Student Voice:
Empowerment, Engagement, Efficacy
In New Zealand Schools

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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DECLARATION

Name of candidate: Helen Parry

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled:

Student Voice: Empowerment, Engagement, Efficacy In New Zealand Schools
is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of:
Master of Educational Leadership and Management.

Candidate's declaration

I confirm that:

- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the
  Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec
  Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any
  requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.
  Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2014-1042

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to examine student voice initiatives in schools; more specifically, the successes and challenges that leaders and teachers have faced when implementing student voice strategies. ‘Student voice’ has many meanings, but for the purpose of this study student voice refers to the ideas, views and perspectives voiced by students that are listened to by teachers and factored into learning opportunities both in the classroom and school-wide.

A qualitative research methodology was used to explore and examine the notion of ‘student voice’ in two primary schools in Auckland, New Zealand. One-to-one interviews were carried out with four school leaders and two focus group discussions with teachers and two focus group discussions with students from two schools. The data collected were analysed in order to identify themes and commonalities across the two schools.

Despite the variability of teachers’ and students’ understanding of student voice, ‘Assessment for Learning’ practices and student leadership roles were identified as the predominant features of student voice. Having a clear vision and values was seen by both schools as vital to successful student voice initiatives as was the belief that student voice must be led.

Relationships were seen by both schools as an important component of student voice practice, and the data provided evidence that this philosophy was being upheld in both schools to various degrees. The challenges of implementing student voice strategies related to the sharing of control between the teacher and student with evidence of tokenism – there was little curriculum decision-making by students and the locus of control remained firmly held by the teacher. The recommendations from this study have implications for schools in terms of: developing teacher’s pedagogical knowledge and understanding of student voice; reducing tokenism; increasing student decision-making; changing the locus of control, and changing the pre-conditioning of students to enable them to have a voice.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This research is about student voice in primary schools and took place in two primary school research sites. The aim of this research study was to explore ‘student voice’ initiatives in schools and the perceived impact of these initiatives on student empowerment, motivation and engagement to learn as reported by school leaders, teachers and students. The notion of ‘student voice’ has been selected as the focus of this research for two reasons. The first reason is that student voice has been identified internationally and in New Zealand as a potential tool for empowering, motivating and engaging students in their learning (Beaudoin, 2013, Bishop & Berryman, 2006; McIntyre, Pedder & Rudduck, 2005). Secondly, international research (Biddulph, 2011; Hart, 1992; Jagersma & Parsons, 2011; McIntyre et al., 2005) from the United Kingdom, Canada and America make up the majority of available literature in this area and focuses predominantly on secondary school students. The limited New Zealand research in this field has also tended to focus on secondary school students rather than primary school students.

This lack of literature necessitates research at the primary school level to find out if leaders, teachers and students perceive that student voice can help empower, motivate and engage students in their learning. Research to date has focused predominantly on secondary aged students and advocates strongly for student voice as a prerequisite to building student Mana, improving their engagement and motivation to learn (see, for example: Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009; Bishop & Glynn, 2000; Smith, 2012). Indeed, Bishop and Berryman (2006) found that students wanted to be able to have a ‘voice’ in curriculum decision-making which also included planning lessons together with the teacher.

The concept of student voice can be traced back to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC,1989). In 1993, New Zealand
became a signatory to the UNCRC and became obliged to adhere to the inherent childrens’ rights, provisions within that document along with all the other United Nations countries. Article Twelve in the UNCRC states that “parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (United Nations General Assembly, 1989).

Over the last decade, there have been many initiatives emerging from the Ministry of Education (MoE) that are focused on helping students in their learning in New Zealand. These include the He Kakano programme (Ministry of Education, 2009), the Te Kotahitanga project (Bishop et al., 2009), the Ka Hikitia document (Ministry of Education, 2013), and the introduction of National Standards for years 1-8 in reading, writing and maths (Ministry of Education, 2010). The MoE have also initiated centrally funded professional development packages to focus on strengthening school leadership, and effective teaching and assessment in schools. Moving away from the ‘one size fits all’ approach, the Ministry of Education has divided up the professional development opportunities into consortiums and employed Student Achievement Facilitators (SAF) to work with schools based on the schools’ evidence as to what is now needed in order to accelerate student progress.

Leaders in primary education are under considerable pressure to make changes to teaching and learning practices to increase students’ motivation and engagement in learning (Ministry of Education, 2011, 2013). Personally, I have encountered many students who appear to be disengaged with the curriculum with low motivation to learn. The curriculum seems to hold little meaning or relationship to them, their ‘voice’ is silent. I believe this disconnectedness impacts negatively on their ability to achieve their learning potential. Therefore, the fundamental aim of this research is to seek out ways that schools can increase student empowerment, motivation and engagement in learning. I want to explore how teachers and leaders can empower students through the concept of student ‘voice’.

The definition of student ‘voice’ that has been selected for the purposes of this research project, is that students take ownership and responsibility of their learning,
articulating their perspectives on education in the classroom, which in turn influences classroom programmes and delivery (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009; Biddulph, 2011; Hart, 2002). Collecting data from leaders, teachers and students will allow me to identify and examine the perceived challenges and successes of the implementation of student voice strategies.

RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

Aims
- To Identify and critically examine the student voice strategies that are currently being used in schools to empower, motivate and engage students in their learning;
- To Identify and examine the challenges and successes that leaders and teachers experience when implementing student ‘voice’ strategies.

Research Questions
- In what ways are leaders and teachers implementing student ‘voice’ strategies for students?
- What are the successes and challenges for leaders and teachers when implementing student ‘voice’ strategies for students?
THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis is set out in six chapters.

Chapter One will identify the research problem, rational and justification for much needed research in the area of student voice initiatives and perceived impact on student empowerment, engagement and self-efficacy.

Chapter Two will examine the literature from New Zealand and overseas defining and describing ‘student voice’ and will consider the implications of student voice on student learning.

Chapter Three will identify the research design approach and examine my epistemological position, methodology and data collection methods chosen for this study. The validity and reliability of the study and how any ethical issues will be addressed will also be clearly addressed.

Chapter Four will present the research study findings of the focus groups and the one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The findings will be categorised according to emergent themes from the data.

Chapter Five will analyse and discuss the findings from the interviews and focus group discussions in the two schools, and will identify common themes. Seven data themes are identified from the sub-themes and these are critically examined. These themes will link to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. From the analysis of findings conclusions and recommendations which relate to the two research questions that guide this project will be given.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Student voice is widely believed to increase students’ motivation and engagement to learn (Biddulph, 2011; Mitra, 2003). This literature review will explore and discuss the concept of ‘student voice’ and the literature, both international and local, that is associated with student voice. The first section of this chapter will define student voice. Following this, literature pertaining to three themes of decision-making, self-efficacy and strategic leadership, will be reviewed and discussed.

The concept of student voice is not new. In 1993 New Zealand signed the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) which mandates children having rights to have a ‘voice’. The Convention acknowledges that participation is a fundamental component of citizenship. Children have the right to have their views taken seriously and have a say in all matters relating to them. Participation is not just about giving an opinion, but also requires the environment to be conducive to children being able to seek information, have discussions, debate and form their own opinions freely. When decisions are being made about children, it involves adults listening to the children and showing respect for their opinions.

The UNCRC details these rights and states that children should enjoy the opportunities to have a voice and must not be discriminated against because of their gender, religion, race or any other possible discriminatory basis. It further decrees that children have a right to guidance from adults to enable them to participate in the decision-making process in a way that is a positive and productive experience for them. The children also have the right to have their views given due weight and a right to feel safe during the process. Adults, the Convention states, must always ensure that any participation is in the best interests of the child. Figure 2.1 below illustrates the UNCRC and the articles that are pertinent to this research study. It clearly defines children’s’ rights to have a ‘voice’ in matters relating to them which aligns to the notion of student ‘voice’ in schools.
STUDENT VOICE: AN OVERVIEW

To further understand the term ‘student voice’ it is necessary to understand that learning is a social process because it relies on the interactions with others and is shaped by the community in which it occurs (Biddulph, 2011; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). With this social nature of learning in mind, we are able to look at more than one part of the jigsaw of education in an attempt to establish how students learn best and how this social interactive environment can be created.
Defining student voice

Student voice may be defined as students having a ‘voice’ in decision-making that results in the students having meaningful learning experiences (Mitra, 2003). According to Mitra (2003), student voice involves students discussing matters with teachers that relate to the operational running of the school (for example: the school tuck shop, playground design), as well as discussion and decisions about classroom organisation and curriculum delivery (for example: classroom layout, group organisation, workshops for students on specific curriculum needs and conferencing with students). Levin (2000) and Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) similarly describe student voice as students helping to establish the school’s direction, vision and values by sharing their knowledge and perspectives on a range of topics. Student voice is also seen by Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) as a way to find out about students’ perceptions of school, their views about the effectiveness of the teaching and learning they are experiencing, and the ways they think the school could improve so that students are motivated to learn.

Furthermore, within the context of assessment, student voice has been referred to by Absolum et al. (2009) and Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2009) as a way to give students ownership of their learning and increase student engagement. Ownership of learning includes the student’s participation in teacher-student conversations about their academic achievement level, what they can do and identification by the student of their next learning steps (Absolum et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2009). Biddulph (2011) takes the definition of student voice a step further, and describes student voice as a process where students take more control of the curriculum and share their ideas and thoughts around curriculum delivery.

In regard to the New Zealand context in particular, student voice is also defined by Bishop and Berryman (2006) and Bishop et al. (2009) as a culturally appropriate way to find out the major influences on Maori students’ educational achievement within the classroom, the school and in the wider contexts of whanau and community. In this model teachers listen to students talk about their schooling experiences and offer encouragement to them to share their thoughts and ideas about what improvements could be made at school to help them learn. Bishop and Berryman (2006) and Bishop et al. (2009) see student voice as a way for teachers to build
relationships with their students that will ultimately empower and motivate the students to learn. This is in contrast to Absolum et al. (2009) who see student ‘voice’ as a strategy to help students take more ownership of their learning, by gaining knowledge and understanding of assessment principles rather than just a tool for building up relationships.

For the purpose of this literature review, therefore, student voice refers to students taking more ownership over their learning by participating in decision-making in both the classroom and school-wide contexts (see, for example: Biddulph, 2011; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Hart, 2002; Wragg, 1997).

**Student voice participation models**

On the premise that participation is a fundamental right of citizenship Hart (1992) presented a conceptual model measuring youth participation called the “Ladder of Participation” to UNICEF in 1992. The “Ladder of Participation” describes progressive stages of participation in society (Hart, 1992, 2002). The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) then promoted the Ladder to educators as a way to measure student participation in situations and activities.

Two models that demonstrate the different states of student voice and participation levels by students in schools are the ‘Ladder of Participation’ (1992) identified above, and Shier’s model of ‘Pathways to Participation’ (2001). I have chosen these two models on which to particularly focus in this section because they are pertinent to the notion of student voice and link to the UNCRC which dictates that children have rights to have a voice. Hart’s ‘ladder’ design was influenced by Sherry Arnstein’s 1969 ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’ (1969) which was designed to measure citizen participation in three American federal social programs - “urban renewal, anti-poverty, and Model Cities” (p. 216). It has been widely used by other writers as a framework to describe where students who are given a voice in their learning are able to ‘climb’ the ladder, lead and initiate action, and share decision-making with adults (Shier, 2001; Wyness, 2010). The ladder is shown overleaf in Figure 2.2.
Figure 2.2  The Ladder of Children's Participation (Source:Hart, 2002, p. 41)

The eight rungs of the ladder represent the level of ‘voice’ and participation that students have that contribute to making decisions. In Hart’s ladder the first, second and third rungs are described by Hart as ‘non-participatory’ where the students are manipulated; there is no student voice and attempts to have children participate are merely tokenistic. The fourth and fifth rungs define students being consulted and informed although this is all still adult directed. The sixth, seventh and eighth rungs are all ‘participatory’ and identify increasing levels of student ‘voice’. The seventh
and eighth rungs, in particular, describe students leading and initiating action and sharing their decision-making with adults (Hart, 1992, 2002; Shier, 2001). Wyness (2013) speaks of a child’s ‘authentic’ voice and explains that this can be measured by how high up the ladder the children are and involves “children taking charge and having full agenda-setting powers at this level” (p.3).

Although linear in shape, Hart (2002) criticises the assumption that the aim of his ladder model is for the student to work their way up and progress from one rung to another until they reach the top. Instead, Hart (2002) advocates that students can ‘step onto’ any of the rungs according to the situation and adopt opportunities for student ‘voice’ that are appropriate on that rung. Hart (2002) also warns that schools need to be careful not to misinterpret the ‘Ladder of Participation’, as it was designed as a broad tool for measuring a student’s participation in their learning not a “jumping off point for their own reflection” (p.19).

A particular word of caution comes from Hart (1992) and Fielding (2001) who suggest that schools need to be careful in their student ‘voice’ initiatives to ensure that the student participation is genuine and not tokenistic. Tokenism, the third rung on Hart’s (1992) ladder, has been highlighted by Fielding (2001) and Shier (2001) as a potential problem when implementing student voice initiatives in a school. Tokenism can occur when the adults are motivated to give students opportunities to participate and have a voice but the reality is that the students have “little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating, or no time to formulate their own opinions” (Hart, 2002, p. 41).

Shier (2001), influenced by Hart (1992) and the ‘Ladder of Participation’, has identified a further five stages of participation, and includes within those stages a logical sequence of 15 questions as a planning tool for greater participation. The five stages of participation are: children are listened to; children are supported in expressing their views; children's views are taken into account; children are involved in decision-making processes; and children share power and responsibility for decision-making. According to Shier (2001), each level of participation involves varying degrees of commitment to the process of empowering participants and is
further categorised under three stages of commitment identified as ‘openings’, ‘opportunities’ and ‘obligations’.

These stages are shown in Figure 2.3 on the next page. An ‘opening’ happens as soon as the participant makes a commitment to work in a certain way but is described only as an opening because, at this moment in time, the opportunity to succeed may not be available. The ‘opportunity’ comes in the second stage when the participant has the necessary resources, which may include staff time, skills and knowledge to operate at this level. The participant enters the third stage once they have already moved through the second stage and become ‘obliged’ to adopt an agreed policy. Staff are then obliged to work in a particular way, thereby enabling new levels of child participation. This, in turn becomes embedded into the system (Shier, 2001).

The minimum point that Shier (2001) recognises as meeting the UNCRC is at stage 3 where children’s views are listened to and given due weight in decision-making. Children and teachers need to answer the questions to ascertain their position and to identify the next steps for them to increase participation levels. It is expected that participants will be at different stages according to the task in hand (Shier, 2001). Shier’s (2001) model helps schools to identify their organisational readiness for developing student participation and voice to a level where the students share the power and responsibilities for decision-making.
### Student Voice Principles and Approaches

Student voice is a broad term and as such has many underlying principles. In this section, the following will be discussed: the agenda for learning; locus of control; and the development of a school culture.

An ‘agenda for learning’ is a tool that helps students prioritise, plan and complete tasks at a reasonable pace. This sense of control over their learning involves student
‘voice’. This is where students are given the time and opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas on their learning (Absolum et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2009). The student’s knowledge and perception of their learning impacts on a teacher’s pedagogy through the student’s ‘voice’, providing valuable insight into what the teacher can do to further motivate and engage the student in their learning (Absolum et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2009).

The term ‘locus of control’ refers to the level to which teachers have control over events affecting students. This level of power by teachers can be altered by encouraging students to take more ownership of their learning (Martin & Loomis, 2007). Changing the locus of control is an important aspect of student voice as it allows teachers to listen and learn from students’ ideas, and make their teaching more relevant and effective (McIntyre, Pedder, & Rudduck, 2005). It leads to a fostering of dialogue which changes the students’ role from just being a ‘subject’ of test results to a student of active participation in their learning (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Hart, 1992). McIntyre et al. (2005) maintain that teachers do not find it difficult to shift the locus of control to the students. However, other writers such as Absolum et al. (2009) and Jagersma and Parsons (2011) believe otherwise, and suggest that teachers need to ensure that these approaches are sincere and students need to be equipped with the language to be able to share their learning.

Giving students authority to have a ‘voice’ in their learning does come with other challenges as insights from the students may not be simple or straightforward to address (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Rudduck, 2007). Flutter and Rudduck (2004) and Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) further explain that these student ‘voice’ approaches take time and resources; otherwise students could become disengaged, alienated and see having a ‘voice’ in their learning as a negative experience (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Rudduck, 2007). According to Rudduck (2007), there may also be tension between teachers and students due to reluctance by teachers to give credence to making authentic change based on student ‘voice’ findings.

The final principle of student voice is that a school culture is influenced by the students when the school actively promotes student voice as a basis for action and allows the students to speak up and participate in decision-making that impacts on
the wider school organisation (Mitra, 2001; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). This repositioning of power allows students to be active participants in the development of school culture (Mitra, 2001; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). However, both Flutter and Rudduck (2004) and Rudduck (2007) do caution that it is important to plan carefully, taking into account factors such as the readiness of the school to embrace change, the availability of resources, and teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and understanding before embarking on any student ‘voice’ initiatives. This is substantiated by McIntyre et al. (2005) and Jagersma and Parsons (2011), who further point out that this planning is vital, along with building teacher confidence, if students are to feel comfortable about contributing thoughts and ideas that could impact on the school culture.

Rudduck (2007) also believes in the value of students contributing their ideas and thoughts as a basis for developing a practical agenda for enhanced learning (see Figure 2.4 overleaf). Rudduck (2007) asserts that student consultation helps to develop and transform teachers’ knowledge of students by providing teachers with key reflections and suggestions for improving student learning opportunities. Rudduck (2007) identifies self-esteem as an important component towards optimum student learning and highlights student consultation as an effective way to strengthen students’ self-esteem and build positive teacher-student relationships. Rudduck (2007) further asserts that as the students feel listened to and valued so their commitment to learning will strengthen.

Both Bishop and Berryman (2006) and Absolum et al. (2009) express similar views to Rudduck (2007) and assert that student consultation leading to improved student teacher relationships is fundamental to student learning. This greater awareness of how students think and feel about their learning also leads to positive changes in pedagogy and the teacher’s commitment to teaching and learning (Absolum et al, 2009, Bishop & Berryman, 2006, Rudduck, 2007).

This is clearly encapsulated by Rudduck’s (2007 Commitment to learning example over leaf;
Student consultation

Yields a practical Agenda

Strengthens student self-esteem

Which leads to

Enhanced commitment to learning and to school

which is sustained by

transformation of teachers’ knowledge of students
(greater awareness of students’ insight and capacity for constructive analysis)

Which in turn leads to positive changes in

Pedagogy Teacher-student relationships

Figure 2.4 Commitment to learning (Rudduck, 2007, p. 599)

Although self-esteem is an important consideration for teachers when encouraging students to participate in discussions that impact on the school culture it is important that the students are not perceived as having special attention or having a voice where other students are left unheard. This could cause them to suffer alienation from their peers which would detrimentally affect their self-esteem (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007).

