also spoke of balancing giving them a voice, while building their skills and content knowledge. In order to further gain what supports students’ need for success, teacher three utilizes technology to reveal student understanding and comfort with content. A red or green number represents students on the overhead projector. Red indicates a lack of understanding green demonstrates they understand it. It’s an anonymous process to reveal where the class is, and support can be targeted and intentional based on the color. “Listening to, responding to, and being guided by student voices is not about succeeding- not about “getting there”- but rather about always changing in response to what we hear” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 381).

Openness to input and student feedback. All of the student focus groups reported either opportunities they encountered to provide their teachers feedback, or expressed the interest in being able to provide their teachers feedback. The three

teachers were highly impacted by the feedback they received from students in relation to what they teach and how they teach. Focus group one identified that allowing students a voice around things that are important. They stated the importance of being heard and teachers actually listening and not being insulted or taking offense and losing control of the class. Speaker three in focus group one stated, “When your teachers tend to help you, and listen to your feedback, you feel more motivated, and more confident.” Students in focus group two also expressed the need to communicate and provide feedback to their teachers. They emphasized the importance to communicate what you need to succeed. They viewed teachers as experts in their content areas and when they were available for support and open to student input, they were more motivated. Speaker three in focus group two emphasized her counselor being open to input stating, “When it comes to counseling, you can clearly identify your problem, then your counselor is helpful in partnering with you to generate solutions.” Focus group three was similar as they were interested in taking an active approach to providing feedback to staff, making suggestions anonymously in order to get their needs met. Speaker two in focus group three reported, “we all appreciated the opportunity to give input on how to improve the course, but we never did that before, we never considered it or really thought about it. He also continued, “I know sometimes students don’t want to make suggestions unless it’s anonymous, just because of the stigma around it. If you could give feedback on a Google form, then it wouldn’t seem as critical and kids could provide their voice on how to better learn the material.” He further stated, “When you get people’s input into something then it makes them feel more connected to it. So being able to make students

feel like they have a role in what they are learning, that their voice matters.” The students in focus group two and three also provided suggestions on furthering their voice and active participation.

Group two had concerns with budget cuts, and the elimination of Wednesday late starts. Their school in the past had teacher professional learning on Wednesday’s, and next year they have been eliminated. Speaker one in focus group stated, “I feel like if we take on activism for a specific purpose, like the school getting rid of Wednesday late starts, we should have a voice in that too, because it affects all of us.” Focus group three also expressed an interest in teacher hiring and non-renewal practices. Speaker three in focus group three stated, “If there’s a teacher you don’t think is teaching well, I don’t know who to go to, to talk about that. It would be helpful to have a say, when you don’t feel like a teacher is doing a very good job.” Speaker two further stated, “I think student reflection around teacher performance could be beneficial. If there are really specific questions based on how they do things, I think students will give an honest response, especially if it is anonymous.” Participation can also increase youth attachment to school, which in turn correlates with improved academic outcomes (Mitra, 2004). Students not only want to be heard as individuals but also as a group (Mitra and Gross, 2009). Students share a sense of frustration that they were being largely ignored collectively. They viewed the hypocrisy of adults paying little attention to them, but expecting them to take the reins of a democratic society in the near future, (Mitra and Gross, 2009).

As a group, the teachers all concurred with students desire to give feedback. Teacher one referenced the enthusiasm his students had after being interviewed for the study. He stated, “They expressed a great deal of excitement and appreciation after being interviewed by the researcher. The fact that they were asked what their opinion was, they really valued that experience.” Teacher three gained a great deal of useful information on how to incorporate experiences students were interested in. He reported, “They gave me feedback in terms of process and how I teach certain concepts. A lot of kids talked about wanting to learn a language we’re not teaching. It’s called C++, and I guess they’ve heard about it, and stated they wanted to learn about it.” Students are understood to be motivated by ethics of care, contribution, and compassion, along with understandable needs for self-satisfaction (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2004).

Advocacy and belief in student capacity. Students and staff alike revealed the importance of advocacy and belief in student capacity to share their voice and be empowered. Notions of inequity and favoritism arose around access to partnership, activism and leadership in some instances, but in the broad spectrum all participants revealed the need for advocacy and belief. The range of student focus groups was critical to unearth this data. Students in focus group one were all in regular track classes, and had not participated in concurrent enrollment courses or advanced placement courses. Their interview resulted in findings where they felt that they missed out on opportunities for leadership. Students felt that the elite students were selected for the leadership class/club. They stated as a group, “if you don’t have a 3.0 grade point and good attendance you cannot participate, you have to be selected by the sponsor.” All of

the students in this group expressed the interest in leadership and how they wanted to have influence in the school, but felt like outsiders since they were not selected for the club due to grades. Students in this group see the impact of marginalization and being limited due to a perceived lack of skills, and feel that they would benefit from leadership opportunities. Speaker three in focus group one stated, “leadership feels like favoritism. The leadership students get more opportunities to stuff around the school. Our school would benefit if more kids had access to leadership opportunities.” The one student in the group who did have opportunities for leadership expressed sincere gratitude and was motivated by the experience. Speaker two in focus group one stated, “I was chosen to be a leader and I’d never been chosen before, and I took pride in being one of those leaders and helping younger students.” He reiterated that having someone believe in him and advocate for him changed his outlook on school. He stated he had never been selected as a leader and took the responsibility seriously.

Focus group one all had the same sociology teacher, and the resonating theme for his instruction was his advocacy for his students, and his belief in their ability to share ideas. He creates a safe space for students to share ideas and learn from one another. Speaker one in focus group one had this to say, “sociology is the one class where you actually have a mind to be free. It’s a class that accepts everyone. Everyone gets to speak their mind and gain an understanding of what others think and feel. The teacher believes in all of his students.” For these students, engagement and teacher relationship may need to precede motivation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Rudduck & Flutter (2004) contend that evidence they gathered,

“From diverse school settings, suggest that pupils who are involved in school and who feel they are respected as individuals and as an institutional and social group are likely to feel a greater sense of respect and belonging, and are less likely to disengage from a school’s purpose” (p. 107).

Students in focus groups two and three were enrolled in more advanced classes, and were also more involved in school clubs. They reported more opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership, and expressed how it motivated them as learners as well. They also felt that leadership was exclusive. Students in this focus group expressed that it would feel good and motivating to be selected for leadership roles and that it would motivate them to be in a leadership role. They all agreed that it was empowering and motivating when opportunities did arise for leadership and they performed better in class when a teacher advocated for them to lead. They spoke about their biology teacher and counselors advocating for them to set goals, and monitored their progress regularly. Speaker four in focus group two had this to say about teacher advocacy, “there are students that have those parents who really don’t care about their grade or what they do in school. It’s good to know that your teacher actually cares about what you’re doing and helps you advocate for your needs, that motivates students to do more.” Speaker two in focus group three stated, “Being able to teach students how to be leaders is just as important as the academics. You can know everything by the book, but a lot of what impacts your success is what you do in terms of interactions and relationships.” With alienation orientation, students may wait for educators to draw them in, to feel invited, needed, interested, and even inspired before motivation rises to a level that propels achievement-oriented activity (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Focus group three was comprised of students mostly enrolled in AP courses, involving more rigorous instruction. They revealed more opportunities for freedom and choice in their classes. Similar to focus groups one and two, they appreciated the opportunities teachers gave them to lead and share their voice. They were not used to giving feedback to teachers as it was not a standard practice throughout their education, but when the opportunity arose, they were motivated by it. They also appreciated the push by teachers to take on leadership roles. Some students, who identified as being quiet, accepted the challenge to lead and thrived in the role. Speaker three in focus group three stated, “If you have a say in what you’re doing, you feel more motivated to do it.” Speaker nine reported, “I think with partnership, students are more interested, and kids will want to do better in their classes if they feel like equals.” Speaker three reported,

One thing I’m thinking about in terms of activism is if teachers do it, it prompts students to mimic that. So, if we were able to walk through how a teacher would like us to be able to add input, and do it respectfully, just seeing the process would help spark more student activism.

