

Managing the Ebb and Flow: A Case for Calling Forth Student Voice

Jonathan Damiani

Nagoya University of Commerce and Business, Japan

Douglas Wieczorek

Iowa State University

ABSTRACT: This case study explored how a principal in a suburban elementary school in the northeastern United States empowered students and used student voice to develop his own leadership. The researchers collected and analyzed data in the form of observations, principal interviews, and student focus groups. Results and discussion describe and explain how the principal engaged with students' perspectives to structure his experiences of school and learning. Also, results indicate that the principal's self-awareness of his instructional leadership actions, particularly regarding the inclusion of student voice and agency, is critical for effective and meaningful leadership. This case provides a new direction for developing and practicing school leaders to consider self-evaluation and reflection as part of ongoing leadership improvement, framed by the research-based concepts of instructional leadership, student voice, and perceptual congruence. Finally, the case study provides an opportunity for the field of educational research to open meaningful and often-overlooked discussions emphasizing the value of including students in models of shared instructional leadership and empowering youth as learners and leaders in their own right.

Keywords: student voice, perceptual congruence, shared leadership, educational leadership

When principals build their educational contexts around the premise of listening to students, new theories that transcend traditional frameworks can emerge to transform the work being done in schools (Cook-Sather, 2010; Elden & Levin, 1991). Further, principals that only use adult perspectives to shape their leadership practices leave students to circumvent or adapt to goals that in many cases will not square with their

own and may impede students' ability to develop socially and academically. While principals have long been regarded as the school manager, they are also in a unique position to empower the voice of a large population of students.

Principals' Perceptual Congruence and Instructional Leadership

Principals' administrative or daily management concerns, balanced with broader, instructionally relevant leadership practices, are enduring challenges of the principal position (Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, & Sebastian, 2010). However, building a positive instructional climate and culture is a struggle for principals who believe their time is often dominated by managerial tasks and paperwork (Barnes et al., 2010; Goldring, Huff, May, & Camburn, 2008). As accountability demands increase and pressures mount on schools to produce academic achievement growth, school communities will continue to seek leaders with particular sets of skills to meet established learning goals and expectations (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). Teachers and students appreciate a visible principal with an open and inviting demeanor who also maintains strong and consistent expectations (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Growing a positive teaching and learning environment requires personal daily attention to the priorities that the community has entrusted the principal to cultivate in the school despite all the barriers, interruptions, stresses, and expectations that come with the position of instructional leader.

Rooted in professional self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), principals' ability to evaluate and reflect upon their own performance is a critical component to leadership performance (Bingham, Haubrich, & White, 1993; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). *Perceptual congruence*, or the difference between an individual's self-

perception of performance and the opinions of community stakeholders, has been found to correlate with leadership effectiveness (Atwater, Ostroff, Yammarino, & Fleenor, 2008). While principals are most often evaluated by district leadership, this is now increasingly occurring by community stakeholders (Fuller, Richards, & Cohen 2008; Goldring, Mavrogordato, & Haynes, 2014). If stakeholders are included in a more comprehensive evaluation model, principal effectiveness is measured by teachers' ratings and parents' perceptions of a leader's performance (Fuller et al., 2008; Goff, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014; Goldring et al., 2014). However, student voices are not often included in instruments to evaluate aspects of principal effectiveness or school culture (Fuller et al., 2008), which demonstrates the dissonance between students' perceptions of principal practice and the principal's self-assessment and awareness of his daily activities as a manager and school leader.

Student Voice

The eagerness of students to take on an academic identity and commit to taking an interest in their learning, behavior, and school experiences rests largely on how principals choose to empower students. Students who are able to take charge of their own education and play a more active role in their learning will develop at a faster rate academically, socially, and emotionally (Kirchner, 2005). Principals who take the time to develop student agency and responsibility within their schools reap the rewards of a student body with a strong sense of self who play a dynamic role in their own education (Mitra, 2004; Simmons, Graham, & Thomas, 2014).