Student voice and student learning
To implement student voice initiatives the school must first take a ‘wide angle’ whole school approach followed by a ‘spotlight’ approach. The ‘wide angle’ approach
involves looking at areas for development by monitoring and evaluating school-wide systems (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). This should be easily linked to school documents, including the school charter and strategic plan (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Rudduck, 2007). Using the evidence gathered, the next step is to facilitate a ‘spotlight’ approach, to look more closely at student needs and to identify and establish target groups of students who need extra support (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) and Rudduck (2007) promote this process and state that the target groups need to be part of the school charter which should be aimed at motivating and engaging students to learn.

In England some schools have embraced student voice and implemented initiatives and strategies in an effort to increase students’ motivation and engagement (Biddulph, 2011; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). They saw this as fundamental to improve student learning. Falmer High School, in particular, selected a Year 7 and a Year 8 group of students to complete a four stage process to identify factors that affect student engagement with learning (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). The school wanted to explore students’ attitudes and responses to various teaching and learning styles. In this study the students observed and recorded detailed observations on teachers and the responses of students to different learning activities. Key issues were identified from the analysed data which then became the focus for student group interviews (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). The students later identified that they felt listened to and more involved in their learning, and came up with ideas for increasing students’ motivation and engagement in class (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004).

Student focus groups can comprise of any age group and can provide further insights into teaching and learning across schools (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). In fact Arnot and Reay (2007) found that consulting students and gathering their insights enabled teachers to obtain a greater understanding of how a student’s learning is shaped by ethnicity, gender, social class and prior academic achievement. Having students partner up to identify, discuss and find solutions to school problems also helps gather student insights (Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2001). This also highlights the strength of gathering the students’ unique knowledge and their perspectives which teachers would struggle to replicate (Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2001).
Cultural capital

Cultural capital is another facet that needs to be taken into account when considering student voice. Pierre Bourdieu first used the term ‘culture capital’ in 1973 to define the set of durable dispositions, both conscious and unconscious, that shape a person’s behaviours, attitudes and responses to any given situation (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Bourdieu believed that home and family life play a significant role in the degree to which the child is able to acquire the values, dispositions and cultural capital that characterise the school (Webb et al., 2002). Bishop et al. (2009), in their studies, also refer to ‘cultural capital’ and encourage teachers to use student voice to explore the students’ cultural capital. Bishop et al. (2009) believe that this shapes who students are and what their interests are, which is fundamental to the student’s level of engagement with learning.

Flutter and Rudduck (2004) express similar views as Bishop et al. (2009), and believe that teachers need to put in time and effort to get to know the students and find out what the students bring to school in terms of background and experiences. Little Stoke Primary School in England carried out a ‘spotlight’ study approach and used student voice to explore the students’ ‘cultural capital’, with a focus on improving the students’ writing skills. By listening to students and finding out about their home lives, backgrounds and interests the teachers were then able to use this new knowledge of student commonalities, to develop collaborative writing groups. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) saw this as a precursor for increasing student motivation and engagement. The students then moved beyond their ‘cultural capital’ and gained the ideas and wisdom of others, Flutter and Rudduck (2004) found that this improved their achievement in writing. During this process, the students at Little Stoke Primary were also able to see and discuss video footage of their learning activities. This aligns with the work of Absolum et al. (2009), who believe that students’ motivation and engagement to learn increases when they are given the skills and opportunities to discuss their learning.

Student voice in participatory decision-making

The Education Review Office (2003) has found evidence in some New Zealand schools of student decision-making at the organisational level and classroom levels
and also through student leadership opportunities. At an organisational level, the Education Review Office (2003) discovered a range of school-wide consultation mechanisms where students have a ‘voice’ in making decisions about issues relating to behaviour systems, tuck shop and education outside the classroom initiatives. At the classroom level Absolum et al. (2009), Wragg (1997), and McIntyre et al. (2005) have also found that, in some schools, students have a ‘voice’ through conferencing with the teacher to make decisions about their learning and identifying what they need to do in terms of achieving their next learning step.

Some students have also contributed to discussions about how they learn best and how they want the teacher to teach them. This has been found to provide a positive contribution to teacher learning (McIntyre et al., 2005). The Education Review Office (2003) found evidence of classroom opportunities for student decision-making including feedback on teacher classroom performance, curriculum adaptation and organisation of class activities. Examples of student leadership opportunities in some schools were also identified by the Education Review Office (2003), including student prefect groups, kids’ councils, class prefects, Boards of Trustees’ student representatives, and shared student staff initiatives, such as school productions and school camp. Bishop et al. (2009), in their secondary school case studies, found that students who are given decision-making opportunities feel a sense of ownership in their education. They feel their ideas and thoughts are being appreciated and this increases their focus and engagement in learning (Bishop et al., 2009).

Giving students opportunities and encouragement to express their views on curriculum choices is seen by many writers as best practice for raising student motivation to learn (Biddulph, 2011; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Kidd & Czerniawski, 2011). In fact, similar views around the value of student voice in decision-making and increased student engagement and learning have emerged from an American study carried out in 2013 (Quaglia Institute of Student Aspirations Research Center, 2013). The study concluded that where student ‘voice’ is present in schools, the students’ engagement in learning was six times those of other students. Furthermore, these students were fifteen times more academically motivated than their counterparts. The My Voice Survey data was collected from 56,877 students in grades 6-12 during the 2012-2013 academic year. Interestingly, those students whose schools did not
promote students having a voice felt that if they were allowed to be part of the curriculum decision-making that this would impact positively on their learning (Quaglia Institute of Student Aspirations Research Center, 2013).

Notwithstanding, Fielding (2001) and Flutter and Rudduck (2004) have found successful student voice curriculum decision-making initiatives in some schools in England. In these schools the students feel that their teachers are very open to listening to their ideas about teaching and learning (Fielding, 2001, 2011). Furthermore, the students claim that the teachers are not just looking at testing methods but are also looking at:

*matters to do with the nature of learning, not just in its narrowly conceived terms of test scores, but also in terms of its wider and more profound human sense of making meaning from and with the world around them (Fielding, 2001, p. 101).*

Rudduck (2007) builds on these ideas and maintains that it is important that the students’ participation is clearly defined and that there is clarity of process, structure and expectations. Without this, Jagersma and Parsons (2011) and Rudduck and Flutter (2000) believe, communication could break down and student-teacher interactions could become teacher-controlled which defeats the purpose of student voice and participatory decision-making. Shier (2001) also states that although teachers need to ‘share’ the power of decision-making, that not every decision made by the students has to be acted upon.

In terms of the curriculum and student voice, students need to have a sense of connectedness with the curriculum or lesson objectives if teachers want them to constructively participate in curriculum decision-making (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Without this connectedness Rudduck and Flutter (2000) believe students could become barriers to their own learning through disruptive practice. The New Zealand primary school curriculum is promoted as being written with the learner as the central focus (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2013). It speaks of the foundations of curriculum decision-making and asserts that students should “experience a curriculum that engages and challenges them” (p. 9). However, Bishop and Berryman (2006) and
Bishop and Glynn (2000), in their extensive studies of Maori students, have found no evidence that any primary school students have had any input into either the curriculum design or the implementation process. This lack of student consultation, broadly termed ‘student voice’, is in direct contrast to the student voice beliefs of Rudduck and Flutter (2000), and is cited by Canadian educationalists Jagersma and Parsons (2011) as being detrimental to students’ learning potential. Fox (2013) also warns educators to beware of overdoing student voice in decision-making as it could spiral out of control and detrimentally undermine teachers’ authority. In some schools students are even making decisions on teacher employment and other panels, considered by Nelson (2014) to be detrimental to school institutions.

Schools that are deemed to be fostering student voice initiatives may well have other agendas and could be using student voice as a manipulative tool to hide other social inequalities (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Fielding, 2009). In fact, Arnot and Reay (2007) argue that the students can only articulate the language that has been created for them by school pedagogies and, as such, may well be merely a manipulation of school policy makers. Biddulph (2011) expresses a similar view, and further argues that it is vital that any student voice opportunities are independently constructed from any other agenda. It needs to be on the students’ terms and in ways that will benefit them that are not tokenistic (Biddulph, 2011).

To avoid the possibilities of tokenism and maximise student engagement and learning Beaudoin (2013) and Hart (2002) suggest that students need to initiate enquiry in conjunction with their teachers, play an active role in decision-making, and plan further action from the school’s data and review processes. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) express a similar view and also advise that schools need to consider how they can implement student ‘voice’ initiatives without excluding or privileging certain students over others. If students feel there is any unfairness this could heighten their sense of alienation from the school and result in disengagement (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Although Hart (2002) and Shier (2001) both advocate for students making decisions with adults, Shier (2001) suggests that students should not be pushed into taking responsibility for decisions that they do not want to be involved with and nor should decision-making be restricted by the existing parameters.
A challenge for schools that Fielding (2001) identifies is that the consultation process needs to include both teacher voice and student voice on top of existing consultation mechanisms. The next consideration, therefore, is how to create a connection between student voice and teacher voice and decide upon the inter-relationship between the two (Fielding, 2001). Biddulph (2011) acknowledges these challenges that exist within schools, and claims further research is necessary to ascertain whether student voice initiatives will actually change the status quo and allow for student voice decisions to impact and help shape the curriculum of the future.

**STUDENT VOICE AND SELF-EFFICACY**

Self-efficacy is a student’s belief in their own ability to succeed in a particular situation (Beaudoin, 2013; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Not only does student voice have the capacity to shape decisions that are made in schools, but it is also linked to self-efficacy and students’ sense of place in the local community (see for example: Beaudoin, 2013; Biddulph, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2009; McIntyre et al., 2005). Interwoven through their level of self-efficacy is the students ‘cultural capital’; their identity, their culture, who they are and how they think and feel (Biddulph, 2011). ‘Identity talk’ is one aspect of student voice which enables teachers to find out a student’s cultural capital.

According to Bishop and Berryman (2006) and Bishop et al. (2009), improved student engagement comes from recognizing and valuing students’ ‘identity talk’, where they are able to bring their culture and experiences into the discussions about learning. This is shown in interviews of students by McIntyre et al. (2005) and their subsequent findings, where students stated that the “authenticity of their learning experiences could be enhanced by bringing tasks into closer and more striking alignment with the mental and social worlds that they inhabit both inside and outside the classrooms” (p.154).

Allowing students to have a ‘voice’ in their learning encourages students to see teaching and learning as a joint effort; that is, everybody is on the ‘same page’ working in the same direction (Biddulph, 2011; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). This can be highly empowering and motivating for students and increase self-efficacy as they
see their teachers in a new light; as a supporter, not an enforcer of prescriptive learning (Bevan-Brown, Mc Gee, Ward, & MacIntyre, 2011). It is this belief in their ability to succeed, complete tasks and reach goals, that students need in order to fulfill their learning potential abilities (Bevan-Brown et al., 2011; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Mitra, 2003).

This expectation of potential success can affect how a student copes and persists with an activity. In fact, McIntyre et al. (2005) and Beaudoin (2013) claim that nothing much will happen in schools unless we can get students to care about what they are doing in class. Students who lack the capacity and maturity to express their opinion will need the guidance and direction from others, and should not be discounted through a lack of immediate ability to share thoughts and feelings (Lundy, 2007). Sufficient time and encouragement will be needed if students are to voice their thoughts and feelings freely (Lundy, 2007). Lee and Zimmerman (1999) have also discovered that students who feel that networking with other students is valuable for them; it gives them a sense of identity and makes them feel valued for their contribution. Students who feel their ideas and thoughts are being accepted by adults feel better about themselves and learning (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Rudduck, 2007). A student’s self-efficacy and participation level is also reflective of their social and emotional development level (Hart, 1992). Hart (1992) claims that students with low self-efficacy, based on their beliefs about their ability to complete schoolwork for example, are likely to struggle with communicating their thoughts and feelings through feelings of inadequacy.

Studies with Maori students about how they learn best have highlighted self-efficacy as an important element to their motivation and engagement levels to learn. Bishop and Berryman’s (2006) research also gave clear indicators that, for Maori students to be empowered and more engaged in their learning, they need to be heard, feel a sense of belonging, feel valued, respected and assimilated into the school system. Student voice is, therefore, viewed as an effective consultative method that is both culturally responsive in design and powerful for finding out what the students feel and want in terms of education (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2009).
Self-efficacy is considered a prerequisite to student empowerment, motivation and engagement to learn (see, for example, Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop & Glynn, 2000; Smith, 2012). The key to building self-efficacy in Maori students is to embrace the student’s home culture and seek out the student’s whakapapa (family genealogy) (Bishop & Glynn, 2000; Hohepa & Robinson, 2008; Smith, 2012). Teachers interviewed in some New Zealand schools view a successful school as one where teachers look at things from the student’s perspective and who have developed positive relationships and trust with students (Bishop, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2009). This is validated by the students who feel that they do better in class when they are listened to, when the teacher has built up a good relationship with them, and where they have a ‘voice’ in decision-making (Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop & Glynn, 2000, 2006).

To encourage students to voice their ideas and thoughts that will help in their learning, schools need to get the power balance right between teachers and students (Beaudoin, 2013). Although Beaudoin (2013) acknowledges that schools need order and control to be safe, Beaudoin also argues that “control is the staple of teachers not good at their craft” (p.16). Hart (1992) and Arnot and Reay (2007) both warn of the difficulties surrounding adult-student power relations and the need for students to be able to fully express their thoughts and ideas untainted by adult influence and control. Hart (2002) argues that adults can, with all good intentions, deny their own involvement in directing students’ ideas and thoughts, but in reality the adults have a pre-decided agenda. This, Hart (2002) believes, does little to foster a student’s self-efficacy. Beaudoin (2013) further argues that far too much time is spent on viewing students as problems rather than possibilities which will certainly inhibit students empowerment and self-efficacy to learn.

**Self-efficacy and student assessment**

Putting students at the centre of their learning is key. In fact, Absolum et al. (2009), Bishop et al. (2009) and Flutter and Rudduck (2004) promote student engagement where students are actively involved in discussions and decision-making about their learning. Absolum et al. (2009) goes further and warns that:
In a world where young people exercise personal choice over matters as trivial as the ring tones of their cellphone, or as far reaching as the learning pathways they pursue, denying them opportunities for active involvement in important learning and assessment decisions is likely to promote disengagement. (Absolum et al., 2009, p. 8)

‘Assessment for Learning’ philosophies (see, for example: Absolum et al., 2009; Briggs, Woodfield, Swatton, & Martin, 2008; Gadsby & Beere, 2012) describe the learner as sitting at the ‘core’ with the skills and confidence to engage in dialogue with the teacher about their learning. This aspect of student voice is seen by Mitra (2003) and Lee and Zimmerman (1999) as one way to help re-engage students who are alienated from learning. By consulting with students on their views of teaching and learning, students gain an understanding of how they learn and get a better sense of their abilities while also feeling respected and valued for their ‘voice’ (Absolum et al., 2009; Mitra, 2003). This can then be linked to greater teacher accountability and improved classroom practice (Absolum et al., 2009; Mitra, 2003). The students’ confidence will only grow if the teacher works collaboratively with them and they feel empowered to speak up and they get to make decisions about their learning. This links to the ‘Ladder of Participation’ and ‘Pathways to Participation’ exemplified earlier by Hart (2002) and Shier (2001).

In fact, Black, McCormick, James, and Pedder (2006) state that “pupils’ learning is more productive if it is reflective, intentional, and collaborative, practices which may not come naturally but can be taught and can lead to pupils taking responsibility for their own learning” (Black et al., 2006, p 126). This aligns to the work of Lundy (2007) and Wragg (1997) who highlight the teacher’s responsibility to the student to provide the conditions to support and facilitate discussions with direct benefit to teaching and learning. However, changing classroom behaviour to encompass student voice ‘Assessment for Learning’ initiatives can be problematic for teachers due to the sheer volume and speed of transactions in many classrooms (Wragg, 1997). Wragg (1997) reports on studies which found that teachers were engaged in up to 1,000 interpersonal exchanges in any given day, and believes this would impact detrimentally on the available time for students to have a voice in their learning. Wragg also discovered that “there was a change in ‘activity’ every 5-8
seconds, an average each lesson of 174 changes in who talked and who listened; that teachers often made a decision in less than a second” (1997, p. 113). With these discoveries in mind, Wragg (1997) finds it surprising that teachers are able to take in so many factors in a short time - the students’ concerns, their prior history and background, feelings, maturity level and other factors - let alone providing for student voice about their learning.

It is pertinent to state that there is no one effective teacher ‘type’ and, therefore, it would be naive to say that all teachers should teach in the same way (Wragg, 1997). A dynamic school needs to encompass a whole school approach, a committed collective collaborative environment and strategic leadership (Adair, 2010; Wragg, 1997).

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP**

Introduction of school-wide student voice initiatives requires organisational change and strategic leadership which are inextricably intertwined (Bryman, Collinson, Grint, Jackson, & Uhl-Bien, 2011). Davies (2006) defines strategic leadership as “the ability to define the moral and visual purpose, and translate them into action” (p.104).

**Vision and values**

To implement student voice philosophies there needs to be a clear schoolwide vision and set of values underpinning what the school believes student voice is, and how it can be integrated into school life. It is important that the school’s moral and visual purpose, its vision and its values are firmly embedded within the schools’ strategic intent so that the overall direction of where the school is going is clear (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Davies, 2006; Starratt, 2005). The vision originates from the school’s beliefs and assumptions, guides the school’s direction and needs to be visible throughout the organisational structures and programmes (Starratt, 2005). Similarly, Haydon (2007) believes that the vision is the school’s perception of what they want in the future; it inspires others to strive towards it. The vision and values help inform the strategic intent and will not be sustainable unless they are embedded schoolwide (Haydon, 2007).
Davies (2006) explains that the strategic intent informs what major change the school wants and defines how schools operate in a new and strategically different way to shift the schools’ performance. Used to create a high learning success culture, it is the process of committing the school to setting objectives to meet the direction that they have decided will be the most productive for the school and the students’ educational needs (Davies, 2006).

**Four stage strategic intent process**

A four stage strategic intent process can assist schools to gain a conceptual shift in thinking and build capability and capacity to change and is exemplified in Davies’ (2006) model for strategic leadership (see Figure 2.5 overleaf). The process begins first with the strategic intent. This is followed by thinking and recognition of what is needed in terms of building capacity and capability to achieve the intent. This ‘thinking’ is coined by Davies in his model for strategic leadership as ‘*people wisdom*’ and ‘*contextual wisdom*’. ‘*People wisdom*’ describes the need for people to have interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. ‘*Contextual wisdom*’ involves being able to understand and develop culture, share values, beliefs and collectively build a vision together. It is from these collaborative processes that the strategic intent begins to take shape moving into the final implementation of strategic changes and the identification of what else needs to be done to make the changes successful (Davies, 2006).

Adair (2010) and Davies (2006) affirm that once the strategic intent is set the school leaders need to establish what the teachers collectively understand about the proposed new initiative and the rationale behind the school’s reasons for its introduction. Davies (2006) also strongly believes that “engaging the people is a critical element to the strategic journey. Involving and motivating all in the school to work towards a sustainable and successful future is vital” (p.71). Everyone needs to be going in the same direction and be involved in the design and implementation of the strategic process (Davies, 2006). Ultimately, the focus is unwaveringly on teaching and learning - the improvement of student learning outcomes by increasing student motivation and engagement to learn (Ministry of Education, 2008).
In his model for strategic leadership Davies (2006) asserts that school leaders need to have ‘strategic intelligence’ – that is, to be versed in both ‘people wisdom’ and ‘contextual wisdom’. Davies (2006) highlights in the four stage intent process (see Figure 2.5 below) a need for the school leader to have clear sequential strategic approaches and processes in place that foster a school culture which embraces reflection, analysis and dialogue.