Teacher advocacy for increased student voice and partnership offers teachers important insights into learning, teaching and schooling from the perspective of different students and groups of students as “expert witnesses” (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004, p.4).

Consequently, this work potentially challenges the passive role of students within schools and may redefine student-teacher relationships as a joint endeavor in learning (Fielding, 2007). In regards to the teachers, there is still a feeling to control the learning environment, where the focus is more teacher centric and less student centered.

All three teachers wanted to set clear expectations and ensure the students understood the rules of engagement. They also felt tasked with making sure students had academic skills in reading and writing as well as content knowledge, prior to allowing for more opportunities for student voice. Despite claims that classrooms should be constructivist, student-centered, and empowering, school experiences are often controlling, oppressive environments for a large proportion of young people who are failing at and being failed by schools (Angus, 2006; Smyth, 2006a). All three teachers expressed the need to allow for more student leadership and opportunities for them to express their voice in meaningful ways. Teacher one stated, “I know students want to share ideas and have autonomy. We can do a better job of creating opportunities that empower them to be leaders. You’ve got to put yourself out there, as a teacher you need to understand there are going to be good days and bad days.” Teacher two spoke of student bias, and wanting to support them in developing an educated bias. She reported, “you can’t fault students for their bias, like how do you break that bias? I think I try to build opportunities for voice and provide a space that listens to multiple views and sides to an argument.” Teacher three has the challenge of teaching very technical computer science content with very rigorous standards, and is experimenting with opportunities for students to lead and problem solve and developing their voice. He stated, “There are two approaches to problem solving in my classes. The Xerox approach where they just duplicate what they hear others doing without understanding it. I try to fight that, so I have to get them to the point where they understand the objective.” He also alluded specifically to what motivates his students. He continued, “There are intangibles that

support student voice. For some students, their identity is tied to their performance in the classroom, so you want to get them to show everyone that they know what they're talking about. That's motivating for students."

All three of these teachers have foundational pieces to developing increased opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. They also have the belief that students need to be empowered, and they need to advocate for those opportunities in their classes. The notion of letting go of control appeared to be a challenge for these teachers. Teacher three stated, "I don't know if can ever be equal. They see the teacher as being important and don't really speak their voice." Teacher two stated, "Kids aren't seen as the experts, so teachers have to provide the information." There is an implicit idea among the teachers that as the authority figure, they decide for students what opportunities to provide. Traditionally, views and opinions of young people were discounted as having less legitimacy than that of adults, but as attitudes towards children have changed, new views have arisen with these changes (Holdsworth, 2005). Fullan (2001) indicates that students have been ignored in the change processes in that when adults think of students, they regard them as mere potential beneficiaries of the changes rather than participants in the process of change and organizational life. School contexts greatly influence the type of influence a group can have (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993).

Absent growth opportunities and peer networks that sustain teachers' motivation, engagement and voice, it is likely teachers will avoid student-centered techniques and regress to far easier, far less productive "stand and deliver" sorts of pedagogies (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). All three teachers believe in listening to

students and getting input and feedback to improve their teaching. They want to continue to develop those skills for the benefit of their students. They all expressed an interest in this study, but had no background knowledge or understanding of the concepts revealed through the questions. The belief and the advocacy they demonstrate in openness to feedback is a great launch point for future work in their classes. Teachers felt that they benefitted because they positively changed their perceptions of students' capacities, gained new perspectives on their teaching and enhanced their pedagogies (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). Frequently, teachers are compelled to focus their efforts on lesson planning, assessment, and classroom management, which can overemphasize the development of academic competence and social relatedness at the expense of individual autonomy (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The potential for transformation is more likely to reside in arrangements, which require the active engagement of students and teachers working in partnership than in those, which either exclude teachers or treat student voice as an instrument of teacher or state purposes (Fielding, 2004). Schools can become healthier and more engaging places of learning when students are granted an active role in school decision-making. Without the voices and support of students, a key component of school reform effort is missing (Smyth, 2006).

Summary

This chapter presented the information and data as gathered, analyzed and reported by the researcher. The information was procured by research question, and responses were bracketed by reoccurring themes within the data collected. Chapter five

provides a brief summary of the study, conclusions gleaned from the research, implications for current practices and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

- 1. What opportunities exist within the urban high school for partnership, activism and leadership?*
- 2. What are the perceived barriers that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?*
- 3. What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools?*

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore urban high school student and teacher perceptions of student voice, specifically in the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. Findings from the study support the perceptions that student partnership, activism and leadership do have an impact on student motivation. When opportunities were provided for student voice, namely partnership, activism and leadership, students felt more ownership, motivation and a stronger connection to the teacher and coursework. Teachers all expressed the importance of incorporating student voice on a more consistent basis, however they all felt that structure and expectations precede opportunities for voice.

Summary of the Study

The study provided valuable insight into the spectrum of student voice framework created by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), and revealed what opportunities exist for partnership, activism and leadership within an urban high school setting. The study also

revealed barriers that exist which hinder opportunities for student voice, as well as teacher beliefs and the conditions they create in their classrooms that facilitate opportunities for student voice. Student responses also revealed an increased level of motivation when they felt that their teachers provided freedom of expression, opportunities for leadership and the support to speak their voice. I have extracted key data from the interviews and aligned it to the research in the summary of major findings.

Summary of Major Findings

The findings were broken down by research question. Within each research question the following themes and concepts emerged:

Research Question 1. What opportunities exist within the urban high school for partnership, activism and leadership?

Partnership- opportunities were referenced by the student groups where teachers or counselors were conferring with students on ways to improve grades, as well as teachers seeking input from students on how to better teach and improve their practices. Students felt motivated and supported when they knew what their grade was and how they could improve. Although focus groups two and three had clear examples to speak of, they were not aligned with Toshalis and Nakkula's (2012) definition of partnership, which according to their definition requires students to have a formalized role in decision-making. The forms of partnership referenced fall within the second step on the spectrum of student voice, consultation which is defined as students being asked for their opinion and providing feedback. Skills appeared to be missing by both students and staff to form clear partnerships, as defined by Toshalis and Nakkula. A common set of skills,

including common language and norms are paramount in any group effort for student voice activities (Mitra, 2005). Connecting the findings from the study to the research, students were given opportunities for input on a consultative level, but did not participate in examples of partnership provided by Cruddas (2005) where schools used student voice for education planning and improvement including: students as participants in curricular planning meetings; co-creating new school designs; planning the school day; and planning and constructing learning units with the assistance of teachers. Other aspects of student partnership include reform efforts including, curriculum and assessment development, such as by students offering instant feedback during staff development sessions (Fielding, 2001; Ruddock and Flutter, 2000).

Activism- students were given opportunities to listen and respond to district officials discussing budget issues, and the writing of persuasive essays in classes around social justice themes. In summary, one student referenced, “students had opportunities to speak their voice at the budget meeting, but it wasn’t really heard, because the district official wasn’t really answering the questions. I also feel like an opportunity was missed for real action to be taken, based on input from students.” Levin (1994) suggests that we “must make it normal, even expected, that students would have a reasoned, informed and respected voice in school decisions” (p. 96). According to Toshalis and Nakkula, for true activism to be present students need to be organizing responses, agitating for change, generating solutions and taking action (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The examples of activism provided by the focus groups are forms of expression, which are defined as students volunteering opinions (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The findings from the study

yielded potential alignment to the research regarding, meaningful student involvement for activism through students as researchers and advocates (Fletcher, 2005). The students as researcher model, includes issues for investigation that are identified by students who receive training in the skills and values of research and inquiry (Fielding, 2004). Students in the focus groups spoke of social justice themes for research papers, however their research did not correlate to the research. At the highest level of activism, students are enabled to criticize and question issues such as structural and cultural injustices within schools (Fine, 1991; Mitra, 2007b). “When students research their schools, they become critical consumers of the institutions that affect them most” (Fletcher, 2005, p.11). One such way scholars and educators have conducted research with young people to address inherent power an imbalance is through (YPAR) youth-led participatory action research (Fine & Cammarota, 2008). Students in the study had choice around critical issues, however they did not take action and execute the form of research, where students participate in research design, execution, analysis, and writing about schools, environments, the teaching and learning process, as well as injustices that exist (Fletcher, 2005). Fielding (2001) and Holdsworth (2005) link the importance of ‘voice’ to ‘action’, stating the central issue of student voice is not simply to provide data, but should be encouraging student’s active participation in shared decisions, with consequent actions about their own present and futures.