When adults listen to what students have to say about their learning and meaningfully use student voice and participation to shape their experiences of school, they can empower students as learners and transcend traditional school frameworks in the process (Cook-Sather, 2010, 2014). As students gain confidence and experience, they naturally create opinions, ideas, and beliefs about school. These include individual perspectives and actions within the contexts of learning and their experiences with education (Rogers & Lea, 2005). However, opportunities for students to express their opinions and make decisions about a range of school-wide factors that affect their learning have been few and far between (Beattie, 2012).

Principals that have found non-traditional ways of approaching their role as school leader minimize time spent on non-instructional tasks (Baroutsis, McGregor, & Mills, 2015; Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Damiani,

2014). One way principals are breaking the mold is by making decisions in a collaborative manner with students. This non-traditional and decentralized approach occurs when principals actively involve students in making decisions that may impact students' experiences in school. While students at these sites are sometimes allowed to make decisions around managing and organizing school activities and behavior, shared decision making has been largely subjected to limiting school parameters (Warner, 2010). Unfortunately these parameters have rarely been designed to include students' perspectives of teaching, learning, and leadership (Gentilucci, 2004; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

Gioux (1992) argues that educators must become more engaged and reform minded in their approach to working with students. At the root of his argument, and other arguments rooted in issues of social justice, is a need for school leaders to address social pressures that challenge the principal's ability to reach learners that have until now been failed by the system (Grundy, 1993). Student identity and academic self-concept are another set of internal factors that compete with students' and principals' agendas (Silins & Mulford, 2010). Current educational reform thinking underestimates the importance of student agency—specifically the willingness of students to take on an academic identity and commit time and effort when peers are making other choices in school (Jackson, 2003). Many adults, and principals in particular, struggle to view students as collaborators who can potentially inform their practice.

To move toward understanding how educators can use student perspectives to structure their approaches to leadership, this study used two research questions:

- 1) From the student perspective, what are the most significant challenges faced by students in school?
- 2) How does the principal help children cope with the challenges they face?

Methods

This study used a case study design to describe how a principal in a suburban elementary school in the northeastern United States empowered students and used student voice to develop his own leadership. Case narrative was selected as a design to help the researchers investigate a contemporary leadership phenomenon—perceptual congruence of leadership practice—that has received little attention in the literature on educational leadership. This approach is particularly well suited to new research areas or research

areas for which existing theory does not sufficiently apply (Gomm, 2000; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2000; Yin, 1994). In early stages of research on a topic, or when a fresh perspective is needed, case narrative is a useful way to connect multiple data sources and to help offer insights into themes that are rarely connected (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The principal of Forest Hills (FH) Elementary arrived to the school 18 months before the study along with 170 newly enrolled students. He also replaced approximately a third of the staff after the previous principal retired. Before arriving at FH, the principal worked at a neighboring elementary school within the district for seven years as a teacher and seven more as a principal.

FH is a K-6 site serving 498 students who are predominantly white and middle class. Approximately 25% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. FH is located in an area of suburban sprawl just over 15 miles from the closest city center. On each side of the school and for miles in both directions, one can see restaurant chains, superstores, gas stations, retail outlets, and other places of business that can be found across the country. But despite this impersonal setting, one finds a much different atmosphere inside the school. FH has a warm, nurturing environment where teachers collaborate, students take responsibility for their own learning, and the principal proactively works to understand the needs of students and staff.

The participating principal was recruited through the following methods: a) recommendations from colleagues at local universities and regional schools that identified principals that work directly with students to find meaningful ways of promoting student learning and shaping their leadership, b) face-to-face screening interviews that revealed how each principal incorporated student voice and/or empowered students, and c) expressed interest from principals excited about the study.

The lead researcher conducted two interviews with the principal. An initial formal interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted before the researcher met with the students. Questions asked the principal to describe a typical day, success stories, challenges and hurdles, methods in which student-based initiatives were presented at the schools, and his interactions with the students. A second interview, which lasted 60 minutes, was then conducted with the principal. The questioning in this interview was created in response to the analysis of the first focus group with students, was informed by observa-

tions at the site, and was intended to give the principal an opportunity to respond to any questions or concerns posed by the students.