![Figure 2.5. A model for strategic leadership (Source: Davies, 2006, p. 119)](image)

**School culture**

The vision and values a school upholds defines its culture and this is dependent on a strategic leader to ensure its cohesiveness. *The Kiwi Leadership for Principals* (KLP) strategy (Ministry of Education, 2008) promotes a similar model to Davies (2006),
and identifies principals as having a key role in leading education systems that will provide students with the necessary skills, knowledge and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century. Robinson et al. (2009) and the Ministry of Education (2008) share these views and want school leaders to develop and sustain an effective culture of learning in schools, and take steps to ensure that teachers have sound pedagogical knowledge and understanding of how students learn.

An effective culture of learning in schools, Fullan (2011) believes, requires the need for the right ‘drivers’ of policy and strategy. Fullan (2011) describes the right ‘drivers’ as leaders, teachers and students who are motivated to work as a team to achieve instructional improvement. The key for success is for the policies and strategies to build intrinsic motivation in staff so that they embrace and participate in the development and enactment of student voice initiatives (Bush, 2010; Fullan, 2011). Effective strategic leadership only happens if the leaders have the pedagogical understanding of change initiatives such as student voice, and put the time in to empower and develop a sense of meaning for staff (Davies, 2006).

For any initiatives to be successful, leaders need to have the necessary skills and attitudes to be able to drive the team, facilitate decision-making and know when to step in when the team is becoming disorientated and nothing is happening (Bush, 2010). Within this platform of clear direction and leadership, it is vital that there is a culture of trust, a sense of group identity, purpose and an environment conducive to risk taking (Cardno, 2012; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Wildy & Clarke, 2011). It is this ‘emotional intelligence’ of teams that facilitates a high performing team (Goleman, McKee, & Boyzatzis, 2002). These views are supported by Bush and Middlewood (2005) who feel that collegiality, teambuilding and being able to influence others are important considerations in leadership development and are “vital to performance in an organisation” (p.24). Supporting these theories, Cardno’s (2005) ‘holistic model’ emphasises that high performing strategic leaders have strong social awareness and can manage effective relationships, a prerequisite to a teacher’s professional development and also to organisational growth.

Four essential facets to this model “curriculum, management, school and personal development - can be adapted as a basis for planning and evaluating a school’s
professional development programme” (Cardno, 2005, p.292). Effective decision-making, promoted in leadership development, will by its very nature influence positive change both with the teacher's professional growth and organisation as a whole (Cardno, 2005). This mutuality of purpose, ‘horizontal integration’ and ‘vertical fit’ highlights the complexities of professional development for teacher professional growth, leadership development, improved student learning and the impact on organisational change.

**Resistance to change**

With all new initiatives there may be resistance to change. Middlewood and Lumby (2011) allude to this and warn that teachers who are not 'on board' with the school-wide change initiatives may not work in the best interests of the students in their attempt to thwart change. It can be difficult to change the minds and hearts of staff (Middlewood & Lumby, 2011). Davies (2006) and Robinson et al. (2009) believe that student ‘voice’ initiatives in schools also require school leaders to be active learners themselves so that they may model good practice for others. This is substantiated by Robertson and Timperley (2011), who found direct evidence that those educational leaders who were strategic in their resourcing and who promoted and participated in teacher learning and development had a positive impact on student outcomes.

Implementing in student voice initiatives is not always easy for schools to achieve or sustain. It can pose problems for some leaders as they have very busy lives and it is a juggling act between prioritising time for themselves, for their own learning and development, and making time to listen to others (Davies, 2006). Alignment and coherence of these actions is vital. Just as Davies (2006) advocates for a collaborative style of leadership so do Bell, Schargel, and Thacker (2014) who go a step further and recommend shared leadership where teachers lead the learning in the school. This requires the leaders to improve their own skills and links directly to Davies (2006) model of strategic leadership.

By going through a strategic process in the manner advocated by Davies (2006) a leader can begin to develop a pedagogically engaged school. A pedagogically engaged school consists of culture, pedagogy and structure that overlap and involve teachers, learners and contexts as exemplified in Figure 2.6 overleaf (Smyth, 2007).
Smyth (2007) also states, in his pedagogically engaged schools model (Figure 2.6) that there needs to be strong encouragement for high ownership of learning, student voice, school and community dialogue with a clear focus on educational context.

Within the pedagogically engaged school, there also needs to be time for teachers to be reflective and critical thinkers (Absolum et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2009; Smyth, 2007).

Figure 2.6. The pedagogically engaged school (Source: Smyth, 2007, p. 653)

**Sustainability of school initiative**

Finally, strategic leadership and sustainability of student voice initiatives need to be considered. Hargreaves and Fink (2012) warn that “change is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain” (p.17). There needs to be care
and attention to avoid ‘initiative overload’ as there is a limit as to how many initiatives anyone can reasonably handle. Bryman et al. (2011) and Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) assert that sustainability can be a problem when programmes are implemented episodically. Instead, Bryman et al. (2011) believe that sustainability requires an ongoing process that involves the leader learning themselves every day and using hindsight in order to move forward. This fits well with the ‘conservation sustainability factor’ advocated by Hargreaves and Fink (2012) and Davies (2006).

Hargreaves and Fink (2012) identify seven factors for sustainability that they believe strategic leaders need to consider when implementing school-wide initiatives:

**Depth:** - Initiatives must be school-wide affecting the whole school with clarity around the deep and underlying principles of learning and moral purpose.

**Length:** - Initiatives run for a reasonable period of time to enable them to become embedded into the school culture.

**Breadth:** - The strategic vision, direction of the school and encompassing initiatives that are extended out to the school community.

**Justice:** - A moral obligation to ensure that strategic change benefits the students.

**Cohesive diversity:** - The school meets the students’ needs by being able to diversify and be flexible with the curriculum development and delivery.

**Resourcefulness:** - Practicality of resources needs to be taken into account when bringing in new initiatives. Both leaders and teachers are considered resources and so workload and level of expectations also needs to be considered if the initiatives are to be sustained.

**Conservation:** – Any strategic change requires the hindsight of learning in the past in order to move forwards and build sustainable strategic change.

**SUMMARY**

The literature supports my experience as a school leader responsible for curriculum. Student voice as a tool for driving curriculum delivery and choice is gaining some momentum in schools and has the potential to revolutionise education and increase student motivation and engagement for learning. Within all change management practices there will be school leaders who struggle to embrace new initiatives and
who may also lack the pedagogical knowledge and understanding of the reasons for change. The validity of this research will be dependent, firstly, on establishing relational trust with school leaders, teachers and students to get their ‘voice’. Validity of this research will rely, secondly, on the ability to demonstrate to school leaders the potential of classroom practice that is modelled around ‘student voice’ and student driven curriculum delivery to improve students empowerment, motivation and engagement to learn.

This literature review suggests that student voice initiatives might be an effective approach to raise student empowerment, engagement and efficacy. A school with such an approach, a pedagogically engaged school, is one where students have real ownership of their learning and decision-making is based on dialogue with students (Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 2002; Smyth, 2007). It is where the locus of control from the teacher is shared with the students. The curriculum is also designed to be relevant to the student, they can make connections to their wider world and the school environment is one of care fostering respect, trust and relationships (Robinson et al., 2009; Smyth, 2007).

It is also evident through this literature review that leaders play a vital part in leading staff and also working alongside them. It is important that leaders have clarity around their strategic leadership and have the pedagogical knowledge and understanding of student voice in order to have credibility in their leadership direction. A positive school culture and trust is vital if teachers are to move out of their comfort zone, embrace new initiatives and embed good practice that increases student motivation and engagement to learn.

To date, literature pertaining to New Zealand and ‘student voice’ initiatives in primary schools is limited. Although there is research from the United Kingdom, Canada and America that recognises the value of student consultation and participation on student engagement, it is hard to quantify the full effect on individual student performance due to other factors influencing student learning. These factors include external and internal influences as previously examined in this literature review. It seems, therefore, that further investigation is needed in order to fully understand and
recognise the impact of student voice initiatives on student empowerment, motivation, and engagement to learn in New Zealand schools. The gap in current local literature in the area of ‘student voice’ suggests that research at the primary school level to examine the ways in which student voice can help empower, motivate and engage students to learn was a worthy and relevant focus for this research.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

INTRODUCTION

In consideration of appropriate research approaches, the interpretive approach to the study of behaviour seemed to be the natural vehicle for this case study. The interpretative approach focuses on the intentional behaviour, and interpreting and understanding the specific actions and meanings of subjects, as opposed to the normative paradigm that relies on behaviour from the past and the causes (Cohen et al., 2011). Interpretive researchers build theory around the understandings of people’s behaviour (Cohen et al., 2011). This is particularly valid when considering student voice and sits within an interpretative naturalistic epistemology. This is where studies take place in natural settings and a sense of, or interpretation is gained from the respondents’ perspectives of the phenomena around them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

This chapter is set out in six sections. The rationale for much needed research on how student ‘voice’ could impact positively on student empowerment, engagement and learning will become evident in Section One. The second section will examine the epistemological position and methodology and Sections Three and Four will examine and justify nominated data collection methods. Section Five will examine data analysis and also discuss reliability and validity issues. Ethical issues and how they will be addressed will be clearly explained in Section Six.

This research project, carried out in two primary schools, was chosen for two reasons. The first reason was that student voice has been identified internationally and in New Zealand (although the local literature is very sparse) as a potential tool for empowering, motivating and engaging students to learn (see, for example: Beaudoin, 2013; Biddulph, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; McIntyre et al., 2005; Rudduck, 2007). Notwithstanding, student voice is viewed as promoting a productive partnership between students and teachers which is believed to lead to greater student engagement (Biddulph, 2011; Hart, 1992; McIntyre et al., 2005). Research evidence suggests that students want to be heard and to be involved in school-wide
matters and curriculum decision-making (Absolum et al., 2009; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop & Glynn, 2000)

Secondly, there is very little research on student voice in New Zealand with the student voice research that has been carried out locally being focused predominantly on secondary school-aged Maori students. International research from the United Kingdom, Canada and America makes up the majority of available literature in this area and also focuses predominantly on secondary school-aged students (see, for example Biddulph, 2011; Hart, 1992, 2002; Jagersma & Parsons, 2011; McIntyre et al., 2005; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007).

**METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

My research has explored the perceptions of students, teachers, and leaders aimed at closing the gap in our knowledge and understanding in the area of students having a ‘voice’ in their learning. By collecting the participants ‘voice’ I have been able to identify what student voice strategies are evident in classrooms at the present time, and the perceived impact that this has on students’ motivation and engagement in learning. The findings of this research are fully presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

A researcher always brings their own inherent knowledge, values, beliefs, culture and experiences to the research they carry out. It is these perspectives that influence and shape the researcher’s epistemological and ontological views (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Ontology refers to the characteristics and nature of reality and epistemology refers to knowledge and understanding (Creswell, 2013). These philosophical assumptions provide the paradigm or the landscape from which individual theories can develop (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Two competing paradigms, the positivist and interpretative approaches, are used in research (Bryman, 2012) Davidson and Tolich (2003) argue that the interpretative approach is focused on the validity of the data whereas the positivist researcher favours reliability over validity in their research.
My epistemology and ontology was influenced by holding a situated view of learning; that is, that knowledge is shared across social situations which humans construct via their cultures to allow them to work together (Cohen et al., 2011). I took a constructivist approach to explore student ‘voice’ and its perceived impact on student learning. The constructivist approach premises that reality is constructed and more subjective (Mutch, 2005). Some researchers would argue that this lacks the rigor of a positivist approach, which relies heavily on quantitative data and statistical analysis of these data (Cohen et al., 2011; Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

My research included listening to the students’ ‘voice’ to find out the ways in which student voice is promoted and used in their classroom and how it is perceived to impact on their learning. This is a more robust research design as compared to relying only on an adult interpretation of children’s perspectives. This aligns to an interpretative approach within a qualitative paradigm which values how the participants construct meaning and make interpretations to inform their own world view (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Creswell (2013) and Yin (2009) say that a case study involves researching in a real life context or setting and allows for a particular human activity to be studied thoroughly (Gillham, 2000). It is also the study of prior theoretical propositions which aligns with the premises from overseas research that suggest that student voice can help empower, motivate and engage students in their learning. A key characteristic of a case study is that multiple sources of evidence are used which enables the researcher to make sense of theories and explanations (Creswell, 2013; Gillham, 2000).

Another reason for choosing to carry out a case study was that I was predominately interested in exploring attitudes and feelings; therefore an approach which investigated participants’ reactions to experiences and situations was more helpful than one which focuses on statistical data. Observations and interviews are frequently the primary choices of case study researchers (Bell, 2010; Mutch, 2005). The natural choice for my data collection was to carry out interviews which would enable me to listen to and record participants’ ideas and thoughts.
To collect this ‘voice’, I carried out semi-structured interviews and focus groups with leaders, teachers and students. This was on the premise that gathering different world views from the various stakeholders would enable robustness of findings (Creswell, 2002). This is defined by Bell (2010) and Cohen et al. (2011) as a multi-perspective triangulation approach to data gathering.

**SAMPLING FRAME**

For my qualitative research I used a purposive sampling approach. Creswell (2013) explains that the purposeful sampling approach assists the researcher to make decisions as to the participants to interview, the type of sampling that will provide the necessary data and the size of the sample. This required me to consider who would be the most appropriate people to interview in order to find out about student voice in schools. It was important to gather more than one voice and to gather voice from a range of people who hold different responsibilities. I chose to interview two Principals and two Deputy Principals to gain data from a leadership perspective. This fits with Adair’s (2010) and Davies’ (2006) views that the leaders are a vital component when introducing initiatives and change in a school. The sample size needed to be manageable and was decided by the number of year 5 and 6 classrooms in the schools. Consideration was also given as to the manageability of interviewing participants in terms of time and availability, and how to narrow down the pool of potential participants in order to carry out an in depth study. This premise fits well with that of Creswell (2013) who states that the intent of qualitative research is to study a few areas in detail rather than a wider pool of participants which may only elicit generalised information.

By collecting ‘voice’ from leaders, teachers and students I was able to examine the findings for the participants’ mental models, their espoused theories and their theories in use. People’s behaviour is determined by ‘mental models’ where they have a model or theory as to how the world works and their behaviour is reflective of that (Senge, 1990). Espoused theories refers to people’s descriptions of how they think they behave and theory in use is what they actually do (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Carrying out purposive sampling is considered important by Bryman (2012) as it allows the researcher the opportunity to interview those participants that have a
direct relationship to the research focus and questions. I chose two schools in different geographical areas in Auckland as schools in one area sometimes work in clusters and I wanted to get a broader idea of student voice in schools that are different to each other. The sampling consisted of two schools (see Figure 3.1 overleaf) that met the following sampling criteria:

- a minimum of five classes of Year 5/6 in each school;
- different decile ratings providing a range of socio-economic settings.
- Education Review Office (ERO) reports that suggest that the schools are either interested in or are already developing student voice initiatives.
- from two different geographical areas in Auckland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part One</th>
<th>Part Two</th>
<th>Part Three</th>
<th>Part Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews (Principals)</td>
<td>Interviews (Deputy Principals)</td>
<td>Focus Groups (Teachers)</td>
<td>Focus Groups (Students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>One interview</td>
<td>One interview</td>
<td>Four teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>One interview</td>
<td>One interview</td>
<td>Five teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Sampling framework overview

All year five and six teachers were invited to participate in the study, from both schools, and those that consented participated in the teacher focus group. The students were selected from the classroom registers, the first boy and girl on the roll until ten students had been selected from each school. Those students that had signed consent forms and parental signed permission participated in the student focus group.
I used a general inductive approach to my research to analyse data from both schools. Bryman (2012) and Creswell (2013) explain that inductive analysis involves qualitative researchers working from the ‘bottom up’ by organising data inductively into patterns, categories and themes.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups

Semi-structured one to one interviews
I carried out semi-structured interviews (see Interview Schedule Appendix D) with two Principals and two Deputy Principals to get a leadership perspective on student voice in two schools, and the participants’ perceptions on student voice in terms of motivation, engagement for learning and impact on student’s self-efficacy. The starting point of the semi-structured interviews was from an interpretative stance and free of bias, which Cohen et al. (2011) and Smeyers (2008) state is necessary in order to get a social construction of reality.

Observations were initially considered as a method for collecting data but were discounted due to the possibility, as stated by Bryman (2012) and Creswell (2013), that students may behave differently when an observer is in the room. This could reduce the validity of the data (Bryman, 2012). Students sometimes have a tendency to engage with any adult that comes into the classroom and this alone could slant the observer’s view of student engagement in class. Bryman (2012) warns that the observer could disturb “the very situation being studied” (p.496). Despite structured interviews being easier to aggregate with prescriptive questions asked of all interviewees (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011; Yin, 2011), I chose semi-structured interviews as they were more adaptable and provided opportunities to vary the sequence of questions during the flow of the interview. Bryman (2012) and Bell (2010) value the flexibility of semi-structured interviews and state that they are an excellent interview structure as they allow for the interviewer to probe for more detail.

The participants in the semi-structured interviews appeared to be comfortable to answer and discuss questions. The flexibility of a semi-structured interview allowed
the participants to lead some of the conversation and have a greater sense of ownership of the research process. Both Bell (2010) and Bryman (2012) assert that this can help participants feel more relaxed and increase interaction which provides for a deeper insight into the participants’ beliefs and opinions. This raises questions about keeping the interviewer’s own world view separate to the interviews, which positivists would argue is one of the flaws of using the interview process for research purposes. Positivists believe the researcher can influence the interviewer’s responses.

Questions were, therefore, well-articulated with my own world view unrecognisable, which (Yin, 2011) believes is necessary to reduce the likelihood of bias. I took care to keep intonation to a minimum when asking questions and acknowledging their responses so that the participants were unaware of my own beliefs and values. Responses were digitally recorded to ensure an accurate ‘picture’ of the participants’ perceptions and understanding of student voice within their school. Although Bell (2010), Gillham (2000) and Yin (2009) feel that interviews are time consuming and potentially subject to bias, they all promote interviews as an effective way of adding rich information to support other research methods.

It was also important to ensure that the process of transcription was robust. According to Bryman (2012) and Bell (2010), a transcription is a written translation of a recorded interview and allows the researcher to gain a correct record of the participants ideas and views. To further ensure that the transcript were accurate, these were given to the respective participants for them to look over and add, delete or comment on anything they felt needed to be amended.

The disadvantage of this type of data collection is the length of time it takes to type up the transcripts. Bryman (2012) and Hinds (2000) identify that for every hour of interviewing there will be five to ten hours of transcription typing. However, writing notes to capture exactly what the participants said in the interviews would have been too difficult and would have detracted from the flow of the natural conversation. Two digital recording devices were used, one as a backup in case the other failed. Digitally recording the interview was helpful in that I could listen to the recording and replay it over and over again to ensure I had all the data correctly transcribed.
Bell (2010) affirms the value of recording interviews and states that it allows the interviewer to listen several times to the interview which helps them identify categories, carry out coding of emerging themes and then summarise the findings. To ensure anonymity in all transcripts the school leaders, teachers and students were recorded using pseudonyms. The two schools were classed as School A and School B to ensure that neither school nor any person could be identified.