Leadership- a Leadership club exists at the school, as well as opportunities to lead projects in specific classes. One student specifically referenced the Leadership club stating, “Leadership feels like favoritism. The leadership students get more opportunities

to do stuff around the school. Our school would benefit if more kids had access to leadership opportunities.” School contexts greatly influence the type of influence a group can have (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). The main difference between the advantaged and the disadvantaged is that the latter need such flexible schools even more (Meier, 1995). Ngussa & Makewa (2014) state that students need to be encouraged and supported to take greater responsibility for their own learning and participation. This involves developing as individual learners who increasingly manage their own learning and growth, by setting goals and managing resources to achieve these (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). The Leadership club does align with Toshalis and Nakkula’s (2012) definition of leadership, where students co-plan and make decisions alongside adults and take significant responsibility for outcomes. However, Fielding (2006) refers to leadership as “radical collegiality” and what Philip Woods and Peter Gronn (2009) label “distributed leadership”. In this form of student voice, supports and growth opportunities are embedded into schools with gradual increases in influence, responsibility and decision-making authority, in which adults and youth work in tandem to impact change (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). The research is indicating school-wide initiatives, not limited to an exclusive club or class. Leadership involves students as systemic decision-makers and leaders for organizational change (Fletcher, 2005). In a decision-making model, students partner with educators to make decisions throughout the school system, from curricula, calendar year planning, building design, as well as budgeting and hiring (Fletcher, 2005). Further elaboration on opportunities for student leadership, Glatthorn et al (2009) argue that adoptive and instructional practices demand students’ involvement in curriculum by

developing their own curriculum. Glatthorn et al (2009) further maintain that involving students in curriculum development encourages them to explore the topics they study deeply and allows them a voice of their own as well as opportunities to share their learning with community and makes them revitalized as they experience the benefits of their own initiatives.

The following information gleaned from the teacher interviews reveals patterns and themes that were consistent among the three teachers. All three teachers spoke of relevant student projects within their content areas that were somehow connected to students' lives and interests, and allowed students to collaborate and support one another. One teacher specifically stated, "finding entry points with the curriculum to real world opportunities makes their voice stronger. If it is something that affects them and their life, they are more active and engaged." All three teachers gave examples of real world projects; however, these examples fall within the participation range of the spectrum of student voice. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) define participation as the frequent inclusion of students around relevant issues and some action planning takes place. Most student voice activities currently in schools consist of less-intensive involvement, in the forms of expression, consultation, and some participation; increasing partnership, activism, and leadership would motivate students to make an effort and ultimately succeed (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). In the analysis of teacher findings on relevant projects, they do not align with the research on meaningful opportunities for student voice regarding curriculum.). Eisner (2001) asks, "What opportunities do students have to formulate their own purposes and to design ways to achieve them?" (p. 371). If students are not allowed

leadership in curriculum development, they will become their own barriers to learning (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Students need to be encouraged and supported to take on leadership for their own learning and participation. This involves developing as individual learners who increasingly manage their own learning and growth, by setting goals and managing resources to achieve these (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014).

All three teachers implemented opportunities for students to provide feedback on how they teach and how they can improve to better meet the students' needs. The process and specific feedback varied across the three teachers, however the act of receiving student feedback is critical to building partnership with their students and can help pupils feel that they are respected as individuals and as a body within the school (MacBeath, 2003). According to Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), this is a form of consultation, where students are providing their opinion and feedback. Simply put, understanding the perspective of high school students and being sensitive to profound learning experiences are critical elements in fashioning a responsive and engaging education experience (Mitra and Gross, 2009). For student feedback to be on the higher end of the spectrum, students are involved in evaluating programs, conducting research as part of school reform efforts, or investigating issues in their communities (Zeldin O'Connor, & Camino, 2006). Also, (O'Connor and Camino, 2005) state providing legitimate opportunities for youth to take on meaningful roles, including to be change-makers in their schools and communities so they can experience making a difference- especially helping others in need (Mitra, 2003).

Research Question 2. What are the perceived barriers that influence opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?

The following were themes that emerged regarding barriers from the perception of students;

(1) Teacher attitude towards listening to what students have to say. A critical finding in regards to this specific barrier was reported by a student stating, “teacher attitudes can make it difficult, there’s just some teachers who prefer unbelievably controlling classes, because that’s how they were taught.” Darling-Hammond (1997) states, many teachers’ preparation has not taught them how to create situations in which learners can have real breakthroughs in understanding or how to evaluate learning and adapt their teaching. Thus, they teach as they remember being taught, creating a flow of lessons and activities aimed at fairly superficial coverage that moves along comfortably oblivious to student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Another student reported, “It seems like teachers want a peaceful environment, not an argumentative one.” Evidence of educators’ fear, rather than neglect, grew apparent when students (activated by curiosity and rebellion) initiated conversations of critique, which were rapidly dismissed (Fine, 2003). The findings from the student interviews also align with Alfie Kohn’s research regarding adult barriers. Kohn (1993) stated adult barriers exist when they learn from students that they aren’t doing what should be done. Kohn (1993) further states adults feel threatened dealing with the ideas, opinions, knowledge and experience of students.

(2) Teachers do not have enough time to provide balance to both teach material and appropriately meet the individual needs of their students. In regards to time as a barrier one student reported, “they never have time when you have time, so they don’t actually schedule around when you can do it, it’s either on their time or none at

all.” Another student reported, “All of our teachers should be more organized to where they do have time to listen to the kids and still do what they need to do.” Williams (2012) reflected that teachers felt they should set aside more time for content instruction and must be encouraged to give students more time for voice in their classroom design. The dominant culture of schooling and insistence upon outcomes “prevents practitioners from listening to students’ own creative ideas about how systems can change and meet their needs” (Cruddas & Haddock, 2003, p. 6). The essence of time aligns with Kohn’s (1993) structural barrier. Kohn (1993) references structural barriers as little encouragement, incentives, or recognition for meaningful student involvement exist in schools and leadership not making it a priority or denying that type of activity. In this case study all three of the teachers stated that student voice activity is not a focus or priority within their school reform efforts. Student voice initiatives need to support the whole school with the whole school culture supporting the process and follow up around student voice (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014).

(3) Students lack skills to articulate voice appropriately. Three big ideas emerged under the notion of students lacking the skill to articulate their voice appropriately. (1) The feeling of ‘marginalization’ and ‘favoritism’ where opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership are only for the elite students, (2) a lack of understanding how to navigate the system and determine which teachers are open to student voice, (3) a lack of skill on how to articulate voice, and in turn a lack of confidence to enact their voice, (4) teacher perceived as the authority figure and students rely on teachers to give them voice. Students in all of the focus groups emphasized a need

to have more opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership at a younger age to develop the skills to enact their voice effectively. Listening and learning from student voices necessitate a shift from the ways in which teachers engage with students and how they perceive their own practices (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014, p. 23). In this case, listening is the most basic form of attention to student voice with “collaboration” and “leadership” signaling increasingly greater roles and agency for students (Cook-Sather, 2006). In order to improve meaningful opportunities for student voice, a common set of skills is paramount in any group effort for student voice activities (Mitra, 2005). Again, this notion of lacking skills by both students and staff aligns to the structural barriers emphasized by Alfie Kohn (1993). In this case, student voice efforts may not be necessarily denied as a school-wide focus, but there is currently no system that supports this work, therefore results indicate a lack of skill by both students and staff to meet the areas addressed in the literature regarding partnership, activism and leadership.