Two focus groups were each composed of four to six students randomly selected from grades 3, 4, and 5 as determined by the principal. Chosen students were also among those whose parents were willing to complete and submit consent forms. Both focus groups were meant to be representative of the overall school population.

This study used the recommendations of Liam-puttong (2011) when conducting student focus groups interviews. Focus groups began with a warm-up activity with students from all groups, which involved helping the group to become comfortable and acquainted with one another. Students were asked to identify images of various adults and to describe the same images during a free association activity. Next, students were provided with colored pencils and lined paper to draw what they thought their principal does during the school day.

The first focus group was provided with opportunities to describe their experiences, relationships with adults, challenges in school, support from principals, and voice given in shaping school culture. The second focus group began with a read-aloud of an age-appropriate children's book about principals as a prompt for a more focused discussion (Creech & Bliss, 2001). After the story, students were prompted to discuss the story as it related to data collected from the principal's second interview. Each focus group interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was conducted by the lead researcher, along with the presence of another adult from the school site. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis by the researchers.

The lead researcher conducted four days of principal observations at FH. During each session, lasting between one and two hours, the researcher took detailed field notes describing the principal's actions.

An analytically inductive method allowed essential category emergence as data were collected, produced, and analyzed. Data analysis was guided by Elden & Levin's (1991) model of co-generative dialogue and models of narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008; Rolling, 2008). This model suggests that more participatory approaches taken by the researcher and subjects during the data collection process can help the participants—in our case a principal and students—develop a shared framework that can be tested through collective action or used to produce a new general theory that can inform and improve

their situation in the future.

In the first stage of analysis, two sets of codes were categorized—one for the principal and one for students. The resulting two sets were then merged and assigned to field notes, interview transcripts, and any artifacts collected from the students during the focus groups. More general categories for coding the interview data were based on what students and the principal said, what they did, how they interacted, and how the principal helped students learn.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis produced three emergent categories to address the research questions: *leadership agenda*, *instructional leadership*, and *principal of the day*. Below, results for each category are presented along with an integrated discussion.

Leadership Agenda

In our first conversation with the FH principal, we asked him to describe his role as principal. He relayed the following statement:

It's really supporting the initiatives that are coming down from the district, from the state, the federal government, and have them be able to efficiently, smoothly, flawlessly go into the classroom with the teacher. It's trying to figure that out.

The principal appears to be doing a good job of actively coordinating the curriculum. Standardized test scores, coupled with observations of the work taking place in FH classrooms, show how students and staff members are successfully implementing the instructional program and helping students learn and grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

The school has had numerous recent physical changes. As a result, the hallways are brighter, and the walls are adorned with glossy new posters of school-wide philosophies where tattered student illustrations previously hung. These glossy and colorful signs feature characteristics of FH learners, anti-bullying rules, whole body listening cues, and the school's golden rule: *Good Choices Equal Great Results*. Student work that hangs throughout the hallways is focused on content and is more desirable to the eye than in the past. *Paw Points*, the new character education incentive system, hangs proudly outside of the principal's office, marking moments when any staff member recognizes student achievement.

Additionally, the school has a new media coordinator, and morning announcements are broadcast from their new media and technology center onto Smart-

board screens in every classroom. Based on observation, the students are actively engaged in learning and are given opportunities to develop socially and emotionally in this very nurturing climate.

However, despite the evidence and appearance of a high-achieving, healthy school culture, there was a disconnect between the principal's leadership and the school community members. In particular, there appeared to be conflict arising from the principal's need for control and the students' school experiences relating to this control. During our first meeting with the principal, he was asked how students' opinions and attitudes about school or teaching influenced his agenda. He responded,

Everybody needs to be led. Everybody needs to be able to look to somebody for guidance. But we also have to have expectations. As we work with kids, and as we work with adults, the expectation of where we're going needs to be out there. Because if the kids understand, the adults understand. If the adults understand they can help lead students. So as kids work through it, you want to listen to the children, but you need to lead the children. You can't let them control what we do.

