

STUDENT VOICE AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: INTRODUCTION

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The recent events in Parkland, Florida and subsequent student activism illustrate that not only can students be a catalyst for change, but it is important for adults to listen, value, elevate, and respond to their voices. Such public discourse is important to understanding what happens in our schools and conditions that foster more ethical, responsive, and caring communities. The events in Parkland are not isolated; highly turbulent political, economic, social, technological pressures are affecting schools and children across the United States and abroad (Gross, 2014). We argue the importance of adults to process these experiences *with, not for* students—to refrain from reproof and instead respect students as human beings whom are growing developmentally. School people are in the business of growth. Perhaps, if we harken back to our undergraduate textbooks of yore, we will remember that students are developing cognitively, physically, ethically, and otherwise. And let us not forget that old concept, scaffolding. You know, how adults build on students' prior experiences to help them grow into healthy human beings? Adults might not have all the answers to our most pressing problems, but even if we did, should it not be our goal as educators to build young people's capacities to be critically engaged citizens? Thus, this special issue of the *Journal of Ethical Educational Leadership*, "Student Voice and School Leadership," could not come at a better time. In this issue we ask the educational leadership field to consider the importance of youth leadership in schools. What might school leadership that includes students look like? How can we encourage more youth to be engaged in solving pressing school and community issues?

Inviting students to participate in the governance of their schools enables school leaders to learn necessary perspectives about school challenges and ultimately design and build community around effective change strategies. Student voice helps cultivate a school climate, culture, and practices that encourage safe and productive learning environments (Mansfield, 2011, 2015) along with myriad of student (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005; Mansfield, 2015; Sands, et al., 2007) and educator (Camino, 2000; Mansfield, 2014; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007) outcomes. Student voice is an investment where the benefits far outweigh the costs (Fielding, 2001, 2004; Mitra, 2008; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Sands et al., 2007).

Though this concept of student voice has existed for quite some time, it is often overlooked in educational leadership. Since influential adults in schools are crucial for setting the tone and leading school improvement initiatives, we thought it was important to engage the educational leadership field in order to address sociocultural conditions and structural arrangements that position students on the fringe of school change rather than as central partners (Brasof, 2015). Adults often justify exclusion from important decision-making structures and processes by espousing or behaving in ways that communicate negative images and beliefs about young people's ability and maturity to be effective change makers (Costello,

Toles, Spielberger, & Wynn, 1997). As a result, it is relatively rare to find youth-adult leadership collaborations in schools.

However, the tide seems to be turning within educational leadership. Some recent examples of student voice in educational leadership include the University Council of Educational Administration's 2017 conference theme, *Echando Pa'lante: School Leadership (Up)rising as Advocates and (Up)lifting Student Voices*, which lead to the March 2018 special issue in the *Journal of Research on Educational Leadership: Rethinking Educational Leadership in the Margins: Youth, Parent, and Community Leadership for Equity and Social Justice*. There are also several books that examine a range of educational leadership themes as it relates to student voice (Brasof, 2015; Connor, Ebby-Rosin & Brown, 2015; Connor & Rosen, 2016; Mitra & Serriere, 2015). If student participation in school governance is to become more embedded into the ethos and practice of school, it is imperative to move student voice discourse deeper into the psyche of the educational leadership discipline—both in terms of leadership preparation programs as well as leadership practice in schools. Thus, the main purpose behind our advocacy for this special issue.

The contributions in this special issue come from a wide range of contexts with most originating in the United States and several from abroad. Stories take place in rural, urban, and suburban neighborhoods in elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges, universities, and community non-profits. Within these diverse settings, the concept of student voice has been interpreted and implemented in myriad ways. For example, some articles detail the ways students contributed to system change via the school board, while others used their voices to implement more democratic school discipline reform such as Youth Court. Others yet shed light on ways students became involved in Youth-Adult Participatory Action Research, service learning, classroom advisory and other student leadership groups, student appointment to multiple ad hoc and/or permanent committees, administrative training classes and listening sessions, and the list goes on. Within these contexts and programs, students *lead* change initiatives focused on improving school climate and culture; developing curriculum; reducing disciplinary incidents; evaluating the presence of student participation in schools; understanding race and racism in schools; disrupting hate-driven community protest; and addressing structural inequities in higher education to name a few.

When we put together our call for the special issue, we were keen to include articles from not only professors and professional researchers, but practitioners and graduate students. We expected to hear mostly from professors. But, as the contributions rolled in, we continuously celebrated our good luck that people from so many walks of life took an interest in this project! We were particularly awestruck receiving two articles submitted by students, one in middle and the other high school! Receiving manuscripts from school teachers was also a major source of satisfaction.

From call to publication, this issue took two years to manifest. Such work was not just the result of us as the two guest co-editors: We are most thankful to the leadership, mentorship, and friendship of Dana Mitra for introducing us after recognizing the many ways our work connected. We have become fast friends since then, in addition to becoming productive collaborators. We are also grateful to the editorial board of the *Journal of Ethical Educational Leadership*—especially editor-in-chief, Edward Myers, for believing in this project. We would also like to recognize John Stuetz, graduate assistant extraordinaire who meticulously combed through and formatted every article in this 300-plus page special issue. Finally, we are most

grateful to all the authors for their contributions and patience. We never anticipated such a large number of submissions. But now that this project is complete, two very exhausted co-editors, along with this issue's many thoughtful and talented authors, can enjoy the scope and depth of our collective conversation and contribution to the educational leadership field.

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