The following were themes that emerged regarding barriers from the perception of teachers; **(1) Students lack of content knowledge.** One teacher reiterated, “kids sometimes lack the background knowledge, so they struggle articulating their voice around content related questions. Balancing giving them a voice, while building their skills and knowledge is challenging.” Perhaps the single biggest obstacle maintaining progressive reforms is the extensive skill needed to teach both subjects and students well (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Alfie Kohn discussed the research regarding the perils of student voice implementation. Even in healthy school climates, the sharing of power with students can be perceived as threatening to teachers (Mitra & Gross, 2009). For adults to

empower students, they need to be empowered themselves by their broader institutional environment (Mitra, 2005b; Muncey & McQuillan, 1991). Based on the teacher findings in this study, the emphasis in their classrooms rests primarily on enhancing student academic skills. The teachers acknowledged a need to increase voice, but also voiced their lack of understanding, particularly within the framework of partnership, activism and leadership. I can deduce from the findings that all of the teachers defer to what they know best in terms of teaching. Absent growth opportunities and peer networks that sustain teachers' motivation, engagement and voice, it is likely teachers will avoid student-centered techniques and regress to far easier, far less productive "stand and deliver" sorts of pedagogies (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

(2) Structure, management and expectations precede opportunities for student voice. One teacher stated, "I think probably the most fundamental feature of teaching is the organization and structure, and classroom discipline." Because schools are set up on premises of prediction, control and management, anything that challenges those premises is hard to accomplish within formal education contexts (Cook-Sather, 2006). The teachers in the study all stated that students must know who is in control, and before voice can happen, structure, management and expectations must come first. This theme of control and fear connect to the literature regarding barriers and the perils of student voice implementation.

Difficulties can emerge, namely the need to alter traditional structures, practices, beliefs and values to allow student voice to flourish (McQuillan, 2005); dangers can arise from co-opting student voices rather than learning from them (Fielding, 2004; Fielding, 2007a); the tricky business of cultivating "respectful disagreement" between youth and adults (Denner, Meyer, & Bean 2005); the challenges associated with "surface

compliance” (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006); and time limits, levels of administrative support, worries about teachers losing power, the authenticity of voices, and whether full inclusion of all voices is being achieved (Rudduck, 2007) (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 30).

Most schools are not structured in ways that encourage student voice; instead they often conflict with adolescent needs (Mitra, 2003).

Research Question 3. What is the significance of maximizing partnership, activism and leadership for students, teachers and administrators in urban high schools?

The following findings reveal patterns and themes that both teachers and students reported as the facilitators for student voice, and how the facilitators play a significant role in student motivation. The findings also align with the research on how student voice has a significant impact on student motivation. **(1) Understanding what type of support students need.** All of the student focus groups reported they feel most motivated when their teachers have an understanding of what they need to be successful. Teachers also expressed confidence in their teaching when they were able to identify gaps in student learning to provide support. Students in focus group one also expressed concerns when not allowed to express their needs. They recommended that teachers should identify where students struggle, allow them the voice to express what support for them looks like and what would be most meaningful. The findings around supporting student needs connect closely to the research around student voice elevating student outcomes. Students frequently recalled experiences from teachers who were interactive, and provided personalized learning that was supportive and challenging (Mitra and Gross, 2009). Research has demonstrated that when students are engaged, their teachers tend to provide them with more motivational support and assistance (Furrer & Skinner 2003). Students

possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate, such as providing a bridge between the school and families reluctant to interact with school personnel, including first-generation immigrant families (Mitra, 2009).

(2) Openness to input and feedback from students. All of the student focus groups reported either opportunities they encountered to provide their teachers feedback, or expressed the interest in being able to provide their teachers feedback. The three teachers were highly impacted by the feedback they received from students in relation to what they teach and how they teach. The findings from the participants stating the need for student input align with the research. Ornstein and Hunkins (2009, p. 241) further consider students as important sources for school improvement. They contend that, “students should have a voice in the school improvement, and their input is important in its own right, but allowing them to participate in school improvement also empowers them and encourages them to take responsibility for matters that concern them.” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009, p. 241) Research shows that when educators work with students in schools- as opposed to working for them- school improvement is positive and meaningful for everyone involved (Fletcher, 2005).

(3) Advocacy and belief in student capacity. Students and staff alike revealed the importance of advocacy and belief in student capacity to share their voice and be empowered. Notions of inequity and favoritism arose around access to partnership, activism and leadership in some instances, but in the broad spectrum all participants revealed the need for advocacy and belief in students. A student from focus group one reiterated that having someone believe in him and advocate for him changed his outlook

on school. Even though the opportunities for the students varied, both teachers and students alike expressed the importance of creating meaningful opportunities for student voice, and aligns with what research deems necessary for voice efforts to impact positive student outcomes. Rudduck & Flutter (2004) contend that evidence they gathered, “from diverse school settings, suggest that pupils who are involved in school and who feel they are respected as individuals and as an institutional and social group are likely to feel a greater sense of respect and belonging, and are less likely to disengage from a school’s purpose” (p. 107).

All three teachers expressed the need to allow for more student leadership and opportunities for them to express their voice in meaningful ways. Traditionally, views and opinions of young people were discounted as having less legitimacy than that of adults, but as attitudes towards children have changed, new views have arisen with these changes (Holdsworth, 2005). Without the voices and support of students, a key component of school reform effort is missing (Smyth, 2006).

The significance of increasing opportunities for student partnership, activism and leadership was revealed in research question three, with three key factors increasing student motivation. The three themes that emerged are also what the research deems based upon the findings across participant groups, to be the facilitators to providing students opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. Students and staff agreed first that understanding what type of support students need is critical to motivation. Understanding the supports needed by students led to the second factor of staff members being open to feedback from students regarding how they learn best, as well as providing

staff feedback on how they teach to meet the range of student needs in their classes.

Lastly, students and staff agreed that where opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership may not exist equitably throughout the school, the notion of those opportunities are highly desirable for both students and staff alike to become more empowered, take on more responsibility and become more motivated.

The findings from this study align with Toshalis and Nakkula's research. Most student voice activities currently in schools consist of less-intensive involvement, in the forms of expression, consultation, and some participation; increasing partnership, activism, and leadership would motivate students to make an effort and ultimately succeed (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). When students believe that they are valued for their perspectives and respected, they begin to develop a sense of ownership and attachment to the organization in which they are involved (Mitra, 2009). Levin (2000) concludes that school reform cannot succeed and should not proceed without much more direct involvement of students in all its aspects.

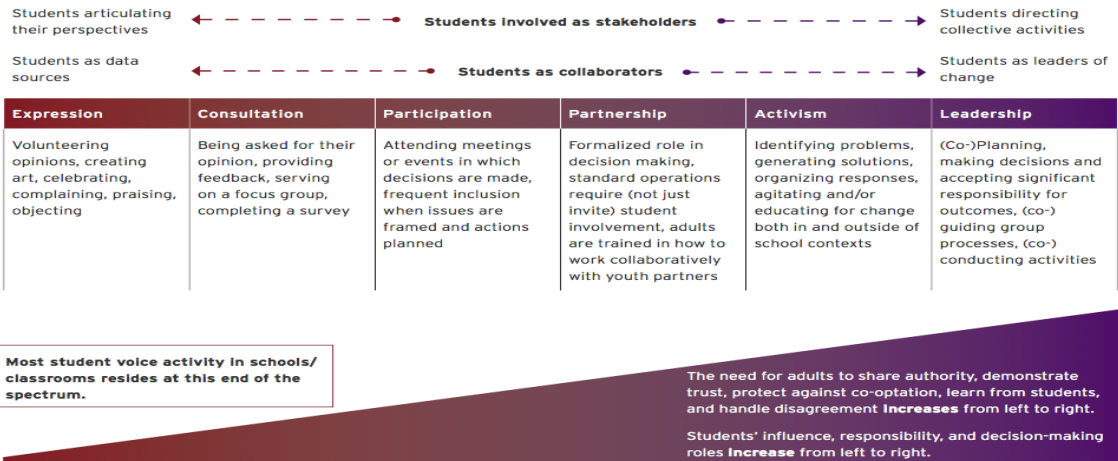
Final Reflections

This chapter presented the information and data as gathered, analyzed and summarized by the researcher. The information gleaned from the focus group interviews and individual teacher interviews supports the previously presented research by authors such as Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), Mitra (2004), Cook-Sather (2006), Hargreaves (2004), and Holdsworth (2005) and many others indicating the need for student voice to be a driving force in school reform. Students across the three focus groups expressed the need to speak their voice, but consistently expressed the lack of knowing who to go to,

and how to speak their voice in a manner where it is heard. The first focus group comprised of students in regular track courses, had limited opportunities for leadership, in comparison to their peers in advanced courses, where teachers provided more student led projects. All three groups expressed that when given opportunities to speak their voice and lead in their classes with the support of their teacher, they were more motivated and felt a better connection to the teacher and content.