This passage represents two sides of the principal's approach to leadership. There is the side that acknowledges the value of student voice for influencing the work of adults and the side that ignores opportunities to do much more than listen in his role as school leader. Unlike the principal's experiences at his previous site, a school where behavioral and academic issues were more of a concern, FH's kids are rarely insubordinate. Furthermore, the majority of FH students are testing at grade level, as standardized testing shows that students are making adequate yearly progress in English language arts, mathematics, and science. These facts, coupled with observations of the quality work occurring in FH classrooms, shows students and staff are adequately navigating the instructional program. Outside the building at recess, throughout the hallways, in the lunchroom, and even inside the main office, things here seem to be running smoothly. This leaves the principal to focus on more traditional managerial functions from the main office, where he does an excellent job coordinating his ample supply of support personnel and resources around a range of student and staff concerns.

Instructional Leadership

After having a few opportunities to sit down and speak with the principal about his practice, it became increasingly clear that he had a great deal of freedom

over how he chooses to spend his time at school. He begins his day by coming in before the rest of the staff to respond to e-mails, voicemail, and any concerns that take place in the overnight hours. Like most principals, he is present early in the morning and ensures he is visible to both students and parents when school begins, during lunch, and at the end of the day during dismissal. The principal also conducts a casual walk-through of the building once the kids and teachers become settled in their classrooms.

His approaches to school leadership take place in between the buses and bells. While the principal stated that he supported students academically, socially, and emotionally at his previous site, he emphasized how he worked with students at FH by stating, "It's way beyond the little things of taking care of the kids; it's taking care of the community." At suburban sites like FH, many parents contact their school principal when their children are having problems with a classmate, teacher, or subject area. As a result, one of the principal's primary functions, in addition to managing the ebb and flow that occurs throughout the day, is to respond to these concerns and support other adults in cultivating a community that the principal repeatedly said is "moving forward together." When asked to describe how this looks on a daily basis, the principal relayed the following statement:

It's a variety of things that can take place, and that's usually by lunchtime. I very seldom have lunch, I eat throughout the whole day, and I don't have a designated lunch. The afternoon continues on like that. I might get a phone call right now and I'll have an issue here. It might be a bus issue. Or a situation where the parents are upset because something happened within the building and they didn't go through the proper chain of command. Doesn't happen often. But it does happen. It's just a variety of things like that. Usually I'm preparing things to help move the building forward. I always try to model how to move a building forward as I work with the staff. But it's a variety of things. It ebbs and flows. I always try to meet and greet parents when they come in. It's very important that I'm visible here, that they feel welcome here throughout the day. I'll touch base with my psychologist [or] my counselor about anything I need to know about kids. I'll meet with the nurse. I'll walk through her office and ask how things are going. Once in a while, [staff will] stop me and ask to talk.

While the principal strives to be visible to his stake-

holders and provide adults with opportunities to touch base and discuss a whole range of conditions that may affect students and their learning, he neglected to mention that he was doing much instructional leadership. He did not identify or describe professional development, instruction, assessment, or classroom talk in any way. One might assume that principals at high-achieving schools like this one are spending hours a day supervising instruction and monitoring student learning and progress.

One instance occurred where the principal stopped into a classroom to observe teaching and learning. The focus of the walk-through was not instruction or learning, but behavioral expectations of students and teachers. Upon entering the classroom, he greeted the teacher and asked what the class was working on. The characteristics of an FH learner were displayed on the Smartboard, and almost as if on cue, the teacher lifted a rain stick as a signal to the students that they should demonstrate their knowledge of whole body listening. The teacher and the students knew the routine verbatim, as if they had been recently or repeatedly drilled in this exercise. As we left the classroom some time later the principal remarked, "And that wasn't even staged." Staged or not, he has created a climate and culture in his school where all members of the school community are aware of his expectations. Order and organization appear to be very important to the principal as a leader. He also emphasized these priorities while he described and displayed his daily leadership activities plan.

