Voice Matters: Building Individual & Collective Agency through Community Voice Circles

Dr. Kathryn A. Page

Voice Matters
Facilitation Guide

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Voice Matters:
Uncovering systemic barriers to school improvement through voice circles

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Rename it!

First Things First...

1. What is student voice
2. What is student agency?"
3. And what are "circles"?

*Student voice refers to student participation in the structures and practices that shape their educational experiences.

*Student agency refers to the level of autonomy and power that a student experiences in the learning environment
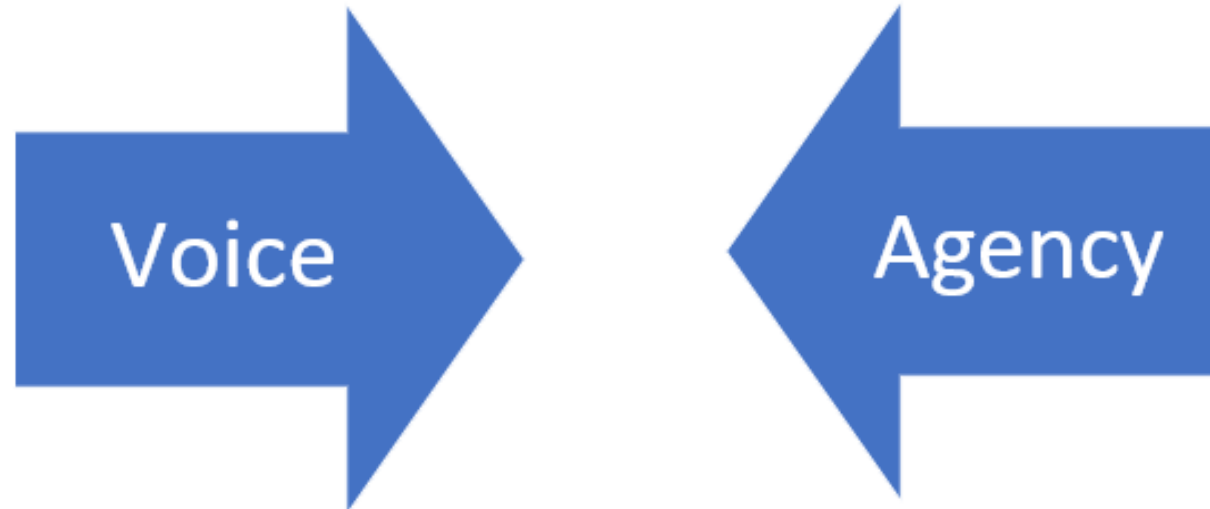
Voice ➤ ◀ Agency