**Focus group interviews**
Focus group interviews were chosen as my second method of data collection. Focus groups are promoted by Bryman (2012) as a productive way of running a group interview where the interviewer is wanting to find out perceptions in a specific defined topic and interactions in the group are a necessary component. I chose to do two focus group interviews at each school to enable me to gather a variety of perspectives, thoughts and ideas from a cross section of people. Both schools have five classes of year five and six students and so it seemed pertinent to carry out focus group interviews on all five teachers at each school.

Both Hennink (2013) and Krueger (2009) recommend that the focus group is small enough to enable everyone an opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas, but also large enough to facilitate a diversity of perceptions to be heard. Less than six participants would be restrictive in terms of collecting insights and Hennink (2013) warns that any dominant participants could thwart the opportunities for the others to share their ideas and thoughts. Hennink (2013) recommends over-recruiting to account for any attrition, and for this reason I asked the school to take the first two students’ names from the school roll for each class until we had a list of 10 students. Only those students with signed permission forms from their parents and themselves were interviewed. This resulted in the participation of six students from School A and five students from School B. Homogeneity is another consideration which led to the design of the focus groups including just senior school teachers and students of a 1-2 year age difference. Hennink (2013) believes that it is important to do this so that the participants have enough in common both socially and intellectually to feel more comfortable to share their perceptions.
The semi-structured interviews and focus groups allowed me to collect data as part of a multi perspective, ‘triangulation’ of gathering data sources as advocated by Yin (2009). This is also recognised by Bryman (2012), Bell (2010) and Cohen et al. (2011) as an important consideration when collecting a valid set of data for analysis. Running a focus group interview with a group of teachers is another productive way of hearing their voice. It enabled me to hear both positive and negative views, which Hinds (2000) suggests is a component of a productive focus group interview. I chose to interview teachers in a focus group setting instead of individually, as I felt they might be more vocal when prompted by their peers to add more detail to a conversation. Seeking the views of both teachers and students allowed me to compare and contrast data (Cohen et al., 2011).

Group interviews can be structured with pre-prepared questions or completely unstructured (Bell, 2010; Fontana & Frey, 2005). For the purpose of this research, the focus group interviews consisted of pre-prepared questions designed to be culturally responsive by facilitating participants to ‘drive’ the interview in terms of sharing their beliefs and values (see the Focus Group Schedule Appendix E). According to Mutch (2005), this cultural awareness is important to enable the interviewer to get greater insight into the participants’ beliefs and values. Fontana and Frey (2005) allude to the same behaviours and explain that interviewers need to be sensitive to the “evolving patterns of group interaction” (p.704). This may well take the interview in a different direction to the intended pathway, Fontana and Frey (2005) believe, but with the multi methods of research being used in this case study, there should be some clear themes identifiable.

Krueger (2009) identifies a variety of different question types that might be used in focus group interviews. There is an ‘art’ to asking questions and Krueger (2009) believes that questions need to be well thought out to suit a distinct purpose through the process of the interview. In the context of this case study, ten open questions, related to the main themes of my literature review, were used as the optimum method of finding out what the participants think. Bryman (2012), Bell (2010) and Krueger (2009) all promote using open questions to discover as much as possible from the participants.
As my research included interviewing students I took care with the language I used to ensure that I did not confuse students with education jargon (see the Focus Group Schedule Appendix E). Bell (2010) and Cohen et al. (2011) maintain that interviews are a social interpersonal event, not just a data collection tool, and the language used needs to be familiar to the interviewees to ensure they understand the questions. Bell (2010) also suggests that question phrasing needs careful attention and thought to reduce ambiguity. To avoid this, questions were either repeated or rephrased if necessary in order to give participants more clarity.

Bryman (2012) highlights difficulties that can happen with focus group interviews where the participants ‘take over’ the interview which leaves the interviewer struggling to summarise findings and bring the interview to a close (Bryman, 2012). To reduce this possibility I repeated questions at appropriate times to ensure that the participants kept to the topic.

It is important to understand that this research was accessing the participants’ most precious gift, their knowledge. Bryman (2012) and Cohen et al., (2011) share this view and believe that the interviewee needs to ensure that the participants are as comfortable as possible with the interview questions. I was also mindful of the busyness of schools and was careful to timetable the interviews to fit in with the participants’ busy timetables. This meant that I needed to be flexible with the time of the interviews to fit in with team meetings and also avoid ‘core’ learning times for the student interviews. Cohen et al. (2011) believe that making the effort to ‘calculate’ a preferable time will have its rewards, optimally a more productive interview where the interviewees have time to consider their answers more thoroughly.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of establishing the meaning of the data. Once I had collected the raw data it then went through a content analysis process. This is defined by Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) and Bryman (2012) as an effective way to establish themes and transform data into findings or results. A content analysis involves a systematic process of looking for emerging themes as they relate to the literature themes. According to Cohen et al. (2011) qualitative data
is much harder to analyse than quantitative data where a deductible analysis approach would result in quantifiable explanations. To reduce the difficulties and aid the analysis of data, the semi-structured interviews and focus were structured in a similar way. The questions were designed to get a broad picture of perceptions of student voice but also written to assist with finding commonalities of thoughts and ideas.

After the semi-structured interviews and focus groups were completed the transcripts were typed up over the following ten days. The transcripts were given to the Principal and Deputy Principal to verify that they were satisfied with the transcript and to allow them an opportunity to amend or add anything they wanted to contribute further if they wished. A summary was written up from the focus group sessions and also given to the respective participants to double-check accuracy and give them an opportunity if needed to notify me of any changes they wanted me to make. Mutch (2005) states that data is founded on rich descriptions of feelings, thought and activities according to the interpretations by the researcher. With this in mind I took care to be objective, and look for strong commonalities woven through the participants’ responses in order to identify themes. This was done by sorting the data into various categories and subsequently coding it according to the themes identified in the literature review. This fits with Bryman’s (2012) description of grounded theory which he deems is the most widely used framework in terms of analysing qualitative data.

Bryman (2012) and Lofland et al. (2006) explain that coding begins by finding the similarities and differences in data. The data is sorted into “various categories that organise it and render it meaningful from the vantage point of or more frameworks or sets of ideas” (Bryman, 2012; Lofland et al., 2006, p. 200). These sets of ideas build up recurring themes and define the concepts for further exploration as necessary to build theory (Bryman, 2012; Lofland et al., 2006). To help establish themes I also wrote anecdotal notes - my thoughts and observation of participants during and after the interviews. Bryman (2012) and Lofland et al. (2006) advocate for note taking as they believe it helps the researcher reflect and makes it easier to code data and distinguish themes. Merriam (2014) shares the same views and says it is important
to keep “track of your thoughts, musings, speculations, and hunches as you prepare your data for analysis” (p.174).

**RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

With all case studies there comes a certain amount of criticism; that is, that they lack validity and reliability. Cohen et al. (2007) refers to reliability as the “fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched” (p.149). Validity refers to whether the data gathered about a particular concept are really able to assist in examining the concept effectively (Bryman, 2012).

**Reliability**

To enhance reliability I took notes, used a dictaphone to record the participants, and later typed up the transcripts verbatim. Creswell (2013) highlights the need to transcribe every pause and interjection by participants to ensure that nothing is missed. Gathering the leaders’, teachers’ and students’ voice about their thoughts and ideas of what actually happens in their schools in regard to student voice was a reliable method of data collection. It was important in this study to get reliable data and to ensure that my ‘voice’ neither influenced nor detracted participants from their own world view, thoughts and ideas. With this in mind, I was careful to keep to the set questions which were worded in the same way for all participants.

Internal reliability was also considered when analysing data, in particular, the participants’ assumptions and perceptions of the benefits of students decision-making correlated specifically to improved motivation and engagement to learn. As indicated by Yin (2009), case studies involve analytic generalisations and this can pose internal reliability difficulties as there is a reliance on inferences as the event is not directly observed.

External reliability can also be a problem in case studies where data is qualitative, and where participant’s views, values and beliefs are measured to a wider theory, rather than quantitative data that is more objective (Yin, 2009).
Validity
The interpretive validity of the research will rely on the researcher’s ability to observe participants and accurately record their beliefs, attitudes, cognitions, and evaluations both consciously and unconsciously (Martella, Nelson & Morgan, 2013). Elliott (2004) advocates for observations to be carried out as well as interviews of actual practices. Cohen et al. (2007), however, argues against using observations as a basis for the research study as they only give a snapshot of the student’s or teacher’s behaviour and actions at a specific time and are hard to validate without a triangulation of data to infer cause and effect (Cohen et al., 2007). Bell (2010) also warns of difficulties that the researcher could face if they do not have a variety of information sources to enable thorough cross checking of data. In consideration of validity of data and the context of this case study, observations were discounted.

Creswell (2013) states that the term ‘validity’ describes a variety of perspectives and prefers to use the term to describe validation of a process and as such believes it to be a distinct strength of qualitative research. In this case study, validity refers to the accuracy of the interview data recordings and subsequent cross checking and coding of information gathered from a variety of information sources; namely, focus groups and one to one interviews with leaders, teachers and students. This balance of sources fits with the perspective of Guba and Lincoln (2005) who state that there needs to be consideration around ‘fairness’ where there is a balance of participants’ views, claims, concerns, perspectives and voices. Failure to do this can be seen as bias, despite it not necessarily being deliberate, and also requires the interviewer to strive for all participants to have an opportunity to offer their thinking, without ‘leading’ the person in their answers (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

To ensure internal validity the semi-structured interviewees were given their transcripts and the focus groups were given a summary of the discussions to look over and amend as they wished.

Trustworthiness
Trustworthiness is an important component of a qualitative study which Bryman (2012) and Creswell (2013) state allows the researcher to assess the quality of the research. Therefore, the study focused on the perceptions, thoughts and ideas from
participants without any interjections from myself which could otherwise affect the trustworthiness of the discussions.

**ETHICAL ISSUES**
Before carrying out any research it is vital to consider all ethical implications and formulate solutions to ensure the research doesn’t burden, invade privacy, harm or offend in any way (Wilkinson, 2001).

**Minimisation of harm, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.**

**Minimisation of harm**
Research ethics is fundamentally about clarity around the nature of the agreement between the researcher and the research subjects and ‘caring’ for the participants (Bell, 2010). For research to be ethically sound participants must be protected from harm, hurt and suffering as a result of their participation (Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). All participants received an information sheet detailing the research intentions and format (see the Participant Information Sheet Appendix B). Any research that harms others is considered unacceptable by most people (Wilkinson, 2001). To eliminate any chance of harm to the participants, transcripts of interviews were made with no embellishment or interpretation that could cause bias and all digitally-recorded data and notes were securely locked away in my office so that no one could access and read them. The leaders that I interviewed received their own transcript but were not given access to the focus group notes or transcripts. One principal who wanted to sit in on the teachers’ focus group was advised that this was not possible. A teacher aide sat in the student focus group to further help the students feel comfortable and happy to participate.

I chose to interview the students in a focus group, rather than on a one-to-one basis to help the students feel more safe and comfortable to answer questions and give their views. As recommended by Cohen et al. (2011), I also made it clear that the focus group interview was a voluntary exercise and that they could abstain from any part of the process or withdraw entirely if they so wish.
Informed Consent

Prior to the research being undertaken informed consent was sought and gathered from all participants (see the Participant Consent Forms Appendix C). This informed consent included details of exactly what was going to happen in the interviews. Bell (2010) believes it is necessary that the participants fully understand the purpose of the research, why they are being interviewed, what the interview entails and how it will be carried out. All students were invited to participate by letter, and a full disclosure of the purpose of the research was included. Consent letters were sent to caregivers, as well as to the students, to ensure that informed consent has been obtained and that the caregivers are in full agreement with their child participating in the research. This will also serve to protect myself, the researcher, from any possible confusion or questions later, which Bell (2010) states is an important consideration not to be overlooked.

Anonymity and confidentiality

To avoid participants’ possible concerns about being identified they were all given information letters and consent forms detailing that they would not have their names published in the research study. To avoid participants being worried about being linked to particular responses, during the interviews, I assured them of confidentiality and they chose their own pseudonyms. They were not asked their real name nor was it recorded at any stage to assure anonymity. Bell (2010) recommends using pseudonyms to provide participants with anonymity and confidentiality.

Although the focus group participants knew each other the summary of findings was typed up using pseudonyms. All quotes include a pseudonym with the last letter relating to either school A or B. All participants were asked to agree that anything they said in the focus group was not to be repeated outside of it, to ensure the confidentiality of participants’ thoughts and ideas. The consent form reiterated that there was to be no sharing of any of the interview outside of the group. To further ensure confidentially the interviews and focus groups were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed by myself.

The interview transcripts and focus group summaries were made available to the participants for them to add, delete or amend anything they wished to.
CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of this research into the perceived value that student ‘voice’ can have to improve student motivation and engagement for learning. From a constructivist paradigm, questions were generated with attention to ethical requirements to ensure that all people were comfortable and confident of participating and felt safe in doing so. Choosing a qualitative interpretivist approach enabled me to gather the participants’ voice and represent their views openly and honestly.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of data collection from semi-structured interviews with two leadership teams, two focus group discussions with teachers and two focus group discussions with students from two schools. Themes and sub themes will be identified from the data gathered and presented in this chapter. The purpose of the focus groups and interviews was to gain the perceptions of different groups about student voice and its impact on student motivation, efficacy and engagement for learning. The interview questions and focus group questions used are included at the back of this thesis in Appendices A, B and C respectively.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the students’ questions were written in child-friendly language in order to facilitate the gathering of the students’ perspectives on student voice. Data from the student questions that mirrored the focus of questions asked of the leaders and teachers have been combined in this chapter to provide greater clarity of findings.

Data presentation

Questions asked of the leaders, teachers and students are presented in numerical order below with the findings grouped under each question. Those questions that were used specifically for student focus groups and do not exactly align to the semi-structured interviews are listed under a separate sub heading with the student findings under each question. The key findings have then been used to identify themes and sub themes which are presented in Table 4.13 on page 79, page 80 and page 81.
THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The interview participants
To ensure anonymity and confidentiality for participants in this thesis, pseudonyms were used for the two schools involved in this research. The schools, for the purpose of this study, are called School A and School B respectively. To further ensure anonymity for participants, the semi-structured interviewees are referred to as ‘leaders’ rather than he/she.

The focus group participants
All of the participants chose their own pseudonyms. This helped put them at ease and feel more comfortable about sharing their perceptions, thoughts and ideas. The leadership team were not included as part of the focus groups which may have helped put the teachers in the groups at ease with the discussion about student voice at the school. The teachers had a range of years of experience at the school, were representative of both genders, and collectively brought a wealth of teaching experience to the focus group discussion.

FINDINGS - Interviews and focus groups

Question One asked: What do you understand by the notion of student voice? Describe what you think student voice means and what it looks like in school.

A total of 50 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to this question, and five main response sets were identified. Of these five areas one theme was commonly mentioned – that is, the leaders, teachers and students suggested that student voice is the mechanism by which students have opportunities to speak, share ideas and make decisions.

This is shown in Table 4.1 overleaf, along with the other main response sets.
Table 4.1  Question 1: Leaders, teachers and students data  
(A= School A, B= School B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership (4)</th>
<th>Teachers (8)</th>
<th>Students (11)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to speak, share ideas, make decisions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of a learning dialogue between teacher and student (next learning steps)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing jobs in class/playground</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A change in locus of control (sharing the power)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to have a ‘voice’ and feel valued for contributions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senior leadership team perspectives (semi-structured Interviews)

All of the leaders understood student voice as being about students being given opportunities to share ideas and make decisions that impact on both the classroom and in the wider school environment. One school leader described student voice as being a tool for building up students’ confidence to speak up, share ideas and feel valued by teachers. This gives teachers the opportunity to listen to the students’ ideas and let them make decisions on matters that impact on them. Three of the leaders spoke of students being given ‘power’ to speak which required the teachers to share the locus of control in order to fully engage the students.

Teachers’ perspectives (focus group)

The teachers predominantly shared the same views as the leaders - that student voice is about students having conversations with teachers about their learning and making decisions both in the classroom and school-wide. One teacher also
commented that it is important that the students feel ‘safe’ to be able to share their ideas, and described student voice as:

*Kids having a say, being able to feel confident and comfortable in sharing their ideas in a safe environment (PA).*

This suggests that a student’s sense of efficacy, which may be defined as a sense of feeling secure and happy to contribute, is an important idea. ‘Assessment for Learning’ principles, which are best described as “a process by which assessment information is used by teachers to adjust their teaching strategies, and by students to adjust their learning strategies” (Ministry of Education) were also seen as a strong component of student voice:

*Students should know where their next learning steps should be … the student as much as the teacher because it’s the student’s learning (PA).*

Teachers from both schools expressed a similar view:

*Setting goals for themselves; understand what those goals are, and how to meet them (BA).*

*To me it’s like giving kids wings, it’s not saying try flying it like fly you know…tell us what you are going to do and where you going to go, and how you are going to do it and then we will have a look and try and support you in it (JB).*

**Students’ perspectives (focus group)**
The majority of students described student voice as students talking, with two students identifying speeches as an example of student voice in their school:

*I think it’s like, how a student like, it’s the voice of the student, like, you could get to know the sorts of what the students thinks, like sort of (JA).*
I think it means, like people saying their thoughts about their school, and yeah (BOBA).

Three of the students who mentioned the speeches as an example of student voice elaborated on their description of students doing speeches:

*They’re (the teachers) always trying to improve the students’ confidence and like, they should like get to say what they want to say and what they think, and to try persuade other people and to, they’re saying what they should be right (JA).*

*We do speeches where we like share a speech for three minutes to the class, and you’re like sharing your ideas about what you think could improve or what you think is good already (BOA).*

The students did not strongly link student voice to talking about their learning in terms of next learning steps, but did link student voice to making decisions around jobs that needed to be done both within the classroom and outside in the playground. Having a teacher to listen to them and spend time getting to know who they are was also deemed important to the students. This is consistent with the teachers’ and leaders’ views that students need to be able to speak, share ideas and make decisions.