During another visit to FH, I asked the principal to share how he prioritized the variety of tasks he was responsible for each day. He stated,

I do start my day with a list. Usually there's about five items on the list. For example today my list consists of my set meeting [with teachers] at eight. I always do encouraging words every month, on the first of the month to my staff [to] show them I care and I help to support them. I have a meeting at ten with you, and then I want to make sure that I connect with my teachers [and tell them] that you were coming and you would meet with them today. Then after school I have a commitment. That's my checklist. Sometimes it's the whole page, sometimes only a few items like today. Which I like because it gives me a lot of freedom and flexibility to work with kids if necessary.

This was an opportunity to explore how the principal views shared leadership with students, especially, so I

asked him to explain what he meant when he said, “to work with kids if necessary.” He took this opportunity to share a story from his previous principalship:

If a student was really struggling with doing their work, there were many times where I ended up having lunch with those kids, and we did study halls, academic support for those kids where I was very involved and helped supervise that work with kids. I don’t do it as much here because the teachers have a handle on it. But I used to be very involved in my old school.

I also wanted to explore how the principal works to provide students with opportunities to talk about their experiences of teaching and learning, which led to the following exchange:

Principal: We also do have a student council, which is school wide. They meet monthly to do a lot of different things. Most of it is our school spirit days, our charitable events, so we do those kinds of things.

Author 1: Do they ever get together to talk about anything regarding learning, leadership, or teaching?

Principal: The student senate is more teaching about community, how it’s an important thing, and how to give back to others. They don’t get involve – [cuts himself off]—like many times I used to have a student council at my old school and the cafeteria always came up.

In these statements the principal illustrated the differences in his orientations towards students, student voice, and level of principal-student engagement based on his experiences at two school sites. At his previous school, he perceived that the students and teachers needed him more as an instructional and academic support leader. He was more actively involved in their daily school lives. At FH, he did not perceive these leadership actions as necessary and has the tendency to manage structures, time, and expectations for the school community. In an era of school accountability, this case displays how a principal can be lulled by data-driven success and lose sight of crucial parts of instructional leadership practices. Student engagement and relationships are integral to the health of all school communities.

Principal of the Day

The school district website showed pictures of the principal beside a young female student beneath a

caption that read “Principal of the Day.” Ideas like this, which he incorporated at his previous school just months before arriving at FH, were certainly designed to empower students as learners and leaders in their own right. However, it is interesting to note that in being bestowed the honor of principal of the day, not one of the nineteen photos documenting this occasion pictured the honoree in the classroom working with students. The student was shown leaning back in a leather chair with her feet kicked up on the principal’s desk while she pretended to talk on a cordless phone. Another image showed the principal pretending to pour a student’s coffee while she read the newspaper. Still another showed her in the office disciplining or reinforcing a golden rule to a stuffed animal. She was also shown accompanying the principal on walk-throughs, holding a walkie-talkie, and riding in an elevator. In only one of the pictures she is posing (facing the camera) beside some students who wear headphones and work facing computers. These photos and this well-intentioned initiative sends a message to students and staff that the principalship is a position of authority that comes with certain requisite managerial decision making and privileges. These images broadcasted to the entire school and community what the principal valued about his work, and they are similar to the illustrations and descriptions students offered within the focus group discussions. Furthermore, they aligned with the students’ conversations and the principal’s responses during one-on-one interviews.

While roughly a third of the students interviewed at FH reported that the principal provided students with opportunities to eat lunch with him as one of the choices for the school’s character education incentive plan, they described how interactions with the principal occurred more often when students were misbehaving and teachers needed help with discipline. During my first focus group meeting with students, I asked them to tell me what their principal does. We had the following exchange:

Author One: What does your principal do?

Student One: He always comes around to the classrooms and checks on us.

Student Two: He writes reports about bus issues.

Student Three: I know he likes it when kids are quiet and nice to each other.

Author One: How do you know that he’s the principal?

Student Four: Because he has an office.