Mitra (2004) suggests that student voice impacts agency by increasing students' ability to articulate what they think and allows their ideas of leadership to develop
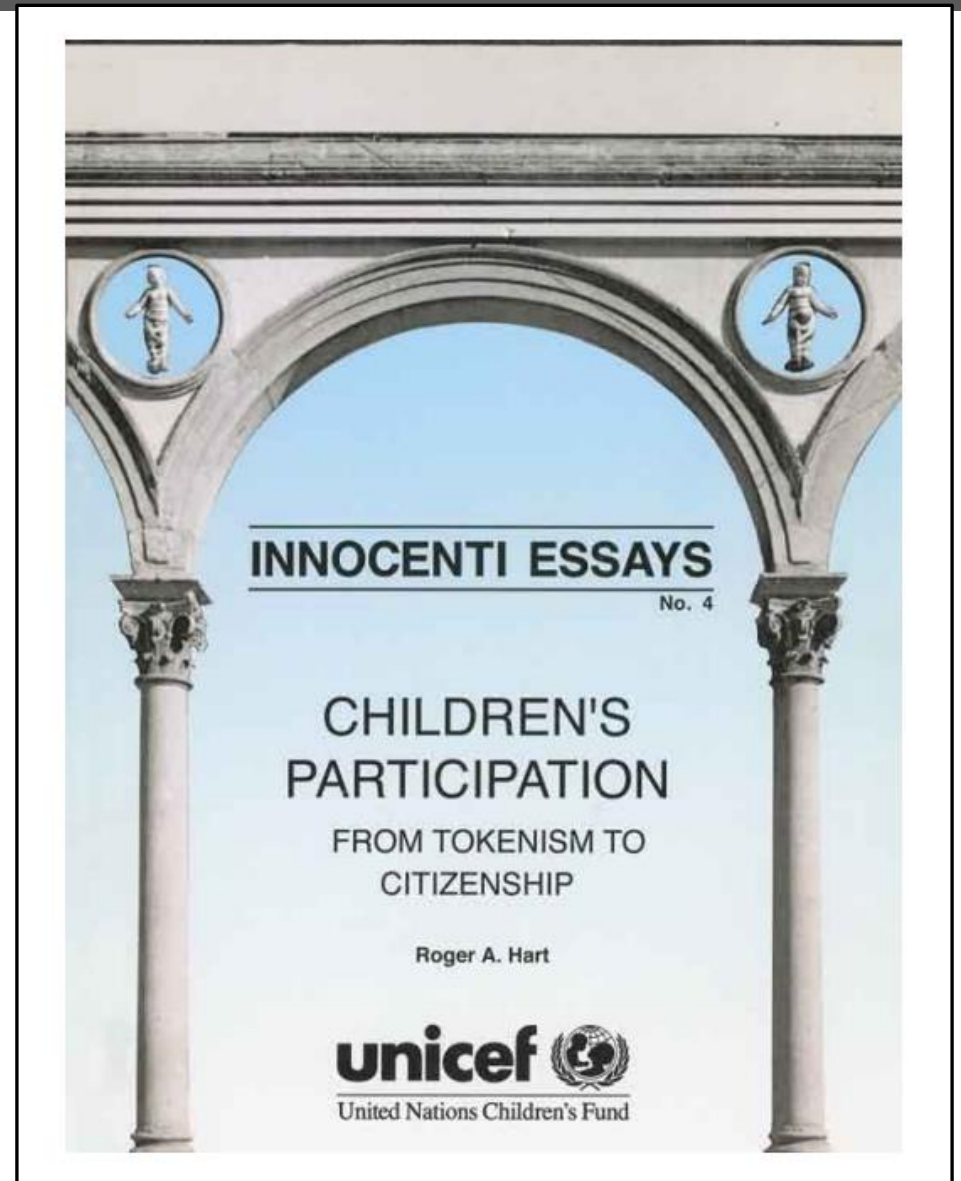
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STUDENT VOICE CIRCLE: *Voice circles are guided conversations. Carefully and thoughtfully structured questions are used to guide meaningful dialogue that encourages student* voice *and* agency. *Students reveal the actions needed to improve the school experience for* **ALL** *students.*

~Kathryn Page, Ed.D.

This essay is written for people who know that young people have something to say but who would like to reflect further on the process. It is also written for those people who have it in their power to assist children in having a voice, but who, unwittingly or not, trivialize their involvement." (Hart 1992)
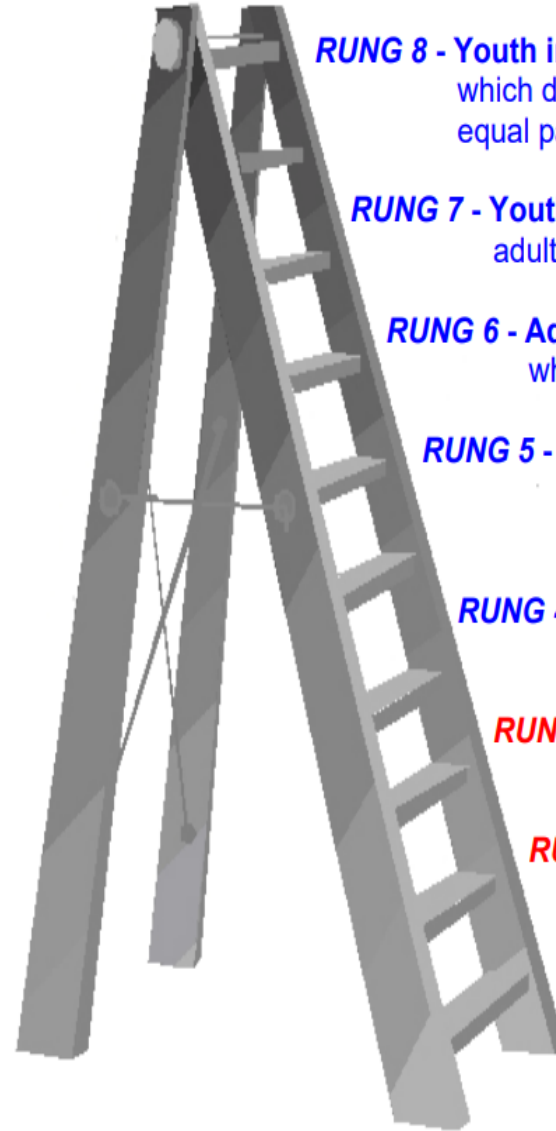
INNOCENTI ESSAYS
No. 4