**Question Two asked: How do the vision and values of your school relate to student voice? Where do you see examples of student voice in the school?**

A total of 50 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to this question, and five main response sets were identified. These are shown in Table 4.2 overleaf. The school vision and values were seen by many of the participants as important in terms of school-wide direction and student guidelines relating to learning and behaviour.
Table 4.2  Question 2: Leaders, teachers and students data  
(A= School A, B= School B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) A B</td>
<td>(8) A B</td>
<td>(11) A B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How vision and values relate to student voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link to student ownership; Good</td>
<td>1 A 2 B</td>
<td>1 A 6 B</td>
<td>2 A 2 B</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicators, thinkers, managing self, listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and relating to each other.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to opportunities for student voice in their</td>
<td>1 A 3 B</td>
<td>1 A 4 B</td>
<td>1 A 1 B</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of student voice in the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of SV: student teacher conversations</td>
<td>2 A 4 B</td>
<td>4 A 4 B</td>
<td>9 A</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leading learning, reflect, and feedback to teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for decision-making in class and schoolwide</td>
<td>1 A 1 B</td>
<td>2 A 3 B</td>
<td>9 A</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- class activities, finishing off work, AFL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>philosophies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-led conferences, student</td>
<td>1 A 2 B</td>
<td>3 A 2 B</td>
<td>8 A</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>councillors, PE monitors, recycling.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senior leadership team perspectives (semi-structured Interviews)

The leaders saw their schools’ visions and values as an integral part of the systems and structures of an effective school. School A viewed the vision and values in terms of empowering students to aspire to be the best they can be and that this should be evident in the conversations that the students have with their teachers:

*It’s a day to day thing and it should be happening in all those roaming conversations that happen between teacher and student at any time of the day, on any day and any year (PC).*
The leaders from School B also placed emphasis on the need for a clear vision and a set of values to which the students can relate. However, School B’s school vision and values appeared to have become disjointed with new initiatives being implemented in school this year with the appointment of a new principal. The new principal is currently designing a new set of values and a vision collaboratively with the teachers. The principal felt it is vital that the staff have a ‘voice’ in the new vision and values to ensure a sense of ownership and ensure that it is living and breathing at the school. One of the leaders felt that it was important for the adults to be role models for the students in terms of student voice. The leader explained that the school encourages the leaders to:

*Have respectful conversations with colleagues and to participate and contribute so I think that definitely filters down to the way students behave in our school (CL).*

**Teachers’ perspectives (focus group)**

Teachers reported that students share their learning with their parents at student-led conferences. Teachers are not directly involved with this process although they are there for support if needed. School A have a ‘gifted’ group of students who share and vocalise ideas which link to the vision, values and school motto. Examples of student voice included student councils, student-led conferences, and students talking about their next learning steps. Students also get to make decisions about where the fundraising money is spent, and what type of fundraising activities the school will do.

One of the teachers described a feedback model where the students were allowed to give feedback to teachers on how well the teacher is supporting them and what units they are enjoying:

*Are you enjoying the way this is working? How am I going with teaching you? How am I going with supporting you? So just giving them the opportunity to give me feedback? And this is just between the students and myself. I look for trends within that as well and sometimes make changes to my practice based on that (BA).*
This is a clear example of student voice, as the teacher is giving students opportunities to speak, is listening to the students’ ideas and thoughts, and then makes adjustments to teaching in order to improve students’ engagement and motivation to learn. Some teachers commented that they also deliberately seek out the quieter students to ensure that their voice is heard, as otherwise they would not be independently forthcoming with ideas and thoughts on their learning.

Students’ perspectives (Focus group)

Students from School B did not know the vision and values for their school. However, students from School A were able to clearly articulate the school motto which represents the school’s vision and values. These are visible in School A throughout the school and encourage students to be self-managers and take responsibility for their learning. One student referred to the school motto as helping students learn and said:

You can keep learning for all your life and you can never actually know everything so you can never stop learning. You can always soar to new heights in your knowledge (JA).

However, the findings suggest that although the vision and values encompass values that promote student voice, it is the teachers that make the overall decisions on school-wide matters and curriculum design and delivery.

Students talked about a self-management board where students record what they need to work on and when its ‘self-management time’ (earned through a rewards points system) the students check the board and decide on which bit of work they will work on next. However, the teacher chooses when the students do the ‘self-management’ work, as one student stated:

Well that was the teacher’s choice ‘cause it’s her classroom (JASA).

Teachers seem to hold the locus of control with varying degrees of student voice linked to learning and jobs that need to be completed in the school and the classroom such as:
Wet day monitors where teachers can go off and talk about some stuff where seniors go and look after the juniors and the middles (JASA).

The students also identified other jobs that they are given to do such as taking work off their classroom walls, completing rubbish duties and being PE monitors.

Question Three asked: What opportunities does the school provide for students to have a voice in their learning? What examples do you have that you can give me?

Question Five asked: What kind of student voice contributions do your students make to their learning in the classroom? And school-wide?

Questions three and question five have been combined here as they are both asking for examples of student voice opportunities. A total of 44 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to this question, and seven main response sets were identified, and are presented in Table 4.3 overleaf.

Leaders, teachers and students identified opportunities for student voice such as student leader roles and student-led conferences where students run the conference about their learning with parents and are supported by teachers where necessary. The overarching theme for both teachers and one of the students from School B was that of the conversations that students have with their teachers about their learning.
Table 4.3  **Question 3: Leaders, teachers and students data**  
(*A= School A, B= School B*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement is built through student leadership roles (school council,</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student leaders, peer mediators), leading assemblies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students share their learning with teachers and make decisions - next</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>step learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have a role in student-led conferences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student leaders and Y6 chn. participate in decision-making in school-wide issues, e.g. Enviroschools, sandpit design, tuck shop</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘teaching as inquiry’ approach is used</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students participate in decision-making that impact on the classroom environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students share learning with their peers and make decisions about their next steps.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Senior leadership team perspectives (semi-structured Interviews)**  
The leaders talked about student voice in terms of inquiry (students making decisions about the activities they do) and all mentioned ‘Assessment for Learning’ (Absolum et al., 2009) philosophies which include students having conversations
with their teachers and being able to talk about their learning. One leader commented that their teachers are working on students identifying their next steps in reading, writing and maths and starting to build inquiry learning but the leader also cautioned that:

*If children don't have good formative assessment practices… I don't think that they can set themselves good goals for an inquiry. I think formative assessment first (TE).*

One leader (BR) referred to an ‘authentic learning model’ and believes that teachers need to use student voice to give students the opportunity to take some control of their learning, have input into what is happening and “run all the mechanisms” that are required to ensure the task is completed. Opportunities for students to make decisions include the *Enviroschools programme* and playground design. A school initiative called *Garden to Table* where students get to decide what food to grow was also given as an example of student voice. The leader who mentioned it stated that:

*There is a lot of student voice in there, as to what we grow, how they want to do it, what they want to eat (TE).*

One leader would like to see the students having opportunities to make decisions about the curriculum delivery.

**Teachers’ perspectives (focus group)**

Two teachers and the leadership team mentioned that students get voted onto their leadership role by the other senior students.

*It looks like in our school that children are making choices, decisions and taking action and starting to identify “what if we could do this” or the questions that they are asking so that they are starting to realise that they can have an impact and they don't have to be told what to do (PB).*
This decision-making had been seen by one teacher in regard to the classroom layout. The teacher commented that they get:

*Feedback from the children along the way which is interesting. I decided I wanted to get rid of my desks for a big desk. We changed a few little bits from last year that the children wanted (PB).*

Although teachers believed that student voice includes students talking about their learning, there was only one teacher who mentioned students setting their own goals. Instead, the conversations held between the teachers and students predominantly involved students coming up with their own idea and projects and then the teachers providing workshops according to the student needs.

**Students’ perspectives (focus group)**
The students that responded to this question aligned student voice to student leadership roles and decisions made on outdoor school-wide matters.

One student suggested that student voice includes a process that they go through when they work with their buddy and do ‘think pair share’ (students share their ideas with each other and the teacher). No students mentioned students writing their own goals. Other examples included making decisions about the playground and improving outdoor playing areas, being able to tell the teacher where they want to sit in class and what group they want to work in. Two students felt that they didn’t make decisions in their learning.
Question Four (leaders, teachers) and Question Three (students) asked: How well do you feel teachers know the students? Why do you say that? Is this important to you?

A total of 50 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to this question (see Table 4.4 below) and four main response sets were identified. The dominant responses for these questions identified that it is important to build trusting relationships with the students, to listen to them and find time to get to know the students’ home life as well as daily school life.

**Table 4.4 Question 4: Leaders, teachers and question 3 students data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A     B</td>
<td>A     B</td>
<td>A     B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers take time to actively ask and listen to the students about their</td>
<td>2     4</td>
<td>3     4</td>
<td>4     4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers build trusting relationships with students by giving their time to</td>
<td>2     4</td>
<td>3     4</td>
<td>3     3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>find out about them on a personal level (home life and personal interests)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships with the students is important</td>
<td>2     1</td>
<td>4     2</td>
<td>1     3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers chat to students when out of the classroom (playground / after school)</td>
<td>1     2</td>
<td>1     1</td>
<td>1     5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senior leadership team perspectives (semi-structured Interviews)

All leaders stated that it is important to know the students, what motivates them, what type of personality they have, and what it is about school that does and doesn't work for them. One leader said that it is very important that the teachers have
community engagement to motivate and engage the students but at the present time it is lacking and many parents drop their students at the gate but do not come in. This leader wants to change this and engage parents more with their child’s learning. Three leaders also believed that their teachers know the parents and the community well with one leader stating that the:

*Teachers are engaged in the lives of the students. They care passionately about these children and they communicate with their parents (CL).*

The exception to this was the second language students (English for speakers of other languages, ESOL) where there is a language barrier. One leader added that teachers are limited as to the available time they have to talk to students due to the constraints of the ‘weighted’ curriculum and the National Standards. The leader believed that you:

*Can’t really teach anybody well unless you know them really well (CL).*

**Teachers’ perspectives (Focus group)**
The majority of teachers responded to this question and said that they value getting to know the students and often chat to them when out of the classroom. There is also provision at one of the schools for students to blog from home to their teacher. One teacher gave an example of student voice where two students were allowed to form ideas regarding a suitable consequence for two other students who had been caught behaving badly. The misbehaving students said they were fine with the punishment as it had come from their peers and this, the teacher felt was positive and helped maintain teacher student positive relationships. The teacher felt, that “she/he was not the bad wolf which was deemed important” (SA).

To find out how the students are feeling about their learning two teachers used attitude surveys and one teacher used thinking hats – finding out how students feel. The two teachers who carry out an attitude survey give out slips of paper (tiles) of different colours and the students hold up the colour of the paper according to how
they feel e.g green is good, yellow is I have to think about it, red is I don’t get it at all. If the teacher gets lots of ‘greens’ then they would say:

Great! Could you go help the reds…because the reds haven’t got it so it’s a way that they can help each other and also give me a fairly clear indication if they’re all red it might be time that I need to re-teach (BA).

Teachers from School B felt it was important to get to know the students and that building up relationships with them helped the student’s self-esteem. The teachers felt that this helps to increase the student’s motivation and engagement to learn. Two teachers said:

We get to know our students through conversation; we spend time with them in the classroom before school before 9am we encourage them to share with us what is going on and we share with them (PB).

I think it’s also important to know them as a person as an actual individual, what their interests are, what kinds of things they, in their home life, outside of school, with sports and activities, they’re the kinds of things you can use as hooks for their next learning steps (PEBA).

Those relationships I have with the students, and knowing them and knowing what their passions and what they are enjoy that is conversations outside of the classroom just helps us connect (BA).

The two teachers’ views from School A were shared by another teacher from School A who believes that relationships are fundamental to student learning.
**Students’ perspectives (Focus group)**

Students who commented on this question from both schools felt that it was important to them that the teacher knew them both in terms of their learning and also in terms of their personality, how they think, their home life and interests.

One student said that the teacher knew them about 50% and two other students said that the teacher knows them 70%. However one student said that:

> *The teacher didn’t know everything about who they were (JAB).*

> *Sometimes she doesn’t know what to do in a particular situation. It affects my learning because she doesn’t know what I am capable of (CAB).*

Two students felt it was important to make sure that the work was right for them. Another student felt that the teacher did know what they were capable of and what they were not capable of and gave them work that was right for them and also helped with problems that they had with their work.

**Question Six (Leaders, Teachers) asked:** What kind of decisions do your students get to make in the classroom and the school? How do you choose which students to whom you will give decision-making opportunities? How do you help them to make decisions?

**Question Eight (Students) asked:** What kind of decisions do you get to make in the classroom and the school? Describe how the teachers help you to make decisions. How does it make you feel when your teacher listens to you and you get to make decisions?

A total of 57 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to this question, and seven main response sets were identified (see Table 4.5 overleaf). Of these seven areas, one overarching theme identified by the respondents was that student decision-making related particularly to those students designated student leadership roles in the schools. Furthermore, students were
chosen for leadership positions according to a voting system and also picked by teachers and a principal.

**Table 4.5  Question 6: Leaders, teachers and question 8 students data**  
*(A= School A, B= School B)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student leaders (voted in by peers) make decisions about projects outside of school and in school (fundraising, PE games, projects)</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>4 1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students make decisions about inquiry learning.</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>3 2</td>
<td>2 3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are happy to share ideas when they feel supported and comfortable.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 2</td>
<td>2 3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students make decisions how they use their time in class.</td>
<td>4 2</td>
<td>1 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students make decisions about their learning (AFL principles).</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>2 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students get to decide what they do in reading and writing (activities, based on a points system).</td>
<td>2 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers choose students who can listen and have the confidence to contribute to the discussion.</td>
<td>1 2 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students decide where they sit in class/groups.</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>1 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

66
Senior Leadership team perspectives (Semi-structured Interviews)

One leader identified student leaders as having opportunities to make decisions that would impact on their school. The leader specified the importance of having student leaders of varying abilities, which includes priority learners, and stated the importance of students having a voice and choosing the student council.

In the classroom, one leader linked student voice to a process whereby the students are given an ‘authentic question’ and then encouraged to explore the question and discuss what they could do next in their learning. In terms of curriculum decision-making, the leader felt that the locus of control was still with the teachers and that the students didn’t have as much of a voice as the leader would have liked. In fact, the leader felt that having that kind of dialogue with students could be problematic:

For a whole bunch of students in our schools that for whom that would be one step too far. (CL).

One of the leaders questioned students being able to make decisions about their inquiry learning when they do not have formative assessment knowledge and understanding. The leader felt that it was all teacher-led and not student-led. To change this, the leader felt that the student needed to be taught the fundamentals of formative assessment to enable them to be able to have conversations about their learning needs. Furthermore, the leader stated:

Before you even go there and start training the kids you have to know that the teachers know the assessment data inside and out. You have to know that their practices are good and until I know that I am too scared to go to a 3 way conferences or student-led conferences because it will expose our teachers hugely (TE)

Teachers’ perspectives (Focus group)

Although the teachers hold the locus of control in many areas one teacher alluded to the students contributing to the decision-making by providing evidence to be able to move up a group. However, it was evident from the teacher’s responses that the teacher still has ultimate control over the decision-making.
Another teacher commented that the students get a ‘self-management’ time once or twice a week where they:

*Make decisions about where they need to use their time- what work they need to be doing, who do they need to be talking to for some peer help…do they need to come and talk to me to get some feedback on something so it’s called self-management and then they’re making those choices themselves. They don’t necessarily have to vocalise it to me but they just know that that’s their decisions* (BA).

Another teacher shared BA’s views, and added that it is important to let the students manage time and not give them set times to complete work. However, there is still a need sometimes for the teacher to have locus of control in terms of a final decision in regard to deadlines. Two teachers mentioned that it is important for the students to know where the support is and that there is continuity so that students know the parameters in which they are making decisions in. One of those teachers stated that:

*Continuity is important to all of us, we kinda have the same kind of boundaries and expectations in place and that makes it easy for the children* (JB).

Reference was made by several teachers to students that may not have consistency and stability at home. One of the teachers felt that if the students:

*Get some of that (consistency and stability) from us then in some ways we are able to fill their bucket and really make them feel valued* (PB).

Two of the teachers felt that if the students felt valued then they would be more likely to become motivated to contribute to conversations about their learning and subsequently become more engaged in tasks.
Students’ perspectives (Focus group)
With regard to locus of control of student leaders and decision-making about PE games one student said:

*Sometimes I think it might be a student only very rarely but sometimes the teachers like it’s a bit of both. They mishmash it together (JASA).*

Two students said that they are more comfortable to share ideas and participate in decision-making when teachers know them as it helps them feel less shy. School B students commented that they get to choose activities such as PE games, and maths games in the classroom which they felt helps their learning as they get to choose what they want to learn. Most of the students commented that the teachers let them pick the groups they are in. One student, when asked how this made them feel, said:

*Makes me feel pumped up (KB)*

The students that responded did mention that they sometimes get to choose maths games, reading activities. Two students from School A said that they got to choose what to do within their own inquiry in terms of activities. However, the students do not have any decision-making opportunities about the content or delivery of the curriculum lessons. One of the students commented that:

*Everyone has their own separate sort of point system and whoever gets the most points they get to plan a day. Like what they play like PE, they do PE, some reading yeah like basically anything they want to do (JA).*

The two students who get to choose activities within their inquiry learning felt that having some ownership of their learning helps to motivates them to complete the tasks. However, they need to present the ideas to the teacher and it is the teacher that ultimately chooses what they are allowed to do for their inquiry activities.
Question Seven (Leaders) asked: What are the successes and challenges that you have experienced as a strategic leader in implementing student ‘voice’ initiatives at this school?

Question Seven (Teachers) asked: What have been some of the successes and challenges that you have experienced with student voice strategies in school?

A total of 13 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to the challenges, and a total of 20 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to the successes, of implementing student voice initiatives. Out of these data items four main response sets were identified for each and presented in Table 4.6 overleaf.

Of the four areas, one theme was commonly mentioned – that time is a factor and lack of time to have conversations with students does impact on the ability of teachers to develop student voice strategies in their school. Professional development and a clear vision upheld by the school were identified as the main contributors to a school’s success implementing student voice initiatives.
Table 4.6 Question 7: Leaders, teachers’ data  
(A= School A, B= School B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is a factor-to talk with students and listen to them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers not knowing the students and the way they learn.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s values and abilities (pedagogical knowledge and understanding).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting younger students to participate in decision-making.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-led conferences.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development in house (tools of inquiry learning, Assessment for Learning)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school vision underpinning all that we do with student voice part of it.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-led conferences.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching model (linked to charter) fon student motivation and engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senior Leadership team perspectives (Semi-structured Interviews)

Challenges seen by one leader included bringing in student voice initiatives when the vision and values of the school are not yet in place. The leader felt that bringing the initiatives in too early could expose the teachers’ abilities to parents and it was felt that this could be detrimental to both the school and the teachers.

One leader (BR) said that teachers varied in understanding and using student voice and she/he felt it was all about “Connecting the dots for teachers” so that teachers understand that teaching as inquiry is so much more powerful if there is student voice through it. Furthermore, the leader believes students are:

_Not consumers they are partners, if the student has a voice, a credible voice, a voice that is really listened to, then this can have huge impact on the quality of instruction and teaching and learning. The challenge_
of course is that this takes time, it takes time for the professional development and it takes time to make that time for conversations with children. And that’s an issue in every school (BR).

Another point raised was about the language when encouraging student voice. It was found in School A that students tended to describe an ‘effective learner’ in terms of behaviour rather than describing their learning attributes. Another word of caution came in terms of changing the locus of control from the teachers to the students as it is one thing to say this but another to shift the ‘mindset’ of teachers to do this.

Teachers’ perspectives (Focus group)

One teacher commented that the teachers have:

*Been given more permission to try more things and encouraged you know to let different things happen and children to have a better voice and I think its modelled to us by our principal I think she models that all the time. She does it without even thinking and it is just who she is and what she does* (AB).