Student Five: Because he’s dressed up nice.

Student Six: Because he sits in the office.

Student Two: He also helps us learn about no-bullying and goes around and helps people to see if they're being good to other people, or to see how people are being mean to each other.

While the students' responses varied, they aligned with both school observations and the principal's comments. During a second focus group interview I had the following exchange:

Author One: If you have a problem with school, who do you talk to?

Student One: My mom.

Student Two: My mom and my principal.

Author One: You talked to your principal?

Student Two: No I didn't.

Student One: I didn't either but I think you should.

When I asked the students at FH to explain some ways they would deal with problems they were having with school, response types were grouped into two categories. The first included students who said they would talk with a sibling (at FH or another site in the district), a parent, a classmate, or their teacher about the issue. The second group said they would work to get the principal's attention, which was not surprising considering the context of many of my questions. What was surprising was the way this group of students would go about being heard. Below is one example of focus group dialogue that occurred around this topic:

Student One: You should act bad so that you can get the principal's attention.

Student Two: I would start meeting with kids and have a strike, or campaign, or write a letter.

Student Three: I don't really talk about my feelings but I express them with yelling and screaming.

Student Four: I'd go on strike or protest.

Student Three: Seriously though, I'd have my little brother go tell the principal for me. He's a crazy kid.

This exchange demonstrates how one group of students at FH said they would react to problems they were having with teachers, peers, classwork, or home. It also serves as an example of how student voice can manifest itself when principals do not develop ways to honor student voice or give students opportunities to actively share their thoughts and feelings about school. These examples of oppositional or resistant approaches to interacting with adults are nothing new and are not unique to this site. Still, these examples highlight a reluctance of students to go to their princi-

pal for help. This may stem, at least in part, from the limited nature of the interactions students have had with the principal in the eighteen months since he has arrived. It can also be traced back to a more traditional model of leadership, as the principal's direct interactions with students are primarily focused on issues of discipline, and feedback and observation are typically focused on teacher performance. However, the students at FH are happy to be in school and are doing well academically. Students' challenges at FH were often with specific subjects or teachers.

When asked how students dealt with the challenges they faced in class, they reported that they were likely to go to a parent, peer, or sibling before speaking with an adult in school. One example of this reality manifested itself during a lively student-driven focus group. During the focus group, students said they were having a difficult time with their physical education teacher. When I asked the students if they were able to describe the problems they were having with the teacher, they said they were scared of the teacher and did not want to get in further trouble. This exchange between students highlights just one situation in which the school would benefit from increased student voice. Further, it shows that when students are given an opportunity to discuss their experiences related to teaching, learning, and leadership with an adult who listens, they become empowered. As a result of these discussions, there were signs during our final interview that the students began to consider their principal as someone they might be able to approach about problems they were having during or outside of school.

Overall, the principal's approach to leadership represents what may appear to many readers as a typical form of primary school leadership in the United States. However, there is a dissonance between the apparent success of the school and the principal's lack of engagement with students. The school culture emphasized organization and behavioral control, highlighted by students' school experiences as they relate to this control. Unfortunately, like many principals, the principal of FH only gave students opportunities to make school decisions related to maintaining the status quo. The principal's leadership style created a cycle of detachment relative to his work with the children in his care.

Implications for Researchers and Practitioners

When principals build their educational contexts around the premise of listening to students, new theories that transcend traditional frameworks can emerge to transform the work being done in schools (Cook-

Sather, 2010; Elden & Levin, 1991). Further, principals that only use adult perspectives to shape their leadership practices leave students to circumvent or adapt to goals that in many cases will not square with their own and may impede their ability to develop socially and academically. While principals have long been regarded as school managers, they are also in a unique position to show a larger population of students that they can or cannot have a voice based on the work that they do.

Principals' perceptions of leadership practice have been examined as they coincide with teachers' perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Blase & Blase, 1999; Goff et al., 2014). These studies most commonly contrast principals' self-ratings with those provided by other adults in the school. The data from these studies is a useful starting place for school leaders that are hoping to align their objectives with those of the teaching staff. Perhaps more importantly, they also point to a need to include students' perspectives and ratings relative to their experiences of learning and leadership.