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

FROM TOKENISM TO CITIZENSHIP

Roger A. Hart

unicef
United Nations Children's Fund

Participation Defined (Roger Hart)

"The process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the community in which one lives".

ROGER HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

RUNG 8 - Youth initiated shared decisions with adults: Youth-led activities, in which decision making is shared between youth and adults working as equal partners.

RUNG 7 - Youth initiated and directed: Youth-led activities with little input from adults.

RUNG 6 - Adult initiated shared decisions with youth: Adult-led activities, in which **decision** making is shared with youth.

RUNG 5 - Consulted and informed: Adult-led activities, in which youth are consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions.

RUNG 4 - Assigned, but informed: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, decision-making process, and have a role.

RUNG 3 - Tokenism: Adult-led activities, in which youth may be consulted with minimal opportunities for feedback.

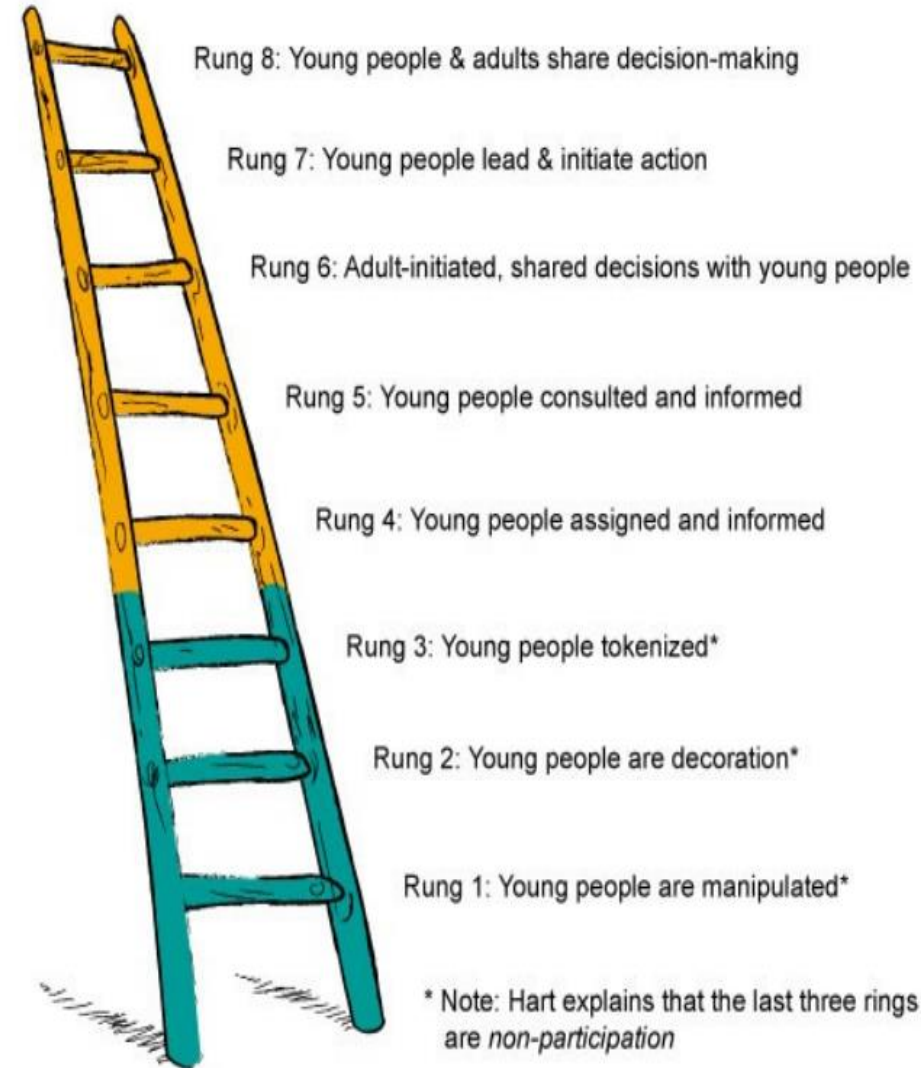**RUNG 2 - Decoration**: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, but have no input in how they are planned.