Getting resistant students to contribute their voice was a challenge identified by one teacher. To overcome this challenge the teacher gives the student a buddy and coaches them to participate when the time is right for them. A challenge experienced by some of the teachers was based around the voting system for the school council. By giving the students total ownership of who was to be voted in resulted in a student being selected who then subsequently turned out to be an unsatisfactory leader. One of the teachers, though, responded to that dilemma and said that sometimes the teachers just have to take back the locus of control and “knock out those real barriers” (PEBA).

Two teachers alluded to the challenge of having senior students who have not been ‘brought up’ on the ethos of student voice and who have:

*No idea of what the idea of having a voice is so they’ve almost lived in that passive environment for a big part of their schooling life. So*
it’s quite a new idea to them so for some of them it’s taken a lot longer to acknowledge that yes they can have a voice and in that it is meaningful as well. That’s one of the things I’ve found difficult (BB).

When you don’t know the kids and you don’t know their learning styles or their personalities as much so you might be demanding of them – I want an answer- but actually there is the kid that needs to sit there for 30 seconds and listen to a bunch of answers before they contribute or you want them to think about themselves but they’re the type of kid that needs to talk about it with somebody because they’re so verbal. So I think that can be a challenge at the beginning of the year as you figure out where these kids fit in with their personality and their learning styles (PB).

**Question Eight (Leaders), Question Nine (Teachers) asked:** What professional development have the teachers at this school received (or are receiving now) that promote student voice?

A total of 15 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to the professional development that teachers had attended (see Table 4.7 overleaf). Out of these data items four main response sets were identified. The overarching factors in the professional development is that much of it was run in house, with the leader taking the session and role modelling what they want to see happen in the school. This was seen to be empowering and motivating for staff to try new initiatives.
Table 4.7  Question 8/9: Leaders and teachers.  
(A= School A, B= School B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership (4)</th>
<th>Teachers (8)</th>
<th>Students (11)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment for Learning (formative assessment).</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student voice pedagogies.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-led conferences.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to increase student voice through reporting to parents.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senior Leadership team perspectives (Semi-structured Interviews)

One leader explained that the school has had many different types of professional development on inquiry learning and 21st century learning which ‘touched’ on student voice. The principal felt they were behind other schools in terms of the latest student voice pedagogy and currently they are working on formative assessment. The principal felt that they cannot fully embrace student voice until the teachers have a grip on formative assessment principles. They are also going to have some professional development on modern learning environments which includes student voice pedagogies.

The principal stressed that although student voice was part of the professional development the intention of the sessions was to raise awareness in the teachers that there was “a whole different world out there” (TE) and they needed to step up to new initiatives. At School A professional development was carried out by outside agencies (Assessment for Learning) and also - in house by the principal or deputy principal.
Teachers’ perspectives (Focus group)

Teachers from School A mentioned that they have had external providers for ‘Assessment for Learning’ professional development and in-house professional development from their deputy principal. The teachers from school B commented that the school is very good at giving them very relevant professional development and it has improved hugely from what they were used to. Teacher from both schools commented positively on the professional development they had received and stated that teachers need to be challenged and to feel uncomfortable in order to make change and talk about their new learning:

Our teachers needed to be challenged to improve and I think people needed a push off the cliff…a push was needed and that was what we were given (PB).

It’s just really good learning and development that you hear all the time and people are asking each other and talking to each other and sharing, its fantastic (JB).

Question Nine (Leaders) asked: How do you see the future of the school in terms of student voice initiatives? What tools or strategies are you intending to use? What strategic leadership will you carry out to lead and support staff in student voice strategies?

Question Ten (Teachers) asked: How do you see the future of the school in terms of empowering, motivating and engaging students to learn? What tools or strategies are you intending to use? What can the leadership team do to help you implement student voice strategies?

A total of 13 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to the professional development that teachers had attended (see Table 4.8 overleaf). Out of these data items seven main response sets were identified.
Table 4.8  **Question 9/10: Leaders**  
(*A= School A, B= School B*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership (4)</th>
<th>Teachers (8)</th>
<th>Students (11)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers collaboratively create / develop school-wide vision and values/ culture.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers using an inquiry model to teach.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Leaders as role models:  
Walk the talk for teachers to see how student voice can look in the classroom to motivate and engage students to learn | 1 | 1 |     |    |     |    | 2 |
| Students to be able to articulate how and where they learn best | 1 | 1 |     |    |     |    | 2 |
| Assessment for Learning practices visible.              | 1 | 1 |     |    |     |    | 2 |
| Children to own the vision and values.                  | 1 |    |     |    |     |    | 2 |

Senior leadership team perspectives (Semi-structured Interviews)

One leader who is new to the school believed that it is imperative that they start with collaboratively creating a vision and set of values school-wide with student voice interwoven to increase student motivation and engagement for learning:

*Very explicit action for those children and those are all unpacked for the children so the child should be able to go there and think if I want to learn and grow and shine these are things I have to do and if there is good student voice built into that it should reflect us in the community.*
From there the leader believed they could break it down and identify how student voice could help them build formative assessment practices, community engagement and relationships with the community through three-way student-led conferences. Role modelling was mentioned as one tool to develop teacher effectiveness. Schools A’s professional development has been about student-led conferences and e-learning led and was led by one of the school leaders. The e-learning digital citizenship professional development has been led by an external facilitator.

Visiting other schools was seen as beneficial in terms of professional development and one leader explained that they sent two teachers who took a leadership role to other schools who then returned highly motivated and ‘sold’ the ideas to the rest of the staff. The professional development was organic (BR), evolving as they went through the process leading to one of school leaders running in house professional development sessions.

**Student focus group questions (4, 5, 6/7, 9, 10).**

Due to the similarity of some questions asked of the leaders, teachers and students the student questions one, two, three and question eight have been combined and covered earlier in this chapter. Student question six and seven have also been combined as they have the same focus, question seven was merely a rephrasing of question six’s focus aimed at getting more student data. This section therefore begins with student question four.

**Question Four asked:** What are some things teachers do to help motivate you with your learning? What else could they do to motivate you more?

**Question Ten asked:** What else would you like to tell me about teachers, how you learn best, what motivates you and helps you achieve your learning goals?

A total of 53 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to the professional development that teachers had attended. This is presented in Table 4.9 overleaf. Out of these data items ten main response sets were identified. The overarching theme as to what teachers could do to motivate students included talking
to the students, giving them more ownership of their environment and allowing them to make decisions that would impact on them.

Table 4.9  Question 4/10: Students data  
(A= School A, B= School B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher talks to me and knows me</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher sometimes lets us make decisions in class (seating, groups, tasks- as a reward)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher encourages us to keep going, helps us, never gives up</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gives us ownership of classroom environment-design</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward us more (food, games)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gets to know us more, capabilities and personality to give us work that suits us better</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school vision and values motivate us</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher makes learning fun. Uses humour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of control is shared with the teacher who lets us choose our work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher lets us make more decisions in the classroom about our learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ perspectives (Focus group)
The students were keen to have more ownership of the classroom layout in terms of where they sit and types of furniture and resources. They also felt that they are more motivated and engaged in their learning when teachers are positive and encouraging
regardless of how clever they feel they are. One student said the teacher was usually positive which helps with the learning:

*He doesn’t really say that, like, the negative things about it. He always says the positive things and the rewards, not what you have to do (JA).*

*The teacher could show us different ways to do a task and then we could choose the way that we want to do it. If we are comfortable and happy with what we are doing then the time flows a lot faster and we won’t get bored (DCB).*

School A students clearly articulate the school values and referred to it throughout the focus group discussion. Highly motivating for them the values ‘drive’ their behaviour and learning habits.

**Question Five asked: What would the perfect classroom look like? Describe a classroom you would like to be in that would make you want to learn more.**

A total of 29 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to the professional development that teachers had attended. Out of these data items seven main response sets were identified. This is presented in Table 4.10 below. The overarching point from the students was that they want more time to talk to the teacher, for the teacher to get to know them and also for them to know the teacher.
Table 4.10  *Question 5: Students data*  
*(A= School A, B= School B)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership (4)</th>
<th>Teachers (8)</th>
<th>Students (11)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More conversations with the teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No chairs/desks –beanbags instead</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couch and pillows in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is fun</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More resources</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More computers, printer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating posters and colourful walls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ perspectives (Focus group)

The students had a range of ideas about what they perceive a perfect classroom to have in it. Five students suggested getting rid of desks and making the room more comfortable with bean bags and a couch. Most of the students wanted the teacher to be more available to them when they want to talk to them and they also wanted the teacher to bring more humour into their learning. Some of the students commented that some of the classrooms were plain and uninspiring and wanted colourful walls with motivating positive posters and work on them.

**Question Six (students) asked:** How does your teacher know what you can do in reading, writing and maths? How often do you talk to your teacher about what you can do and what you need to do next?

**Question Seven (students) asked:** What does your teacher do that shows you she/he knows about your learning? How important is it that your teacher knows about your learning?

Question six and seven have been combined as question seven was a rephrasing of question 6 in order to probe for more data. Table 4.11 below, presents a total of 17
different data items that were gathered from the analysis of the data and relate to the professional development that teachers had attended. Out of these data items four main response sets were identified. The overarching point was that the students felt that their teachers knew their capability by looking at their work and by testing them.

Table 4.11  Question 6/7: Students data  
(A= School A, B= School B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership (4)</th>
<th>Teachers (8)</th>
<th>Students (11)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher looks at our work when we are stuck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gives us tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher sometimes talks to us about our next learning steps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher helps us at student-led conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students' perspectives (Focus group)

Many of the students placed emphasis on tests as the way that teachers found out about their learning, what they can do, and what they need to do next to achieve. Other ways of finding out about the students' learning included teachers roaming the classroom and helping students when they are stuck with their work. Formative assessment practices feature in this question as some of the students explained that their teachers have conversations with them about their work and their next learning steps.

Student-led conferences were deemed by School A students as another good way of finding out what the students can do. The students stated that the student-led conferences run at school allow them the opportunity to show their parents what they are learning and what they are able to do in terms of reading, writing and maths.
Question Nine (students) asked: How does talking about your learning help you in the classroom? What would you like to see changed? What works best for you?

A total of 20 different data items were gathered from the analysis of the data related to the professional development that teachers had attended. Table 4.12 shows that out of these data items four main response sets were identified. The overarching views of the students who responded to this question was that talking about their learning with the teacher helps the teacher to give them work that is appropriate for them.

Table 4.12  Question 9: Students data  
(A = School A, B = School B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response data</th>
<th>Senior Leadership</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking about my learning helps me - sometimes we get to choose activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions in a group for reading and maths helps me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about my learning helps me know what I am doing wrong and what I'm doing right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about my learning with peers helps me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ perspectives (Focus group)
School B students commented that they get to choose activities such as PE games and maths games in the classroom, which they felt helps their learning as they get to choose what they want to learn. No students mentioned that they get to choose what they do in terms of curriculum learning, although two students from School A did comment that they get to choose what to do within their inquiry learning. One of the
students commented that everyone has their own separate sort of points system and whoever gets the most points gets to plan a day:

*Like what they play like PE, they do PE, some reading yeah like basically anything they want to do (JA)*

Two students felt that having some ownership of their learning helps to motivates them to complete the tasks. Other students wanted to be able to make decisions about what they learn in class and some students explained that they get to present ideas for activities to the teacher. However, the students found that it is the teacher that ultimately chooses what they are allowed to do for their inquiry activities.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

_Categorising the sub themes into data theme findings_

The total number of sub-themes found from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups data was 69. These sub-themes were then grouped into themes according to how they relate to student voice in schools. The process involved: finding key words and coding the transcripts then identifying the sub themes in relation to the questions asked and the themes in the literature review. The four interviews and four focus group sub-themes are presented in Table 4.13 on page 79, page 80 and page 81. The table is divided into three columns: the question number, the sub-themes, and the data themes.

Many of the sub-themes overlap and demonstrate the complexity of student voice in schools, both in the interpretation of the words ‘student voice’ and in the integration of student voice strategies within schools. The reality is that both schools have an understanding of student voice to a degree and are already implementing some student voice strategies which empower and motivate students to learn. The successes and challenges of student voice initiatives in the two schools are identified in Table 4.13 along with a correlation between the sub themes and data themes. Table 4.14 shows the specific sub themes and data themes in relation to the research questions.
### Table 4.13  Question sub-themes and related themes

*(L= Leaders, T= Teachers, ST= Students)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Sub themes</th>
<th>Data Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 L,T</td>
<td>Opportunities to speak, share ideas, make decisions</td>
<td>Agenda for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part of a learning dialogue between teacher and student (next learning steps)</td>
<td>Assessment for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doing jobs in class/playground</td>
<td>Tokenism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A change in locus of control (sharing the power)</td>
<td>Locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities to have a ‘voice’ and feel valued for contributions</td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. L, T</td>
<td>Link to student ownership; Good communicators, thinkers, managing self, listening and relating to each other</td>
<td>School culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Links to opportunities for student voice in their learning</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence of SV: student teacher conversations leading learning, reflect, and feedback to teachers</td>
<td>Assessment for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allows for decision-making in class and school-wide - class activities, finishing off work, AFL philosophies</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student-led conferences, student councillors, PE monitors, recycling</td>
<td>Student leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. L, T</td>
<td>Engagement is built through student leadership roles (school council, student leaders, peer mediators), leading assemblies</td>
<td>School culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students share their learning with teachers and make decisions - next step learning</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students have a role in student-led conferences</td>
<td>School culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Teachers take time to actively ask and listen to the students about their learning</td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers build trusting relationships with students by giving their time to find out about them on a personal level (home life and personal interests)</td>
<td>Cultural Capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building relationships with the students is important</td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers chat to students when out of the classroom (playground / after school)</td>
<td>Cultural capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Sub themes</td>
<td>Data Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) L, T</td>
<td>Student leaders (voted in by peers) make decisions about projects outside of school and in school (fundraising, PE games, projects)</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) ST</td>
<td>Students make decisions about inquiry learning</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students are happy to share ideas when they feel supported and comfortable</td>
<td>Self efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students make decisions how they use their time in class</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students make decisions about their learning (AFL principles)</td>
<td>Assessment for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students get to decide what they do in reading and writing (activities, based on a points system)</td>
<td>Agenda for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers choose students who can listen and have the confidence to contribute to the discussion</td>
<td>Tokenism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students decide where they sit in class/groups</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Challenges |
|---|------------------|
| (7) L, T | Time is a factor: time to have conversations with students and listen to them | Resistance to change |
|  | Teachers not knowing the students and the way they learn | Resistance to change |
|  | Teacher’s values and abilities (pedagogical knowledge and understanding) | School culture |
|  | Getting younger students to participate in decision-making | Self-efficacy |
|  | Student-led conferences | Tokenism |

<p>| Successes |
|---|------------------|
|  | Student-led conferences | Student voice |
|  | Our vision underpinning all that we do with student voice part of it | School culture |
|  | Coaching model (linked to charter) focused on student motivation and engagement for learning | Strategic leadership |
|  | Professional development in house (tools of inquiry learning, Assessment for Learning) | Strategic leadership |
|  | Teacher’s values and abilities (pedagogical knowledge and understanding) | Locus of control |
| (8) L | Assessment for Learning (formative assessment) | Assessment for Learning |
| (9) T | Student voice pedagogies | Prof’ development |
|  | Student-led conferences | School culture |
|  | How to increase student voice through reporting to parents | Reporting to parents |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub themes</th>
<th>Data Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboratively create / develop school-wide vision and values/ culture</td>
<td>Strategic leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers use an inquiry model to teach inquiry</td>
<td>Locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders as role models:</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk the talk for teachers to see how student voice can look</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the classroom to motivate and engage students to learn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students to be able to articulate how /where they learn best</td>
<td>Agenda for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher talks to me and knows me</td>
<td>Cultural capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher sometimes lets us make decisions in class (seating, groups,</td>
<td>Locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tasks- as a reward)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher encourages us to keep going, helps us</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gives up ownership of classroom environment-</td>
<td>Locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward us more (food, games)</td>
<td>Rewards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gets to know us more, capabilities and personality to give us</td>
<td>Cultural capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work that suits us better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school vision and values motivate us</td>
<td>School culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher makes learning fun. Uses humour</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The locus of control is shared with the teacher who lets us choose our</td>
<td>Locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher lets us make more decisions in the classroom about our</td>
<td>Locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More conversations with the teacher</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bean bags instead of chairs and desks</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couch and pillows</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is fun</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher looks at our work when we are stuck</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gives us tests</td>
<td>Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher sometimes talks to us about our next learning steps</td>
<td>Tokenism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher helps us at student-led conferences</td>
<td>Locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes we get to choose activities</td>
<td>Tokenism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions in a group for reading and maths</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about my learning helps me know what I am doing wrong and what</td>
<td>Assessment for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m doing right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about my learning with peers helps me</td>
<td>Assessment for Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.14  Summary of findings: Sub-themes linked to data themes and research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific sub-themes</th>
<th>Data themes</th>
<th>Research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Student leaders and Yr 6s in school-wide issues.</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>(1) In what ways are leaders and teachers implementing student ‘voice’ strategies for students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students participate in decision-making that impact on the classroom environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decision-making around what we do in reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make decisions how they use their time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decision-making in class and schoolwide - class activities, finishing off work, AFL philosophies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Links to opportunities for student voice in their learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers build trusting relationships with students (home life and personal interests).</td>
<td>Cultural capital</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers chat to students when out of the classroom (playground / after school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building relationships with the students is important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher talks to me and knows me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher gets to know us more, capabilities and personality to give us work that suits us better</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunities to contribute and feel valued.</td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers take time to actively ask and listen to the students about their learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building relationships with the students is important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students are happy to share ideas when they feel supported and comfortable to do so</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students who can listen and have the confidence to contribute to the discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Getting younger students to participate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning dialogue between teacher and student</td>
<td>Assessment for Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student teacher conversations leading learning, reflect, and feedback to teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessment for Learning (formative assessment)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I know what I am doing wrong and what I’m doing right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Talking about my learning with peers helps me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific sub-themes</td>
<td>Data themes</td>
<td>Research questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Link to student ownership; Good communicators, thinkers, managing self, listening and relating to each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building engagement through student leadership roles (school council, student leaders, peer mediators), running assemblies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student-led conferences</td>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>(2) What are the successes and challenges for leaders and teachers when implementing student ‘voice’ strategies for students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher’s values and abilities (pedagogical knowledge and understanding)</td>
<td>Strategic leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Our vision underpinning all that we do with student voice part of it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coaching model (linked to charter) focused on student motivation and engagement for learning. Collaboratively create / develop school-wide vision and values/ culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student-led conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher’s values and abilities (pedagogical knowledge and understanding)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching as inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher sometimes lets us make decisions in class (seating, groups, tasks- as a reward)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ownership of classroom environment-design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Let us choose our work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Let us make more decisions in the classroom about our learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decisions about inquiry learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Doing jobs in class/playground</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decision-making around what we do in reading and writing (activities, based on a points system)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher sometimes talks to us about our next learning steps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Talking about our learning- sometimes we choose activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next chapter discusses key findings in relation to the literature reviewed, identifies strengths and limitations, draws conclusions, and provides recommendations on the basis of the research carried out in two schools.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This study explored leaders’, teachers’ and students’ perceptions in regard to student voice initiatives in schools. The purpose was to establish what is currently in place and perceived benefits to students in terms of increased motivation and engagement for learning. It considered the perceptions and experiences of leaders, teachers and students in relation to existing student voice opportunities in the two schools.