The most revealing part of this case study came from conversations with students while uninterrupted by adults. During the second focus group interview, conversations about leadership and the challenges students were facing in school allowed students to open up and comfortably share their opinions about their principal, teachers, and school. It was in these spirited moments of conversation that the researchers saw the students and the students saw themselves as capable of providing an honest and sometimes critical account of the work being done by their school leaders. It was in these moments that students reflected on challenges that impeded their learning. Bullying, exclusion, and unhealthy competition were just a few of the problems students cited – problems that continue to plague many schools to varying degrees. Students also commented that they were still being confronted with problems outside of school and that these problems “get them off-track” and in the way of their opportunities for growth.

After spending a significant amount of time reflecting on these challenges – how they relate to decisions principals make (or do not make) and how talking about these challenges made the students feel empowered – we have realized the real significance of this work. While our work as outside researchers gave students and the principal the opportunities to reflect and develop their thinking, the best way to conduct student perspective research may be as a school insider. K-12 practitioners that can actively elicit student voice and use it to shape the way they structure their

students' unique experiences of learning are in an excellent position to impact change within their classrooms, schools, and districts. If principals can structure regular interactions with their students and focus conversation on the students' experiences of school and learning, they will be better able to respond to student issues before they manifest as oppositional behavior, student failure, or office referrals.

Conclusions

Despite, or perhaps because of the high level of student achievement at FH, students have had few meaningful opportunities to interact with their principal. The principal is a strong leader of adults and spends his time helping them with the challenges they face at his new site, and as a result, students perceive him as someone who is there to spread a clear and consistent message, help the school run smoothly, and occasionally act as a disciplinarian. While the principal acknowledges the role students play in making the school function, he is not inclined to take their lead or use their voice to support their experiences of school or learning.

The evidence provided in this case narrative demonstrates how the principal should be more informed and engaged in reflective practices that include his stakeholders. Models of reflective practice and evaluation that include stakeholder voices, specifically students, provide school leaders with a more holistic and inclusive framework to support decision making and respond to school community needs.

The aforementioned privileges come to the principal in the form of choices, where he is able to decide what he is going to focus on during any given day. It is these choices that are made in between the buses and the bells that shape what this principal stands for. As principal of FH, he makes decisions with the students' best interests in mind. He still checks in on students and gives them opportunities to engage on a personal level. The students respond to their principal, who is very approachable, and feel comfortable asking him general questions about school during his walk-throughs. While these behaviors reflect what were once non-traditional approaches to building leadership, the principal chooses to exercise the privilege of leading FH by focusing primarily on developing the work of adults around initiatives that are passed down from above and moving the entire school community forward together by spreading a clear and consistent message.