RUNG 1 - Manipulation: Adult-led activities, in which youth do as directed without understanding of the purpose for the activities.

Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, as cited in www.freechild.org/ladder.htm

Where do the following examples fall on the ladder of participation?

1. ASB
2. Student Representative on School Board
3. Building Leadership Team
4. Student Surveys
5. Student-led Conferences
6. Focus Groups, Voice Circles, Empathy Interviews, Town Meetings, Sensing Sessions, etc.

Rung 8: Young people & adults share decision-making

Rung 7: Young people lead & initiate action

Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people

Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed

Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed

Rung 3: Young people tokenized*

Rung 2: Young people are decoration*

Rung 1: Young people are manipulated*

*Note: Hart explains that the last three rings are *non-participation*

Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

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Top Ten Lessons from Community Circles

By,
Kathryn Page, Ed.D.

#10

It is all about systems!

"You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems."

James Clear (Atomic Habits)

Voices...

"*Honestly, I think we should do a voice circle about anything...letting students talk about what they are passionate about.*" – HS Student

These words were shared by a student after they participated in a Student Voice Circle where I captured students' responses focused on the topic of 'student attendance' at CATS Academy.

Understanding the nuances of why students didn't attend school helped me better understand the life impacts that some students faced each day just to get to school - working in the fields to support their family, having no running water, taking care of ailing family members and many other reasons that I had never had to face in my own life.

Listening to these students who wanted an education but needed assistance due to their circumstances made a lasting impression on me as an educator. Accessing a student's voice is powerful in critically analyzing a question and making it visible in order to impact educational systems as they support ALL students in their educational journey.

Joy Lansdowne
Washington State Leadership Academy: Leadership Coach
AWSP Principal Mentor/Mentee Program: Mentor
Marzano Instructional Framework Facilitator
Leadership Coach: Independent Contractor

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#9

Perception is Reality.

"The use of perceptual evidence is perhaps the most powerful pivot point for creating rapid change in a school that perceives itself as powerless."

(Salina, Girtz, & Eppinga, 2016, p. 52)

Voices...

"Student perceptual data is essential to a thriving school environment because it empowers students and staff to be joint partners in managing decisions in the lives of our students that impact their academic, social and future career experiences."

Julio C. Sánchez, Principal

Hoover Elementary School

509-573-5901

#8

Action is required!

"Gathering students, families, staff, or community members for voice circles and not acting upon the information collected <u>in partnership with the guests</u>, is not only disrespectful; it can be damaging to the future relationship. It will potentially shut the door on future honest dialogue."

~Kathryn Page, Ed.D.

#7

Voice matters….. and it has been proven

"Students with a strong sense of voice, are 7 times more likely to be academically motivated."

(Quaglia Institute)

"Students with a strong sense of..."

Student voice are **7 times** more likely to be academically motivated

Student voice. "The visibility of learning from the students' perspective needs to be known by teachers so that they can have a better understanding of what learning looks and feels like for the students" **(Quality of Teaching = 0.44 ES)**. Also, teachers who develop strong relations with his/her students have a powerful impact **(Teacher-Student Relations = 0.72 ES)** on student learning. "Building and developing relations with students implies agency, efficacy, respect by the teacher for what the child brings to the class...[and requires teachers to use such skills as] listening, empathy, caring, and having positive regard for others." And, "Feedback is most powerful when it is from the student to the teacher" **(0.75 ES)**