The teachers were consistent in their practices of seeking student input around their teaching practices. They also all believed that making their coursework relevant and meaningful was critical to student engagement. They did not have any prior understanding of the spectrum of student voice framework, which was used for this study, and did at times create challenges for them to clearly articulate connections to the framework. The majority of their examples provided in the study were aligned to the lower end of the spectrum, expression, consultation and participation. This is by no means an indictment of their practices, rather reinforcement that for student voice to move along the spectrum to the realm partnership, activism and leadership; teachers need time devoted to professional learning and opportunities to experiment with these concepts and ideas. (*see Figure 1.*)

THE SPECTRUM OF STUDENT VOICE ORIENTED ACTIVITY



SOURCE: (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012)

I was aware of the potential misalignment conducting the study at a site unfamiliar with the framework. It was helpful in contributing to the field of student voice, to investigate the perceptions of both students and teachers, as even though they were unfamiliar with the framework; all of the participants were intrigued and expressed the need for more opportunities for student voice, especially in the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. Advice was given by students to begin this work at an earlier age in order to make the process more natural. Teachers expressed the need to align evaluation and usage of data that is more aligned to enacting opportunities for student voice and tracking student progress and growth within the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. There was an underlying theme of potential turbulence being created when students speak their voice. Students addressed the need to express their voice, but were fearful of teachers losing control in the classroom. Teachers expressed similarly, that structure, management and expectations need to be in place before allowing students an opportunity for voice.

Implications for Practice

Research has shown that the more educators give their students choice, control, challenge and opportunities for collaboration and partnership, the more their motivation and engagement are likely to rise (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). When students have voice, and an opportunity to truly collaborate, become partners in their own learning and have the chance to be advocates for change, they learn to be in charge of their own growth and future learning (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). This study provided the researcher an opportunity to investigate the ideas referenced around student voice research, and if providing students opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership had any significance for their levels of motivation. The researcher identified partnership, activism and leadership within the student voice spectrum as they yield the greatest results for student performance (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Every student involved in the study in some shape or form expressed a need to be heard, listened to, and provided opportunities to take on leadership in their classes. They also expressed a need for their teachers to understand where they struggle, and to be able to provide the support necessary. These critical ideas also served as motivating factors for the student focus groups. The teachers agreed that students need to be appropriately challenged, and one way they all agreed in order to do that was to be open to input from their students around teaching practices and learning styles. They also stated they could do a better job of providing students more opportunities for voice, specifically within partnership, activism and leadership. The resounding theme among teachers was the need to provide content information first, and also focus structure, management and expectations prior to allowing student voice.

One consideration for the implementation of student voice within school settings is to look at a more simplified framework by Michael Fielding. Fielding (2001), asks nine questions for schools to consider which probe for rhetoric and realities of student voice. His nine questions are, (1) who is allowed to speak? (2) Who listens? (3) What skills are required and what support is provided for their development? (4) What attitudes and dispositions are needed to transform skills into meaningful realities? (5) What systems are needed to sustain this kind of work? (6) What kinds of organizational culture need to be developed to enable student voice to thrive? (7) What spaces both physical and metaphorical are needed for participants to make meaning together? (8) What are the implications for action? (9) What are some of the key considerations to take into account in helping student voice to be and become a significant part of the process of community renewal? These questions address the gaps in the findings from the student focus group and teacher interviews. Much of the information found through the interviews entailed a general lack of understanding in relation to all of these questions. In order to move along the spectrum of student voice framework, from expression and participation to activism and leadership, requires a clear system that can clearly answer each of Fielding's nine questions.

Those who work in schools would be well served to seek and listen to the ideas of students regarding the practices of teachers. The findings in this study reveal that a student are energized by having a voice and are drawn to spaces where they feel they have a teacher who allows them to speak their voice, and empowers them to take on leadership. The site for this study revealed an approximation of examples of partnership,

activism and leadership, and would benefit from continued work to support both students and teachers on how to strengthen what already exists and continue to add new dimensions to student voice.

Recommendations for Future Research

Student voice is complex field with many subtle nuances. It is still a relatively new concept in the field of research and there is limited amount of studies that demonstrate traction with regard to student voice having a meaningful impact on school reform. As I conducted interviews, I quickly realized the framework I utilized was not something that the site was familiar with, and the participants did the best they could to identify with partnership, activism and leadership. For future research, I would recommend a more basic framework, specifically thinking about Michael Fielding's nine questions for student voice. A larger sample size of both students and teachers would also provide more insights. Lastly, teacher mindsets are a big part of student voice, and thinking about comparing the teaching practices and student performance of teachers who regularly implement student voice versus those who do not, could be a compelling study. I utilized fairly loose measures for student motivation, asking about attendance and grades. A more formal measure through a mixed methods study analyzing student voice and the impact on specific performance metrics may strengthen the study.

Contribution to the Field of Student Voice

The disconnect between what we know and what we do, between espoused goal of supporting student learning and the reality of ignoring students, points to a profoundly disabling and dangerous discrepancy between the claims behind federal legislation and the policies and practices that result from it" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 373).

Three key themes emerged from this study in terms of significance in maximizing partnership, activism and leadership. The three big ideas that emerged from both the student focus groups as well as the teacher findings regarding the significance of partnership, activism and leadership were; **(1) Understanding what type of support students need, (2) Openness to input and feedback from students** and **(3) Advocacy and belief in student capacity**. These three big ideas created the best conditions for students and teachers alike to optimize student voice, and in turn felt the most motivated and successful.

All three of the teachers involved in this study referenced the need to increase more opportunities for student partnership, activism and leadership. However, they all mentioned the constraints within their current educational system specifically addressing the challenges associated with not having enough time, the academic needs of their students and not being able to fully meet the needs of all of their students. They all reinforced the research by stating they wish they had more time to experiment with student voice and make their classrooms more student driven. One of the most powerful tools available to influence academic achievement is helping students feel they have a stake in their learning (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). New definitions of ‘student voice’ are intended to improve the engagement of students and the outcomes of learning, and have a positive impact on school reform where students actively help shape change (Mitra, 2004). “Student voice signals having a legitimate perspective and opinion, being present and taking part and having an active role in decisions and implementation of educational policies and practices” (Holdsworth, 2000, p.355). According to Toshalis and Nakkula,

the promotion of student voice has been linked to elevating achievement of marginalized populations, greater classroom participation, enhanced school reform efforts, better self-reflection and preparation for improvement in struggling students and decreased behavior problems (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter included a summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations regarding the research project investigating the perceptions of students and staff around opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. The research study utilized the spectrum of student voice framework created by Toshalis and Nakkula. The findings from the student focus groups yielded some discrepancy in terms of access to partnership, activism and leadership. Students in advanced classes ultimately appeared to have more access to the higher end of the spectrum. All of the students expressed a need to be heard and the importance of teachers creating spaces where their voice is heard and listened to in a manner that is supportive and challenging. The teachers all acknowledged that they could improve their practices by receiving input from their students. They also acknowledged that student voice is important and something they need to continue to develop their awareness around. Both students and staff perceptions alike demonstrate the need for shared understandings around student voice and more opportunities to continue to learn and develop the necessary skills for authentic and meaningful student voice.