References

- Atwater, L. E., Ostroff, C., Yammarino, F. J., & Fleenor, J. W. (2008). Self-other agreement: Does it really matter? *Personnel Psychology, 51*, 577-598.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman.
- Barnes, C. A., Camburn, E., Sanders, B. R., & Sebastian, J. (2010). Developing instructional leaders: Using mixed methods to explore the black box of planned change in principals' professional practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 46*(2), 241-279.
- Baroutsis, A., Mcgregor, G., & Mills, M. (2015). Pedagogic voice: Student voice in teaching and engagement pedagogies. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 24*(1), 123-140.
- Beattie, H. (2012). Amplifying student voice: The missing link in school transformation. *Management in Education, 26*(3), 158-160.
- Bingham, R. D., Haubrich, P. A., & White, S. B. (1993). Explaining teacher-principal differences in evaluating schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 31*(1), 1-7.
- Blase, J., & Blase, J. (1999). Principals' instructional leadership and teacher development: Teachers' perspectives. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 35*(3), 349.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2010). *Learning from the student's perspective: A sourcebook for effective teaching*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2014). The trajectory of student voice in educational research. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 49*(2), 131-148.
- Creech, S., & Bliss, H. (2001). *A fine, fine school*. New York: Joanna Cotler Books/HarperCollins.
- Damiani, J. (2016). Unlocking students' perspectives of school leadership: toward a theory of engaging students in school leadership. *International Journal of Student Voice, 1*(1). Retrieved from: <https://ijsv.psu.edu/?article=damiani-j-2016-unlocking-students-perspectives-of-school-leadership-toward-a-theory-of-engaging-students-in-school-leadership>.
- Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 52*(2), 221-258.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(4), 532-550.
- Elden, M., & Levin, M. (1991). "Cogenerative learning: bringing participation into action research," In W. F. Whyte (ed.), *Participatory Action Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Fuller, E. J., Richards, M., & Cohen, R. (2008). Conflict or congruence? The intersection of faculty, parent, and student trust in the principal. *Journal of Public Relations, 29*(2), 112-142.
- Gentilucci, J. (2004). Improving school learning: The student perspective. *Kappa Delta Pi, 68*, 133-143.
- Gentilucci, J., & Muto, C. (2007). Principals' influence on academic achievement: The student perspective. *NASSP Bulletin, 91*(3), 219-236.
- Giroux, H. (1992). *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York: Routledge.
- Goff, P. T., Goldring, E., & Bickman, L. (2014). Predicting the gap: Perceptual congruence between American principals and their teachers' ratings of leadership effectiveness. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Accountability, 26*(4), 333-359.
- Goldring, E., Huff, J., May, H., & Camburn, E. (2008). School context and individual characteristics: What influences principal practice? *Journal of Educational Administration, 46*(3), 332-352.
- Goldring, E. B., Mavrogordato, M., & Haynes, K. T. (2014). Multi-source principal evaluation data: Principals' orientations and reactions to teacher feedback regarding their leadership effectiveness. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 51*(4), 572-599.
- Gomm, R., Hammersley, M., Foster, P. (Eds.) (2000). *Case study method: Key issues, key texts*. London: Sage Publications.
- Grundy, T. (1993). *Managing strategic change*. London: Kogan Page.
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R.H. (2010). Leadership for learning: Does collaborative leadership make a difference in school improvement? *Educational Management Administration and Leadership, 38*(6), 654-678.
- Jackson, B. D. (2003). Education reform as if student agency mattered: academic microcultures and student identity. *Phi Delta Kappan, 84*(8), 579-585.
- Kirchner, G. (2005). *Towards cooperative learning in elementary school physical education*. Springfield, IL: C.C. Thomas.
- Liamputtong, P. (2011). *Focus group methodology: principle and practice*. London, UK: Sage.
- Mitra, D. L. (2004). The significance of students: Can increasing 'student voice' lead to gains in youth development? *Teachers College Record, 106*(4), 651-688.
- Mulford, B., & Silins, H. (2010). Organizational learning in schools. In Peterson, P., Baker, E., Baker, E. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed.) (143-150). Oxford: Elsevier.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 8*(1), 5-23.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Rogers, P., & Lea, M., (2005). Social presence in distributed group environments: The role of social identity. *Behavior & Information Technology, 24*(2), 151-158.
- Rolling, J. H. (2008). Rethinking relevance in art education: Paradigm shift and policy problematics in the wake of the information age. *International Journal of Education and the Arts, 9*(1). Retrieved May 11, 2011 from <http://www.ijea.org/v9i1/>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2000) *Research methods for business students*, (2nd ed.). Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.

- Simmons, C., Graham, A., & Thomas, N. (2014). Imagining an ideal school for wellbeing: Locating student voice. *Journal of Educational Change*, 16(2), 129-144.
- Spillane, J. P., Parise, L. M., & Sherer, J. Z. (2011). Organizational routines as coupling mechanisms: Policy, school administration, and the technical core. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(3), 586-619.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Gareis, C. R. (2004). Principals' self-efficacy. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 42(5), 573-585.
- Warner, D. (2010). *Using student voice for school transformation*. Eltham, AU: Eltham College of Education Press.
- Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.