Four key conclusions are presented which relate to the two research questions that have guided this project. Limitations of this project will also be acknowledged and suggestions for future research will feature within the final summation.

The discussion for each research question is linked to the data themes that emerged from the data analysis process. The data themes are organised according to the research questions and are displayed in Table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1 Summary of findings: Data themes linked to research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>(1) In what ways are leaders and teachers implementing student ‘voice’ strategies for students?</th>
<th>(2) What are the successes and challenges for leaders and teachers when implementing student ‘voice’ strategies for students?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Themes</td>
<td>Decision-making by students</td>
<td>Strategic leadership/ School culture /Vision and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural capital / Self – efficacy</td>
<td>Locus of control held by teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building relationships and knowing the learner</td>
<td>Tokenism: decision-making ultimately controlled by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment for Learning practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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There will also be discussion comparing and contrasting data from the leaders, teachers and students to the student voice models introduced by Shier in 2001 and Hart in 2002. These models have been selected because they show different levels of participation and are a practical tool for showing the degree of commitment that schools are making in terms of students’ participation in decision-making.

**Research Question One asked: In what ways are leaders and teachers implementing student ‘voice’ strategies for students?**

Three key data themes were identified from the data analysis: the importance of student participation in decision-making; cultural capital and self-efficacy which involve the teachers listening to students and getting a sense of their home and family life; ‘Assessment for Learning’ practices, a formulaic process whereby the teachers give students opportunities to talk about their learning.

**Decision-making**

The sharing of decision-making was not a feature of the data. Teachers tend to make decisions as to what the students are doing in class however the students want to have more of a say in terms of curriculum teaching and learning. The students indicated they would be more motivated to learn if they could have a say in what they were learning and the way the lessons are taught.

The students’ views are reflected in the work of Rudduck and Flutter (2000) who advise it is important that teachers ‘share’ the decision-making to increase students connectedness with the curriculum and learning. Rudduck and Flutter (2000) believe that it is this connectedness to the curriculum and learning that helps students to be motivated, engaged and purposeful with their learning and which also reduces potential disruptive behaviour by disenchanted students. Biddulph (2011) also advocates that student voice encompasses students articulating their perspectives, thoughts and ideas on education in the classroom. This, Biddulph (2011) asserts, allows students to take responsibility for their learning and have more control over curriculum delivery.
In fact, the data collected in this research project suggest that although students are able to make decisions of various types, they do not make decisions about what they would like to make decisions about. The decision-making of these students falls short of Shier’s (2001) model of ‘Pathways to Participation’ and Hart’s (2002) ‘Ladder of Participation’. Although students’ comments in the focus groups support these ideals the findings did not support the higher levels of participation advocated by Shier and Hart as necessary elements directed at increasing empowerment and subsequent decision-making. Both Shier (2001) and Hart (2002) promote participation that is child-initiated and directed, where decisions are shared and the power and responsibility for decision-making is also shared. In fact, Hart (1992) states that this level of decision-making takes practice and it is important for those who have the power to put in the time and effort to assist children to have a voice.

**Cultural capital and self-efficacy**

The majority of the teachers and the leaders expressed views that are aligned with the findings of research carried out in New Zealand (Bishop, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2006); that is, that students are more motivated and engaged in their learning if they have a sense that their teachers care about them enough to take time to get to know their background, family and interests. Motivation to learn was seen by seven students to be linked to a sense of feeling valued and listened to by the teachers. These same students felt that teachers took the time to actively ask about them and listen to them but that sometimes they perceived teachers to be too busy to listen to do this.

Three of the leaders and seven of the teachers inferred that relationships are important and that students like it when teachers chat to them outside the classroom in the playground and during break times. The students also said that when the teachers chatted to them, about their outside interests and family, they felt valued and more comfortable, and this impacted positively on their confidence to speak up and contribute to discussions. These findings are consistent with the work of Bishop and Berryman (2006) and Bishop et al. (2009) who found evidence of a link between students’ increased self-efficacy and greater student motivation and engagement for learning. It was also inferred by six students that their school’s vision and values represent a set of values and dispositions that promote students’ beliefs in their own
ability to succeed in school. These findings are consistent with the work carried out by Beaudoin (2013), and suggest that a schools’ visions and values are vital ingredients to promoting a ‘can do attitude to learning’ within the students and increased self-efficacy.

These findings further imply that there was an imbalance in the number of students selected for student leadership roles. The most popular students tended to be voted in by the other students which made some of the other students feel less capable and unworthy. How a student tackles a learning activity is linked to their expectation of success and if they feel unworthy and unpopular this could by its very nature impact detrimentally on their self-efficacy. This is reflected in the work of Beaudoin (2013) and McIntyre et al. (2005) who assert that the expectation of success is important for students self-efficacy and subsequent motivation and engagement in learning activities.

Two teachers also cautioned that sometimes the most popular student chosen may turn out to be ‘unsatisfactory’. One teacher alluded to taking more control and only permitting those students that are ‘suitable’ to be in the running for student leadership roles. This conjures up the debate as to the level of teacher control and requires the teachers to share the balance of power to enable student voice but to also ensure that the student leaders serve as exemplary role models to other students. Martin and Loomis (2007) state that the locus of control can be altered if teachers encourage students to take more ownership. Furthermore, Jagersma and Parsons (2011) attribute teachers having all the power as being linked to teachers’ lack of confidence. If the teachers were more confident at sharing the power then they may be able to help those students that are perceived to be unsatisfactory in a leadership role to step up and assume their role responsibly.

Schools have an obligation under the UNCRC to take into account the voices of a wider pool of students regardless of their perceived ‘suitability’. According to Shier (2001), there needs to be a commitment to the process of empowering participants, including the provision of opportunities for all to have a voice with no bias or segregation. This is echoed in the work of Shier (2001) whose ‘Pathways to Participation’ model states that children’s views need to be taken into account and
children need to be supported and encouraged to express their views. Shier (2001) also recognises that for children to be able to openly and confidently express their views the adults must take positive action to ensure they have the right support to be able to do this.

Assessment for Learning

‘Assessment for Learning’ principles (Absolum et al., 2009) were reflected strongly in the findings and were seen by both schools as an integral part of student voice where students have opportunities to discuss their learning with their teachers, what they can do and their next step learning needs. Absolum et al. (2009) reports that putting students at the centre of their learning, where they are actively involved with discussions about their learning, impacts positively on their motivation and engagement levels. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) share the same philosophy about students being at the centre of their learning but also caution that the school needs to provide the necessary resources and ensure that the teachers have the pedagogical knowledge and understanding to support the students in their endeavours to have a voice in their learning. In fact, two of the leaders, three teachers and two students voiced that giving students the opportunities to have a voice about their learning greatly helped the students’ motivation and engagement levels. The teachers and the leaders also inferred that it was a successful way to ‘reach’ those students who seemed ‘disengaged’ with school.

However, there are barriers to students being able to have a voice and these, Shier (2001) claims, including students’ lack of confidence, shyness, experiences of not being listened to in the past, low self-esteem or being a member of a cultural or ethnic group where it is not the usual practice for children to speak up and voice their views. Mitra (2003) and Lee and Zimmerman (1999) both identify another difficulty for students to have a voice, in that they need to have an understanding of how they learn and get a sense of their abilities in order to make decisions that will impact on their learning. Four teachers and one leader stated that this is not an easy task; students need to be taught how to take responsibility for their learning, learn how to be reflective and that this requires time that is not always available. Wragg (1997) is sympathetic to the difficulties that teachers generally have in providing student voice opportunities. He believes that there is no one way to provide student
voice opportunities but that teachers still need to strive to include opportunities for student voice in their busy daily schedule.

Provision for students to give feedback to teachers on the teaching and learning programme was suggested by two teachers and one student. The student claimed that teachers did not really know the students’ capabilities and by allowing feedback the teacher would be able to set work at the right level. Two other students added that this would help them feel valued which would motivate them to try harder in class. To achieve this, the students need to be equipped with the right language to be able to discuss their learning. Lack of time was listed as a barrier to helping students to be able to articulate their thoughts and ideas. These ideals are reflected in the work of Absolum et al. (2009) who states that for students to be able to articulate in this way there would need to be processes in place to ‘train’ the students to be able to have their voice heard.

Absolum et al. (2009) states that there needs to be clarity in the classroom where both the teacher and students are able to use a common language that is understood by both to articulate the students learning. When there are such processes in place it is then that students will feel comfortable and confident to share their ideas and thoughts about their learning which Absolum et al. (2009) believes will empower the students and enhance their motivation to learn. To ensure this happens Shier (2001) asserts that there needs to be policy directives in place that require students to participate in decision-making about their learning.

**Research Question Two asked: What are the successes and challenges for leaders and teachers when implementing student ‘voice’ strategies for students?**

To aid understanding and clarity of the successes and challenges found when implementing student voice strategies, this section will discuss two predominant data themes: School culture: vision and values; and locus of control: tokenism. The first theme, school culture, is developed from the schools vision and values, they underpin the essence of the schools direction and beliefs about what is important in terms of student education and well-being. The second theme for discussion, locus of control, refers to the level of control that teachers hold in decision-making, a
component of that being tokenism where it may look like the students get to make decisions but in fact the ultimate control is held by the teachers.

**School culture, vision and values.**

**Successes and challenges**

Both schools referred to the importance of having a clear vision and set of values for them and the students to follow. This finding aligns to the work of Bolman and Deal (2008) and Starratt (2005), who state that any organisation needs to have at its core a set of beliefs and values that inherently underpin the structures and programmes within the organisation. One school that participated in this research project has its vision and values firmly embedded throughout the school and there is a cohesiveness between this and student voice initiatives currently in place. Six students articulated the values in their school and affirmed that they were not only visible through the classroom but school-wide. They demonstrated a sense of pride and duty to uphold the values which they viewed as central to learning at the school.

Two of the leaders cited the importance of having student voice linked to their Charter and reported that staff meetings on ‘Assessment for Learning’ and student voice initiatives were highly productive. The sessions were carried out sequentially and provided opportunities for teachers to develop the pedagogical knowledge and understanding of student voice, backed up by research. Three of the leaders commented that everyone needs to be going in the same direction and their needs to be clear guidelines of any requirements of them in respect of their classroom practice. This is clearly defined in the four stage strategic intent process prescribed by Davies (2006).

The school needs to begin with the intent, establish what is needed in order to achieve the intent and then put into place processes to establish what teachers collectively know and understand in order to provide the right professional development into place. Leaders need to be strategic leaders and have clear strategic processes and approaches that forge a culture which incorporates dialogue, reflection and analysis. This will provide teachers with clear guidelines so that they know where they are going and why which is seen as crucial by Davies
(2006) if change is to be successful. Both Davies (2006) and Fullan (2011) state that schools having clear policies and strategies are more likely to have intrinsically motivated teachers who will embrace and participate in initiatives, such as student voice.

Failure to put these processes into place, Middlewood and Lumby (2011) state, can lead to resistance to change by the teachers who do not agree with the student voice philosophies and may thwart attempts for other teachers to give their students a voice and participate in decision-making. Middlewood and Lumby (2011) also believe that it can be difficult to change the ‘hearts and minds’ of staff and share the same views as Bell et al. (2014) that leaders need to build collegiality, develop teambuilding and improve their own skills in order to lead and influence others.

The vision and values in one school were found to be very strong and all students in this study were able to articulate the school values and give examples of them in the school. The vision and values were generated in collaboration with staff and the teachers and leaders identified the importance of having the vision and values visible throughout the school. Two leaders and two of the teachers felt it was vital that schools made time for staff meetings where the vision and values could be reflected upon and kept as a living document.

The thoughts of three of the leaders align to the work of Starratt (2005), who emphasises that the vision and values need to link directly to the school’s charter and strategic plan. This school saw their student voice initiatives, underpinned by their values statement, as a successful start in terms of building an effective school culture promoting student motivation and engagement for learning. It was evident that there was a collaborative style of leadership in the schools; the leaders participated in the professional development alongside their teachers. This helped the leaders promote the vision, values and student voice initiatives as they were able to ‘walk the talk’ which is seen by Bell et al. (2014) as an important aspect of successful leadership. The leaders were also confident to let two of the teachers go to other schools to build up on their knowledge and understanding so that they could also drive the initiatives.
The second school also acknowledged the importance of a school-wide vision and values but commented that their current vision was disjointed and in fact students made no reference to it during the focus group session. Where to start and how to go about developing a new vision and values as a new principal brought with it many challenges. There was a need to go through a strategic planning process akin to the model of strategic leadership advocated by Davies (2006). This enabled the leader, to work collaboratively with teachers and with the students, to give teachers a sense of ownership and create a vision and values that represent the school.

Another challenge that became evident was linked to the teachers’ pedagogical understanding of student voice. At both schools the understanding of what student voice looks like and what it involves varied enormously. In response to this challenge the principal role modelled student voice initiatives and ran professional development sessions to increase the teacher’s pedagogical understanding of student voice. This form of leadership, Davies (2006) and Robinson et al. (2009) say, promotes ‘buy in’ from teachers and reduces possibilities for resistance to change from those who struggle to embrace new initiatives.

Haydon (2007) emphasises that the vision is the school’s perception of their future aspirations and as such is vital if the school is to collectively move forwards with any change initiatives. The principal has also role modelled ‘best practice’ in the classrooms, developed a student leadership team and kept student voice at the forefront of all staff professional development so that it is an organic process.

**Locus of control and tokenism**

**Successes and challenges**

Across both schools it was evident that teachers have been sharing the locus of control with students to an extent, particularly around discussing with students what they can do in terms of literacy and mathematics, and their next step learning. In terms of ‘inquiry learning’ the findings suggested that the teachers gave some students opportunities to choose activities but the choice of activities was still controlled by the teacher. Furthermore, two of the students commented that the only students who got to make any sort of decisions were those students who bothered to
approach the teacher. The findings suggested that those students who were less confident did not get to make any decisions at all about their learning. One leader commented that the school needed to make more effort to ensure that the student participation was genuine and not tokenistic. This aligns to the work of Shier (2001) ‘Pathways to Participation’ level four which also refers to the need for adults to listen to children and let them make decisions without the adults having the final say. This requires an explicit commitment by the adults to make deliberate attempts to ‘share’ the power and give some of it away to the children.

Five of the students wanted to be able to choose their own work and felt that they were more likely to participate in decision-making when they felt comfortable to do so. Six teachers felt that students did get to make decisions in class and yet the students did not support these views which suggest that the locus of control was still firmly with the teachers and the efforts made were merely tokenistic. This ties in with the leaders thoughts that more attention needs to be given around sharing the locus of control and empowering students to have a voice. The leader felt that some of the teachers were motivated to give the students a voice in decision-making but that the teachers needed to put into place a process whereby all students have opportunities to have a voice about what they want to learn.

To empower students and release some of the control from adults, Shier (2001) suggests that adults need to take the time to look at all the risks and benefits of sharing the power and then provide an environment that is conducive to the children feeling comfortable to contribute to decision-making. This will also help those teachers who commented that giving students the chance to make decisions takes time that they did not feel they had, as in fact this groundwork will serve to provide for a more streamline approach of student participation. Although Lundy (2007) and Wragg (1997) acknowledge teachers in schools are busy in the classroom they still feel that it is the teacher’s responsibility to the student to find the time and put into place the conditions so that all students speak up and contribute to decision-making with direct benefit to teaching and learning.

Three of the teachers also felt that there was more to student voice to just sharing the learning with them and stated that they needed to know more about ‘how’ the
students learn best before being able to help them learn. However, this could also be construed as tokenistic if no processes are put into place to enable all students to participate in decision-making. To reduce tokenism there needs to be a mind-shift for many of the teachers to take the understanding of student voice past ‘student leadership’ roles, ‘Assessment for Learning’ practices and classroom environment decisions. The leaders agreed that although these areas all involve student decision-making they are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of embracing student voice. Three of the leaders want to see less of teachers controlling and leading the conversations with students to a model where teachers facilitate opportunities for students of all capabilities to share their thoughts and ideas in all realms of classroom teaching and learning. To create this, Shier (2001) in his ‘Pathways to Participation’ suggests that there needs to be an organisational policy in place that premises that children and adults share the power in decision-making and that a range of activities should be provided for children to help them express their ideas.

CONCLUSIONS

Key conclusion 1: Effective strategic leadership and school culture have a significant influence on school-wide student voice practices.

Effective strategic leadership requires the leaders to have the right ‘drivers’ (Fullan, 2011) of policy and strategy in order to promote a culture of learning in the school. Student voice initiatives need to be led by the leaders through a collaborative style of leadership and involve teachers in the development of the school’s vision and values. The leaders need to have the pedagogical knowledge and understanding themselves of student voice and also take steps to ensure that the teachers too have sound pedagogical knowledge and understanding of student voice strategies. As Davies (2006) states, leaders need to have the contextual wisdom and people wisdom to be able to lead a school effectively. Other important factors to take into account include building a culture of trust, which Cardno (2012) and Wildy and Clarke (2011) claim needs to encompass a purpose and environment conducive to risk taking. As stated by Robertson and Timperley (2011) those leaders who actively participate in teacher professional development are more likely to get teacher buy in which is essential for any change initiatives.
To implement student voice initiatives it is imperative that there is a clear school-wide vision and set of values that are embedded into the school’s strategic intent. Starratt (2005) and Bolman and Deal (2008) also state that the vision needs to come from the school’s beliefs and assumptions and needs to be visible - a living document. The vision and values underpin the culture of the school and therefore teachers and students need to be involved in firstly generating a set of values to uphold and secondly put in the effort to keep the vision at the forefront of everything they do.

Key conclusion 2: The ability to develop meaningful student voice in decision-making in class is a learned disposition and involves teachers having the necessary pedagogical knowledge and understanding of student voice.

Effective professional development for teachers on student voice pedagogies is a vital component, along with a school culture that fosters student voice initiatives if student decision-making is going to develop. Jagersma and Parsons (2011) state that the curriculum is written for the students and therefore links student engagement to students being involved with making decisions about the curriculum. Having the patience and trust to give students opportunities to have a voice in respect to curriculum delivery takes time. If the students do not have these opportunities, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) believe that they well may disengage with the curriculum and create their own barriers to learning. There needs to be procedures set in place to encourage students to be involved with planning and having a voice on aspects of teaching and learning. As teachers grow in confidence, McIntyre et al. (2005) believe they will find it easier to learn from students and further develop student decision-making beyond the more traditional student leadership decision-making roles in class.

Key conclusion 3: Teachers must change the locus of control - that is, share the power with students and make provision for opportunities for all students to participate in decision-making.