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Appendix A



DATE:

TO: FROM:

PROJECT TITLE: SUBMISSION TYPE: APPROVAL DATE:

EXPIRATION DATE: RISK LEVEL:

CHILD RISK ASSESSMENT:

CONTINUING REVIEW: REVIEW PERIOD: REVIEW TYPE:

ACTION:REVIEW CATEGORY:

April 6, 2017

Brian Duwe University of Denver (DU) IRB

[1018361-1] A Case Study: The implications for partnership, activism and leadership.

New Project April 6, 2017

April 5, 2018 Minimal Risk 45 CFR 46.404

Expedited Review 12 months Expedited Review

APPROVED

Expedited categories # 6 & 7

Category 6: Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes. Category 7: Research on group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus

group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Thank you for your submission of the New Project materials for this project. The University of Denver IRB has granted FULL APPROVAL for your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/ benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. The IRB determined that the criteria for IRB approval of research, per 45 CFR 46.111, has been met.

This submission has received an Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations. Please note that the following documents were included in the review and approval of this study:

- ChildAssentDocument,dated3/28/17• InformedConsentDocument-Teacher,dated3/25/17 • InformedConsentDocument-Student,dated3/25/17 • DU IRB Application Form,dated3/20/17• AppendixM-ResearchinSchools,dated3/25/17

Generated on IRBNet

- AppendixF-ResearchIncludingChildren,dated3/25/17• AppendixC-PopulationswithAdditionalConsiderations,dated3/25/17 • ParentalPermissionForm,dated3/25/17• DU IRB Research Narrative,dated3/25/17

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and the assurance of the participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document. Forms used beyond the expiration date stamped on the document are not valid.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the DU IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSO's) and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the IRB. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by the DU IRB no less than annually. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of 04/05/18.

This study involves the inclusion of minors. The IRB determined that the child risk assessment for this project was established as: 45 CFR 46.404 "Research involving no greater than minimal risk".

Please note that all research records must be retained in a secure location for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the DU Human Research Protection Program at (303) 871-2121 or IRBAdmin@du.edu. Please include your project title and IRBNet number in all correspondence with the IRB.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Denver (DU) IRB's records.

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction- Chief Accountability Officer

Dear Dr. Mya Martin-Glenn:

As a doctoral candidate with the University of Denver, I am conducting a study for my dissertation to understand and describe student and teacher perceptions around student voice, specifically in the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. The purpose of this collective case study is to explore urban high school students' and teachers' perceptions regarding student voice and discover what opportunities exist that allow for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as identify what barriers exist.

I will conduct a collective case study, interviewing three focus groups of students through a stratified sampling from the following courses in your school; regular track Civics, Concurrent Enrollment American Government, and Advanced Placement Computer Science. The purpose of the focus group interviews will be to gain the perceptions of students regarding opportunities they experience for partnership, activism and leadership throughout their school day. They will be able to provide answers to the opportunities that exist, or do not exist. If they feel opportunities do not exist they can express their views on what they would like to see. I will then go deeper with what the facilitators and barriers are for opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. I also want to hear if they feel their level of motivation is positively impacted by opportunities involving partnership, activism and leadership, seeking input on performance indicators such as attendance, grades and discipline. I will also conduct individual interviews with three teachers; seeking their input on opportunities they provide for student voice and again see if there is a correlation to opportunities for student voice and increased student motivation, looking at the same performance indicators. I am seeking to understand their intentions and actions in providing opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as what prevents these opportunities. In order to explore how student voice is enacted within a bounded system, my intentions are to seek out multiple student and teacher perspectives on the issue of student voice.

Participants are free to decide not to participate in this study or withdraw at any time without adversely affecting their relationship with the researcher or the University of Denver. On completion of this study, I will share a summary of my findings with you. The input provided is extremely valuable for educators and leaders as they work to improve the educational performance of students in our area.

Sincerely,



Brian Duwe

beduwe@aps.k12.co.us

Letter of Introduction- Principal

Dear Mr. Ron Fay:

As a doctoral candidate with the University of Denver, I am conducting a study for my dissertation to understand and describe student and teacher perceptions around student voice, specifically in the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. The purpose of this collective case study is to explore urban high school students' and teachers' perceptions regarding student voice and discover what opportunities exist that allow for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as identify what barriers exist.

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Participants are free to decide not to participate in this study or withdraw at any time without adversely affecting their relationship with the researcher or the University of Denver. On completion of this study, I will share a summary of my findings with you. The input provided is extremely valuable for educators and leaders as they work to improve the educational performance of students in our area.

Sincerely,



Brian Duwe
beduwe@aps.k12.co.us

Chief Accountability Officer Acknowledgement of Access



March 31, 2017

Brian Duwe 3134 Galena St. Denver, CO 80238

Dear Mr. Duwe,

**Department of Assessment & Research 15701 E. 1st
Avenue, Suite 112 Aurora, Colorado 80011**

**Phone – 303-340-0861 Fax – 303-326-2053 Web –
www.aps.k12.co.us**

Thank you for your interest in conducting research in Aurora Public Schools. I am pleased to inform you that your dissertation research project “A Case Study: Student Voice and the Implications for Partnership, Activism, and Leadership” has been reviewed and approved based on the conditions on the following page.

Please note we do require acknowledgement and approval from the principal of Rangeview High School. Please return the signed principal acknowledgement of access form to our office.

As soon as you review and return a signed copy of the conditions of approval to our office and we have the principal’s approval letter on file you may begin your data collection.

Let me know if you have any questions or require any other information. Sincerely,

Mya L Martin-Glenn, PhD Director, Department of Assessment & Research Division of Equity in Learning Aurora Public Schools 303-340-0861


A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and reads "Mya L Martin Glenn".


Research Study Name: “A Case Study: Student Voice and the Implications for Partnership, Activism, and Leadership” Primary Investigators: Brian Duwe

Conditions of Approval

- . The voluntary nature of the study is made clear to all potential participants. *Final approval for the study is contingent on the principal and/or directors agreement to participate.*
- . All rules in the district's research manual are followed including maintaining the anonymity of the district, the schools, and the study participants.
- . If your request involves the release of data you agree to limit the use of said data to the terms specified in your application. The data will not be released to any third party and you agree not to copy, reproduce, disseminate transmit, license, sublicense, assign, lease, or release the data to any other party. All data should be maintained in a secure fashion with access being restricted to the persons identified in the research application to prevent unauthorized use of the data. Following the use of the data for the prescribed reasons the data should be destroyed.
- . This letter does not reflect a commitment on behalf of Aurora Public Schools towards the requestor. At any point, the approval status involving the release of data or access to students/staff for research may be withdrawn. A violation of any of the conditions within this letter and/or deceptive practices by the researcher will lead to immediate termination of all research privileges. Furthermore, the release of future data and/or research privileges may be indefinitely terminated.
- . A report of the findings is made available to the Division of Accountability & Research at the conclusion of the study (**May 2017**)
- . This letter is returned by mail or via FAX prior to initiating your study with the requestor acknowledging agreement with the terms described above by signature.

Please contact Mya Martin-Glenn at 303-340-0861 (ext. 28420) or at mlmartin-glenn@aps.k12.co.us if you have any questions. **Please return this letter with the following statement verified by signature:**

I, _____  _____, agree to abide by the conditions described in this document and will carry out my research practices in accordance with those conditions. I assume complete responsibility for the described study and will work according to best-practices when working with Aurora Public Schools data and/or conducting scientific inquiry within the Aurora Public Schools district.