To develop student voice initiatives the teacher needs to be more collaborative with students in terms of teaching and learning in class. The teacher needs to provide key
ideas and language prompts for students to be able to speak up and share the power in terms of discussions that will impact on their learning. For those students who are pre-conditioned to stay quiet, the teachers need to make time to ‘coach’ those students to build up their confidence and ability to participate in decision-making. Jagersma and Parsons (2011) state that teachers need to believe that student voice is important and that relinquishing some of the control will serve to help them gain thoughts and ideas from students which would otherwise not be forthcoming. By changing the locus of control, the teacher, McIntyre et al. (2005) state, will gain greater insight into the student’s needs and be able to develop their own teaching and learning accordingly to best meet the needs of the students.

Key conclusion 4: Students need to have an understanding of formative assessment practices and have the language to be able to articulate their learning needs. Teachers need to ‘allow’ students to give feedback and participate in decisions about teaching and learning in the classroom.

To build on the effectiveness of ‘Assessment for Learning’ (Absolum et al., 2009) principles in schools, it is important for students to have a good understanding of what formative assessment means. Briggs et al. (2008) and Gadsby and Beere (2012) state that students need skills, language and encouragement to engage in dialogue with the teacher about their learning. There is also a need for the teachers to not only give the student the regular opportunities to have these discussions, but to also ensure that the student feels comfortable to give feedback to teachers on classroom teaching and learning (Gadsby & Beere, 2012). It is the building of relationships with students where they feel more empowered and motivated to contribute to discussions that Bishop and Berryman (2006) claim is essential for effective classroom practice.
RECOMMENDATIONS
The conclusions listed above have generated the following recommendations.

School leaders need to:

1. Ensure that the school has a clear vision and values that includes the essence of student voice strategies and is 'owned' by staff and students;
2. Demonstrate effective leadership by providing teachers with professional development to increase their pedagogical knowledge and understanding of student voice and, in particular, build skills and knowledge related to sharing the locus of control with students and avoiding tokenistic student voice initiatives; and
3. Actively participate in professional development and be a role model of student voice strategies in school.

Teachers need to:

4. Develop classroom programmes that allow all students to have time with the teacher to articulate their thoughts and ideas on curriculum delivery;
5. Develop key ideas and language prompts for use in increasing opportunities for students to share in decision-making; and
6. Make time to 'coach' those students who are preconditioned to avoiding giving their voice to enable them have the skills and confidence to participate in decision-making.

FINAL SUMMATION
This study has explored the student voice initiatives in two New Zealand schools. The findings and recommendations link to the literature relating to student voice initiatives discussed in Chapter Two.

UNICEF (1990) believes that students have a right to speak and be listened to. It is apparent in the two schools that student voice does exist in a variety of formats but that some student voice initiatives are inhibited by the teaching and delivery style of
the curriculum. The recommendations in this report seek to assist schools in their quest to develop effective student voice initiatives in their own schools.

Despite the variability of teachers’ and students’ understanding of student voice, ‘Assessment for Learning’ practices and student leadership roles were identified as the predominant features of student voice. The leaders and teachers have a somewhat different perception of student voice and how the teachers can share the locus of control with their students. This creates a challenge for teachers, to relinquish some of the control over the student’s decision-making and develop greater student participation in making decisions that will, in turn, increase the students’ motivation and engagement for learning.

Relationships were seen by the schools as an important component of student voice practice, and the data provided evidence this was practised in both schools to various degrees. This includes coaching students on how to articulate and share thoughts and ideas, and capturing the thoughts of those students who would otherwise not engage in discussion (such as students who are pre-conditioned to give responses that do not capture their authentic voice).

The challenge, therefore, is to put in place systems and processes that include professional development - to develop pedagogical understanding of student voice - to enable schools to build a school culture that has a clear focus on capturing student voice. All practices will need to be followed up to ensure sustainability, and provide the optimum opportunities for student increased motivation and engagement for learning.
APPENDIX A – Invitation to Participate Sheets

Board of Trustees.

| Thesis: Student voice: Empowerment, engagement, efficacy |

July 2014

Dear Board of Trustees

I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my research is: *To investigate the ways in which schools use ‘student voice’ strategies to empower, motivate and engage students in New Zealand primary schools.*

Working in schools with students that struggle to achieve to their full potential has fuelled my passion for further research, in particular, around ‘student voice’ and its possible impact on student motivation and engagement in learning.

If the school agrees to be part of my research, I would like to interview (separately) Bruce and Claire from the leadership team. I would also like to carry out focus groups - one group with four teachers; and one group with up to eight Year 5-6 students. The purpose of the interviews and focus groups will be to gather data from a variety of groups related to the aims of my research. Consent forms will be issued to all research participants including the students’ parents, and only those people who have given their written consent to participate will be involved in my research. I would like to conduct the interviews and focus groups at a mutually suitable time at the beginning of Term 3. Each interview or focus group should take no longer than one hour.

I can assure you that your school and those people that participate in my research will not be identifiable in the final thesis or any future publications or presentations. All data and information that are supplied to me will be kept secure and confidential. If participants agree, I will be digitally recording the interviews and focus groups, and
will make the interview transcripts and focus group findings summaries available to participants to check prior to carrying out the data analysis. I am more than happy to provide a summary of findings once the thesis is completed, and to give you access to a digital copy of the final thesis if you request this.

I am able to attend a Board of Trustees meeting to provide the same information if you think this would be helpful. At the end of the research process I am also happy to present and discuss the findings with you.

If you agree that your school can participate in the study then I would like the leadership team to discuss the best way to give information and consent forms to the students to take home to their parents. I am happy to meet with the students to explain more about the research prior to the information sheets and consent forms being given to the students if you think that is a good idea.

I look forward to your response and the prospect of working with you. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, contact details listed below.

Yours sincerely

Helen Parry

MEdLM student, Unitec Institute of Technology

E: helenp@ni.school.com
Mob: 0272717934
Supervisor: Alison Smith: E: asmith@unitec.ac.nz.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2014-1042)
This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25th July, 2014 - 25th July, 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
APPENDIX B - Participant Information Sheets

Principal, SLT member, teachers, caregivers, students

Thesis: Student voice: Empowerment, engagement, efficacy

My name is Helen Parry. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

This research is focused on how student voice strategies may empower, motivate and help engage students in their learning. Working in schools with students that struggle to achieve to their full potential has fuelled my passion for further research on student voice initiatives in schools that could help students learn.

If the school agrees to be part of my research, I would very much like to interview you, at a suitable time, at the beginning of Term 3. The interview should take no longer than one hour and everything discussed will be confidential. I would like to digitally record the interview and will make the transcript available to you for checking. You have the right to withdraw from the research up until 10 days after receipt of the transcription.

I would also like you to assist with:
- student selection for the focus group (by selecting the first two boys and girls from the attendance register of each Year 5-6 class, up to a total of eight students, and continuing this selection process if fewer than 4 students have parent/caregiver consent to participate);
- support in ensuring that students take the information sheet and consent form home so that I can obtain their parents’ permission, and that they return these to school.

I can assure you that neither your school nor you or any participant from your school will be identifiable in the final thesis or any future publications or presentations. All data will be kept securely locked away for five years, and will be used in the strictest confidence to write my thesis. I am also happy to give you access to a digital copy of the final thesis if you request this. If you have any queries about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me (helenp@ni.school.nz) or my supervisor, Alison smith (asmith@unitec.ac.nz).

Yours sincerely

Helen Parry

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2014-1042). This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25th July, 2014 - 25th July, 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
My name is Helen Parry. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

This research is focused on ways that schools use student voice to empower, motivate and engage students in their learning.

I value your educational expertise and would very much like to include you in a focus group discussion along with four other teachers from your school at a suitable time early in Term 3. The discussion will take no longer than one hour. I would also like to digitally record the focus group and will make a summary of the findings available to you in case you wish to amend any of the information. You will have the right to withdraw up until 10 days after the receipt of the summary of findings. I will also be asking you to agree to maintain the confidentiality of the group by not disclosing what is discussed to anyone outside of the group.

I can assure you that neither your school nor you will be identifiable in the final thesis or any future publications or presentations. All data will be kept securely locked away for five years and used in the strictest confidence to write my thesis. I am also happy to give you access to a digital copy of the final thesis if you request this.

If you have any queries about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me (helenp@ni.school.nz) or my supervisor, Alison smith (asmith@unitec.ac.nz).

Yours sincerely

Helen Parry

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This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25th July, 2014 - 25th July, 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Thesis: Student voice: Empowerment, engagement, efficacy

My name is Helen Parry and I am currently studying for the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree at Unitec Institute of Technology. I would like to interview students as part of my research and am requesting your permission to involve your child ______________ in my research, which will be used in the writing of a thesis in order to complete my degree. The group discussion will take place at school and will be for one hour. Participants will be withdrawn from class to attend. A staff member will also sit in on the group discussion as an observer/support person.

My thesis is about ‘student voice’. Student voice refers to students having an input into what happens within the school and the classroom. To gather this information I would very much like your child to participate with up to seven other students in a focus group discussion. Students have been chosen randomly for this research and participation is voluntary.

I will be asking the children questions about the things that the school does and teachers do that really help them to want to learn, to get involved in learning at school, and to enjoy their learning. I want to find out the ways that they are able to participate in decisions about their learning at school. The discussion should not take more than about one hour. I will digitally record the children so that I can closely study what they have said as I write my thesis. The findings may be used for publication and conference presentations but the identity of your child and the school will be confidential and anonymous – they will not be identifiable. After five years, the information that the children have shared with me will be destroyed.

Prior to the group discussion a senior staff member will come with me to meet with the students and answer any questions that your child may have about the group discussion. At the beginning of the group discussion your child ______________ can ask me any questions that they want to ask about the research. They will also have the choice to not answer any questions that they are unsure or uncomfortable about, and they can also withdraw from the discussion at any time. I am also available to answer any questions that you may have and my contact details are provided below. After the focus group I will meet with the children again to give them a verbal summary of the group findings. You can also withdraw your child from the research at any time up until 10 days after I present the findings summary. If you have any questions please email me at helenp@ni.school.nz or call me on 0272717934. Alternatively you can text me and I will ring you back or you can contact my supervisor Alison Smith at asmith@unitec.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely

Helen Parry

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2014-1042). This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25th July, 2014 - 25th July, 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
My name is Helen Parry and I am about to start a big research project. I am looking for eight students to be part of a group discussion about school. The group discussion will take place at school during class time and take a maximum time of an hour. Prior to the group discussion a senior staff member and I will meet with you as a group and answer any questions that you may have. A staff member will also sit in on the group discussion as an observer/support person. I want to find out the things that your school does and teachers do that really helps you to learn. I also want to hear from you about ways that you are able to contribute to decision-making in the school and the classroom.

Once you and your parents have given me signed permission forms for the group discussion I will meet with you and the other students for about an hour along. During this time I will ask you some easy questions and listen to your ideas and thoughts.

To make sure that I have got all your ideas and thoughts I would like to digitally record you and then type out what you have said for my thesis (a kind of report) Only my supervisor (Alison Smith) and I will be allowed to listen to the recordings and read any information that you give me in the focus group. You and your school will be anonymous in my report. I will keep my notes and recordings locked away in my office so that no one can see them. Anything that is said in the group discussions will be kept confidential and not discussed outside of the group.

If you want to be in the group discussion you can:
• ask me questions at any time;
• tell me that you don’t want to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable about;
• tell me that you don’t want to be in the study anymore up until 10 days after I have shared the findings with you; and/or tell me that you don’t want me to use the ideas and thoughts that you told me in the group discussion up until 10 days after I have shared the findings with you.

Your parent(s) are allowed to:
• ask questions of me or my supervisor at any time;
• tell me that they don’t want you to be in the study up until 10 days after I have shared the findings with you;

I hope that you will want to help me with my research. If you or your parents have any questions about the research, please get in touch with me – helenp@ni.school.nz.

Helen Parry

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2014-1042). This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25th July, 2014 - 25th July, 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
APPENDIX C- Participant consent forms

Participant Consent Form: Board of Trustees

Thesis: Student voice: Empowerment, engagement, efficacy

The Board have read the Invitation to Participate (Board of Trustees) and have an understanding of the proposed research.

We have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to our satisfaction. We understand that neither the school nor any names of staff or students will be used in any reports or presentations.

We also understand that the school may withdraw from the study up until 10 days after Helen has shared the summary of findings.

____________________________________________________________

We give our permission for XXX School to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Invitation to Participate (Board of Trustees).

Signed: __________________________________________

Name: __________________________________________

Position: ________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________

Email: __________________________________________

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2014-1042)

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25th July, 2014 - 25th July, 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered.

I understand that neither my name nor the name of my school will be used in any public reports. I also understand that I will be provided with a transcript for checking before data analysis is started.

I understand that anything said in the group discussions and or interviews will be kept in house and confidential.

I also understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this study up to 10 days after receiving the interview transcript.

I agree to take part in this study under the conditions set out in the Participants Information sheet.

I agree to my responses, in the interviews, being digitally recorded.

Signed: ________________________________
Name: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________
Email: ________________________________

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2014-1042)
This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25th July, 2014 - 25th July, 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Thesis: Student voice: Empowerment, engagement, efficacy

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and understood the nature of the research. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, via texting, email or by phone, and have any questions I have asked answered to my satisfaction. I consent to my child being withdrawn during class time to participate in the study, at school, with the understanding that their participation is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw them and/or the information they have provided at any time and up until 10 days after I present the findings summary.

I understand:
- Prior to the group discussion a senior staff member and Helen will meet with my child and the other children in the group and answer any questions that he/she may have.
- That neither my child’s name nor the name of the school will be used in any public reports and all records will be confidential to Helen Parry and the Unitec supervisor (Alison Smith);
- That the children in the group will agree that anything said in the group is confidential and must not be talked about elsewhere.
- A staff member will also sit in on the group discussion as an observer/ support person and the group discussion will take no more than an hour.

I understand that my child:
- Does not have to answer any questions that he / she feels uncomfortable about;
- Can withdraw from the study at any time up until 10 days after Helen presents the findings summary; and/or
- Can tell Helen if he/she does not want her to use the ideas and thoughts that my child told her in the group discussion up until 10 days after Helen presents the findings summary.

I understand that I can request to receive a digital copy of the thesis once it has been completed. The data gathered will be securely stored, including digital recordings, for 5 years after which the data will be destroyed.

I agree to my child ________________ from Room ______ participating in this research study according to the details set out in the Participant Information sheet. I agree to my child’s responses being digitally recorded.

Signed: ___________________________________

Name: ____________________________________

Date: ____________________________________

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2014-1042). This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from (25th July, 2014 - 25th July, 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Participant Consent Form: Students

Thesis: Student voice: Empowerment, engagement, efficacy

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand why I have been invited to be part of the interview group. I have had an opportunity to ask Helen questions about the group discussion and I understand that I don’t have to be part of this research if I don’t want to. The group discussion will take place at school during class time and will take a maximum time of an hour. Prior to the group discussion a senior staff member and Helen will meet with me and the other children in the group and answer any questions that I may have. A staff member will also sit in on the group discussion as an observer/support person.

I understand that Helen will:
- Be asking me about things that my school does and teachers do that really helps me to learn;
- Be asking me about ways that I am able to contribute to decision-making at school.

I also understand that:
- I don’t have to answer any questions that I don’t want to answer and I can stop being part of the group discussion at any time;
- I will be anonymous in the report so that no one will know it is me. The school will not be named either so there is no way of knowing what I have said;
- Anything said in the group discussions is confidential and that I shouldn’t talk about what other children said;
- The information I give to Helen will only be shown to her Supervisor Alison Smith;
- The data, including digital recordings, will be kept locked away in Helen's office cabinet, for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed; and
- That my ideas, during the discussion, will be digitally recorded.
- I can tell Helen if I do not want her to use the ideas and thoughts that I have given in the group discussion up until 10 days after Helen has told me the summary of the findings.

I agree to:
- Taking part in a group discussion.
- The interview being digitally recorded and transcribed.

Signed: ____________________________

Name: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

Room number: ______________________

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2014-1042)

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25th July, 2014 - 25th July, 2015. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
APPENDIX D - Interview questions for Principal, Deputy Principal

Semi-structured One-to-one interviews
Principal, Deputy Principal

1. What do you understand by the notion of student voice? Describe what you think student voice means and what it looks like in school.

2. How do the vision and values of your school relate to student voice? Where do you see examples of student voice in the school?

3. What opportunities does the school provide for students to have a voice in their learning? What examples do you have that you can give me?

4. How well do you feel your teachers know the students? Why do you say that? Is this important to you?

5. What kind of student voice contributions do your students make to their learning in the classroom? And school-wide?

6. What kind of decisions do your students get to make in the classroom and the school? How do you choose which students to whom you will give decision-making opportunities? How do you help them to make decisions?

7. What are the successes and challenges that you have experienced as a strategic leader in implementing student ‘voice’ initiatives at this school?

8. What professional development have the teachers at this school received (or are receiving now) that promote student voice?

9. How do you see the future of the school in terms of student voice initiatives? What tools or strategies are you intending to use? What strategic leadership will you carry out to lead and support staff in student voice strategies?
APPENDIX E- Focus group questions: teachers, students

Focus groups: Teachers

1. What do you understand by the notion of student voice? Describe what you think student voice means and what it looks like in school.

2. How do the vision and values of your school relate to student voice? What does this look like in the school?

3. What opportunities does the school provide for students to have a voice in their learning? What examples do you have that you can give me?

4. How well do you feel you know your students? Why do you say that? Is this important to you?

5. What kind of student voice contributions do your students make to their learning? In the classroom and school-wide?

6. What kind of decisions do your students get to make in the classroom and the school? How do you choose which students to whom you will give decision-making opportunities? How do you help them to make decisions?

7. How does your teacher know what you can do in reading, writing and maths? How often do your students talk to you about what they can do and what they need to do next?

8. What have been some of the successes and challenges that you have experienced with student voice strategies in the classroom/school? What has made the student voice strategies successful or challenging?

9. What professional development have the teachers at this school received (or are receiving now) that promote student voice?

10. How do you see the future of the school in terms of empowering, motivating and engaging students to learn? What tools or strategies are you intending to use? What can the leadership team do to help you implement student voice strategies?
Focus group questions: students.

1. What do you understand by the words student voice? Describe what you think student voice means and what it looks like in school.

2. What are the school values or motto? What do they look like in school and how do they relate to student voice?

3. How well do you feel your teacher/s know you? Why do you say that? Is this important to you? How does this affect your learning at school?

4. What are some things teachers do to help motivate you with your learning? What else could they do to motivate you more?

5. What would the perfect classroom look like? Describe a classroom you would like to be in that would make you want to learn more.

6. How does your teacher know what you can do in reading, writing and maths? How often do you talk to your teacher about what you can do and what you need to do next?

7. What does your teacher do that shows you she/he knows about your learning? How important is it that your teacher knows about your learning?

8. What kind of decisions do you get to make in the classroom and the school? Describe how the teachers help you to make decisions. How does it make you feel when your teacher listens to you and you get to make decisions?

9. How does talking about your learning help you in the classroom? What would you like to see changed? What works best for you.

10. What else would you like to tell me about teachers, how you learn best, what motivates you and helps you achieve your learning goals?
REFERENCES


Fullan, F. (2011). *Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform*. Melbourne, Australia: The Centre for Strategic Education