_____  _____ Signature of Requestor

Please send via FAX or mail to:

Division of Accountability and Research 15701 E. 1st Avenue, Suite 112 Aurora,
Colorado 8001 FAX: 303-326-2053 or 303-326-1901 Attn: Mya Martin-Glenn

Principal Acknowledgement of Access

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study is to explore urban high school students' and teachers' perceptions regarding student voice and discover what opportunities exist that allow for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as identify what barriers exist. The research program will take place after school for students, and during planning periods for staff members, to assure all information is collected without undue stress or hardship on regularly scheduled school events.

Participants will be asked to participate in the following tasks:

1. Three student focus group interviews
2. Individual staff interview

All information is considered confidential and will not be specifically identifiable or tied to the subject under study. There are no suspected harmful risks or effects of participating in this study. The positive aspects of this study would be the ability to contribute to student voice research and potentially influencing educational structures and professional learning in the future.

Your signature below indicates your understanding of this research prospect and your consent for campus participation. Participants have the ability to withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice. If you have questions or concerns you are welcome to

contact me at the following number, 720-233-3735 or email beduwe@aps.k12.co.us.
Questions may also be directed to Dr. Richard Kitchen at Richard.Kitchen@du.edu.
Questions regarding research may be directed to the Institutional Review Board.

Thank you,
Brian Duwe

Ronald M Fay

Principal

Date

Appendix C

Letter of Introduction- Participants

Dear participants,

As a doctoral candidate with the University of Denver, I am conducting a study for my dissertation to understand and describe student and teacher perceptions around student voice, specifically in the areas of partnership, activism and leadership. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore urban high school students' and teachers' perceptions regarding student voice and discover what opportunities exist that allow for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as identify what barriers exist.

I will conduct a collective case study, interviewing three focus groups of students through a stratified sampling from the following courses in your school; regular track Civics, Concurrent Enrollment American Government, and Advanced Placement Computer Science. The purpose of the focus group interviews will be to gain the perceptions of students regarding opportunities they experience for partnership, activism and leadership throughout their school day. They will be able to provide answers to the opportunities that exist, or do not exist. If they feel opportunities do not exist they can express their views on what they would like to see. I will then go deeper with what the facilitators and barriers are for opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership. I also want to hear if they feel their level of motivation is positively impacted by opportunities involving partnership, activism and leadership, seeking input on performance indicators such as attendance, grades and discipline. I will also conduct individual interviews with three teachers; seeking their input on opportunities they provide for student voice and again see if there is a correlation to opportunities for student voice and increased student motivation, looking at the same performance indicators. I am seeking to understand their intentions and actions in providing opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as what prevents these opportunities. In order to explore how student voice is enacted within a bounded system, my intentions are to seek out multiple student and teacher perspectives on the issue of student voice.

Participants are free to decide not to participate in this study or withdraw at any time without adversely affecting their relationship with the researcher or the University of Denver. On completion of this study, I will share a summary of my findings with you. The input provided is extremely valuable for educators and leaders as they work to improve the educational performance of students in our area.

Sincerely,



Brian Duwe
beduwe@aps.k12.co.us

Appendix D

Focus Group Student Interview

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project. Please be honest and forthcoming as this information may assist not only future research but also the design and structure utilized in educational settings. Your information will remain confidential and will be reported anonymously. This focus group interview is intended to seek your input and perspective around opportunities that exist throughout your school day for *partnership, activism and leadership*.

Definition of key terms:

Partnership- opportunities are provided for students to collaborate with teachers/adults and assist in decision-making, as well as plan or evaluate programs in your classes or school.

Activism- opportunities are provided for students to identify problems within their classes, school or community, and generate solutions.

Leadership- opportunities are provided for students to take the lead in decision-making in their classes, school or community and lead activities or groups to impact change.

- 1- Tell me about any opportunities that are provided for **partnership** throughout your school day?
 - a. Give specific examples of what this looks and sounds like, and talk about what your teacher or adult does that makes partnership possible?
 - b. If you disagree that partnership exists, why do you think student-teacher partnership does not exist?
 - c. What are some barriers to partnership?
 - d. Does the opportunity for partnership have an impact on your motivation (attendance/grades/behavior)?

- 2- Tell me about any opportunities that are provided for **activism** throughout your school day?
 - a. Give specific examples of what this looks and sounds like, and talk about what your teacher or adult does that makes activism possible?
 - b. If you disagree that activism exists, why do you think student activism does not exist?
 - c. What are some barriers to activism?
 - d. Does the opportunity for activism have an impact on your motivation (attendance/grades/behavior)?
- 3- Tell me about any opportunities that are provided for **leadership** throughout your school day?
 - a. Give specific examples of what this looks and sounds like, and talk about what your teacher or adult does that makes leadership possible?
 - b. If you disagree to leadership in the survey, why do you think opportunities for student leadership does not exist?
 - c. What are some barriers?
 - d. Does the opportunity for leadership have an impact on your motivation (attendance/grades/behavior)?
- 4- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Staff Interview Protocols

- 1- Please tell me throughout your school day, what opportunities do you provide students a chance to express their voice?
- 2- What opportunities do you provide students that allow for partnership?
 - a. What are things that help support partnership with students?
 - b. What are barriers to creating partnerships with students?
- 3- What opportunities do you provide students that allow for activism?
 - a. What are things that help support activism for students?
 - b. What are barriers to creating opportunities for student activism?
- 4- What opportunities do you provide students allow for leadership?
 - a. What are things that help support leadership for students?
 - b. What are barriers to creating opportunities for student leadership?
- 5- Do you feel that your students are more motivated when they are given opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership?
 - a. Provide specific examples.
- 6- Do you feel that your students are less motivated when barriers prevent partnership, activism and leadership?
 - a. Provide specific examples.
- 7- When providing opportunities to students for partnership, activism and leadership, do you feel that it helps improve your teaching practices?
 - a. Provide specific examples.

- 8- When providing opportunities to students for partnership, activism and leadership, do you feel that it helps inform professional learning and planning?
 - a. Provide specific examples.
- 9- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix E

Consent Forms

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Approval Date: April 6, 2017

Valid for Use Through: April 5, 2018

Project Title: A Collective Case Study: Student voice and the implications for partnership, activism and leadership.

Principal Investigator: Brian Duwe
Faculty Advisor: Richard Kitchen, PhD
DU IRB Protocol #: 1018361

You are being invited to be in a research study for a dissertation. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

Invitation to participate in a research study

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to explore urban high school students' and teachers' perceptions regarding student voice and discover what opportunities exist that allow for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as identify what barriers exist. The researcher will seek to understand if opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership have an impact on student motivation.

Description of subject involvement

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to participate in a focus group interview consisting of 6-12 students from one of your classes (Civics, American Government, or AP Computer Science), after school the week of May 8th for one hour. Students will be purposefully selected so there is representation from all sub-groups at Rangeview, i.e., Caucasian, Hispanic, Black, Asian. Academic records such as grades, attendance and behavior may be reviewed. If you agree to participate in the study, the focus group interview will be audio-recorded. Snacks will be provided during the interview.

Possible risks and discomforts

There are minimal potential risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. **Any information which is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In addition, participating in this study is completely voluntary and you can decide to stop participating at any time and there will not be any consequences.**

Possible benefits of the study

Possible benefits of participation include contributing to the field research around student voice, and potential contributions to enacting more opportunities for student voice within your school and school district. Information revealed from the study could provide valuable information to schools on how student voice can impact motivation and ways to support it in schools.

Any information which is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Confidentiality, Storage and future use of data

To keep your information safe, the researchers will ensure that your name will not be attached to any data (e.g., audio-tapes, focus group interview). Rather than identifying data with your name, a code will be used instead. The data will also be kept on a password-protected computer.

Only Brian Duwe and advisor Dr. Kitchen will have access to the audio recordings. When appropriate, these recordings will be used for the completion of a dissertation, but no identifying information will be included in them such as the names of any of the participating teachers or students. All of the original recordings will be destroyed soon after they have been transcribed.

The results from the research may be shared in the defense of a dissertation.

Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others.

- Federal agencies that monitor human subject research
- Human Subject Research Committee

All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Also, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we may report that information to the appropriate agencies.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. There are no

consequences if you decide to withdraw early from this study and the information or data you provided would be destroyed.

Contact Information

The researcher carrying out this study is PhD student Brian Duwe, from Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may email me at beduwe@aps.k12.co.us, you could also reach Dr. Richard Kitchen at Richard.Kitchen@du.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

Agreement to be in this study

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary. If I choose to be in this study: I will get a copy of this consent form.

Please initial this box if data from this research may be used for future research.

Please initial here and provide a valid email (or postal) address if you would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to you. _____

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

Print Name: _____

Email: _____

**University of Denver
Assent Form for Participation in Research
Children Under Age 17**

Title of Research Study:

Researcher(s): A Collective Case Study: Student voice and the implications for partnership, activism and leadership.

Study Site: Rangeview High School Aurora Public Schools

What is a research study?

A research study is a way to find out new information about something. We would like to learn more about opportunities that are provided for student voice at your school and in your classes. Specifically I am interested in opportunities your teachers provide you for partnership, activism and leadership. I also wish to see

if opportunities for partnership, activism and leadership have an impact on your motivation, i.e., your grades, attendance and behavior.

Why are you being asked to be part of this research study?

You are being asked to join the research study because you are enrolled in either Civics, American Government or AP Computer Science. Three teachers from these courses are also participating in the study, and I am looking at both teacher and student perspective around student voice. I am interested in collecting data from both students and staff on what opportunities exist for partnership, activism and leadership. I am also selecting students who comprise the different sub-groups at Rangeview, i.e., Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic and Asian. You are being asked to participate in a focus group interview, which consists of 6-12 students. The students in the interview will be from either your Civics, American Government or AP Computer Science class.

If you join the research study, what will you be asked to do?

If you agree to join this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group interview with 6-12 students. You will be asked a series of questions in relation to opportunities that exist for partnership, activism and leadership. In a focus group interview students are encouraged to participate so everyone is heard. A protocol will be provided for the process as follows: **1- we do not need to speak in any particular order, 2- when you have something to say, please say it, 3- please do not speak over one another, 4- it is important to respect each others point of view, and avoid judgmental or negative language, 5- due to limited time I may need to re-direct the conversation, 6- ask for clarification and provide opportunities for questions before beginning.**

- You will be asked to come see the researcher doing the study times at the administrative conference room by the counseling office and you will need to stay for one hour after school.
- You will be in the study for one hour after school, and if I need to follow up for any reason to seek clarification, I will contact you by email.
- We will ask you to answer questions to the best of your ability, and provide specific examples to your responses. We will follow the focus group protocol for the entire interview process.
- We will want to audio record you during the study as you answer questions. If you do not want to be recorded, that is okay too. Just tell us if it makes you uncomfortable.

Do you have to be in the study?

You do not have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say okay now to be in the study and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell us when you want to stop. No one will be upset if you don't want to be in the study or if you change your mind later. You can take time to think about being in the study before you decide.

Will any part of the study hurt or be uncomfortable?

There are minimal potential risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. **Any information which is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In addition, participating in this study is completely voluntary and you can decide to stop participating at any time and there will not be any consequences.**

Will the study help you or others?

Possible benefits of participation include contributing to the field research around student voice, and potential contributions to enacting more opportunities for student voice within your school and school district. Information revealed from the study could provide valuable information to schools on how student voice can impact motivation and ways to support it in schools.

Any information which is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Do your parents know about the study?

Your parents will be provided with a written consent, explaining the purpose of your participation in this study. They have the right to approve or disapprove of your participation in the study. They can also provide consent as to whether you can be audio-recorded or not. I will need parent consent forms prior to your participation in the study, if you both chose to participate in the study.

Will anyone else know that you are in this study?

We will not tell anyone else that you are in this study. You do not have to tell anyone about the study.

Who will see the information collected about you?

The researcher will keep all recorded information locked on his computer to keep your information safe throughout this study.

The information collected about you during this study will be kept safely locked up. Nobody will know it except the people doing the research.

Your individual identity will be kept private when we write our final report.

What do you get for being in the study?

I will provide snacks during your participation in the study.

What if you have questions?

You can ask any questions that you have about the study at any time. Just tell the researcher or your parent/guardian that you have a question. You or your parent/guardian can contact the researcher, Brian Duwe any time during the

study by emailing beduwe@aps.k12.co.us. Your parent/guardian already has all of the contact information for questions.

Options for Participation

Please initial your choice for the options below:

The researchers may audio record me during this study.

The researchers may NOT audio record me during this study.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form.

Participant Signature

Date

**University of Denver
Parent or Guardian Permission Form
for Child's participation in Research**

Title of Research Study: A Collective Case Study: Student voice and the implications for partnership, activism and leadership.

Researcher(s): Brian Duwe, PhD Candidate, University of Denver

Faculty Sponsor: Richard Kitchen, PhD

Study Site: Rangeview High School, Aurora Public Schools

Purpose

You child is being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to explore urban high school students' and teachers' perceptions regarding student voice and discover what opportunities exist that allow for partnership, activism and leadership, as well as identify what barriers exist.

What your child will do in the study

If you agree to let your child participate in this research study, your child will be asked to participate in a one-hour focus group interview after school, the week of May 8th. The focus group will be comprised of 6-12 students. The interview will be audio-recorded, and their names will be kept confidential in the study.

What you will do in the study

If you agree to let your child participate in this research study, you will be asked to...

Time Required

Your child's participation in this study will take approximately one hour after school the week of May 8th. Any follow up questions will be addressed through email.

Voluntary Participation

Your child's participation and/or your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your child and yourself from the study at any time without penalty. If you and/or your child want to withdraw from the study, tell the researcher.

Risks or Discomforts

No foreseeable risks or discomforts.

Benefits

Possible benefits of participation include contributing to the field research around student voice, and potential contributions to enacting more opportunities for student voice within your school and school district.

Incentives to participate

Your child will receive snacks for participating in this research project.

Confidentiality

The researcher will keep all recordings secure and will refrain from sharing them with anyone, as well as keeping notes and files private and secure on their computer, to keep your information safe throughout this study. Your child's individual identity will be kept private when information is

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Approval Date: 04/06/17 Valid for Use Through: 04/05/18

Project Title: A Collective Case Study: Student voice and the implications for partnership, activism and leadership.

Principal Investigator: Brian Duwe
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You are being asked to be in this research study because you were selected by your administration as a leader at your school, and showed interest in participating in the study.

Description of subject involvement

If you agree to be part of the research study as a teacher leader at your school, you will be asked to participate a one-on-one interview. The interview will take place during a planning period of your choice, or can be conducted after school. You will be asked open ended questions around student partnership, activism and leadership, seeking input on if you provide opportunities for these three categories, and if they have any impact on student motivation and if you do not provide these opportunities, what barriers may exist. Your interview will be audio-recorded.

Students will be selected from one of your classes, i.e., Civics, American Government and AP Computer Science. The researcher will need access to the designated course roster for the course you teach and will purposefully select 6-12 students to also participate in a focus group interview. The researcher is seeking a purposeful stratified sampling of students representing all of the subgroups within Rangeview HS.

Possible risks and discomforts

There are minimal potential risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. Your answers to interview questions will be kept confidential. **Any information which is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.**

Possible benefits of the study

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Any information which is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Study compensation

For your time you will be given a Starbucks gift card in the amount of \$10.

Confidentiality, Storage and future use of data

To keep your information safe, the researchers will ensure that your name will not be attached to any data (e.g., audio-tapes, one-on-one interview). Rather than identifying data with your name, a code will be used instead. The data will also be kept on a password-protected computer.

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Please initial this box if data from this research may be used for future research.

Please initial here and provide a valid email (or postal) address if you would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to you. _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Print Name: _____