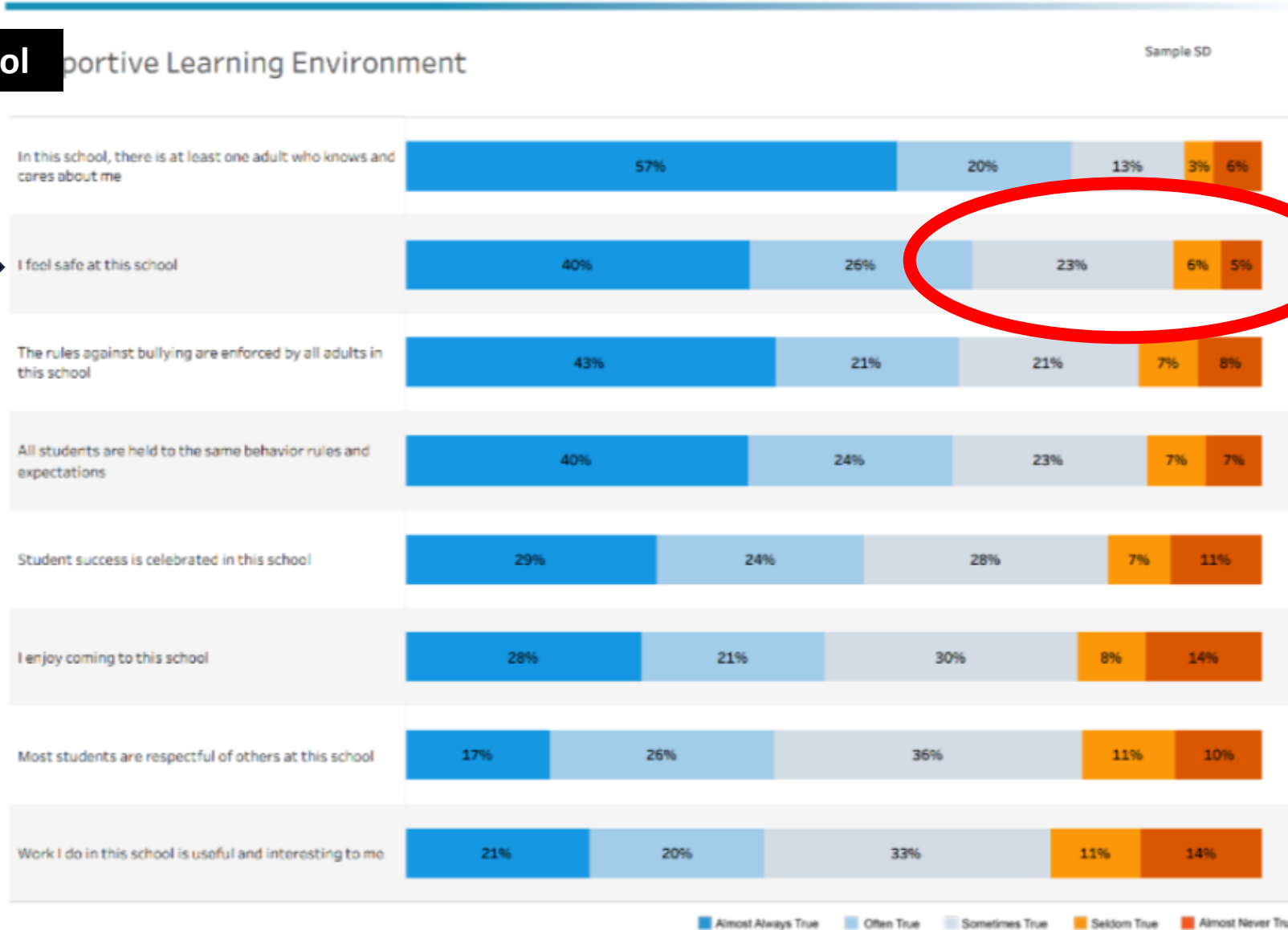*Hattie, John. (2009). Visible Learning. New York, NY: Routledge*
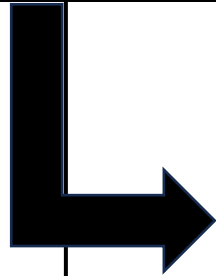
#6

The time is <u>now</u>.

"We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always right to do the right."

~Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sample Report from a Typical Student Survey

I feel safe at school

...portive Learning Environment

Sample SD

	Almost Always True	Often True	Sometimes True	Seldom True	Almost Never True
In this school, there is at least one adult who knows and cares about me	57%	20%	13%	3%	6%
I feel safe at this school	40%	26%	23%	6%	5%
The rules against bullying are enforced by all adults in this school	43%	21%	21%	7%	8%
All students are held to the same behavior rules and expectations	40%	24%	23%	7%	7%
Student success is celebrated in this school	29%	24%	28%	7%	11%
I enjoy coming to this school	28%	21%	30%	8%	14%
Most students are respectful of others at this school	17%	26%	36%	11%	10%
Work I do in this school is useful and interesting to me	21%	20%	33%	11%	14%

Almost Always True   Often True   Sometimes True   Seldom True   Almost Never True

=34%

Sometimes true, seldom true, almost never true

QUESTIONS
1.Tell me about a staff member who has made a positive difference in your life, your go-to person. What **specifically** is it about the person that makes you want to go to them? What do they say or do? The person can be from any grade level…and this is the one time you get to share the name of the person. (If a student does not have a person: Tell me what characteristics a teacher needs to have for you to feel comfortable to talk to them about anything)
2.What does it look, and sound like to feel safe at school?
3.This is a 2-part question and is based on the results from the survey you took this year. a.   Why do you think 40% of our students at this school don't feel safe at school? b.   If you could do anything in our school to change this, what would it be?
4.Tell me about a time when you felt safe at our school? (If they don't feel safe, they could select a different school or grade level to describe)
5.Tell me about a time when you felt the least safe at our school? Please provide as many details as possible.
6.Are there places in our school where you feel most safe? Where are the places and why do you feel safe there?
7. Are there places in the school where you feel least safe? Where are the places and why do you not feel safe?
8. Is there anything else you would like to talk about or share related to safety at our school?

Safety-Focused Community Circle
Audience: 9th, 10th, and 11th Grade Students

Survey Results (October 22): 40% of students don't feel safe
Voice Circle Held? June 2023

We are scared because of all the lock-downs. We never knew what happened. We don't know if it is a drill or real. When it is real, a lot of different stories are told. We aren't told anything.

Unsafe places? There are places where the cameras don't see you. We know where they are.

The most dangerous place is outside the bathrooms. Cameras don't go there and there are people who hang-out there and say and do things to female students.

Do you see what I see?

1. Survey results received in October 2022
2. Voice Circle held in June 2023
3. Could we have prevented anything?
4. How often are surveys administered and actions not taken?

"I thought all I had to do was show people the data and they would understand. But it doesn't work. You have to tell a story."

~Cliff Stoll, U.S. Astronomer

The time is now....

#5

A powershift is needed between adults and students.
(This can be difficult)

"Student voice, in its most profound and radical form, calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students' "power" and "authority". Aspects of student voice do raise concerns for some adults, who feel there needs to be more of a distance between themselves and their students. Cook-Sather (2006:366) explores the influence of "powershift" between adults and students: "the shifts in power dynamics between adults and young people and in roles for students are both prerequisites and results of the key premises and practices of student voice work". This "power shift" can be perceived as threatening to both institution and individual teachers.

Robertson, G. (2015). Student voice at the "heart of learning". *Research in Teacher Education*, *5*(1), 27–32.

#4

Reflection is the Golden Ticket

"We do not learn from experience…We learn from reflection on experience."

`John Dewey.

The Debrief

Voice Circle Debrief		
Date:	Location:	Facilitator:
Champions (Names)		

Questions

Questions	
1. Did anything surface during the voice circle that would be considered a health or safety concern?	
2. What was one of the responses that resonated with you the most?	
3. Did anything surprise you about the responses? Or did they not surprise you at all?	
4. If you were asked to identify an action step based on the dialogue at your table, what would you select and why?	
5. How did this experience and the responses from today inform you in your current role?	
6. Is there anything else you would like to share about the experience today?	
7. What did you think about serving as a Champion? Was it challenging in any way? If you could have a re-do on this circle is there something else you would like to have asked the guests?	
8. What will be our next steps as a team? How will the knowledge gained be shared, acted on, and monitored for progress? How will our guests be included, involved, and continually informed	

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Debrief Document

Who:
Facilitator & Champions

When:
Immediately following a circle

Why:
Address immediate health and safety concerns and determine next steps

"Participating in the Student Voices project was such a rewarding experience for me. I always thought I was really good at the relational part of my job as a classified staff person, but I learned a lot about myself that day. So many students feel invisible...unseen and unheard. Growing up that was exactly how I felt. It's incredibly lonely. I experienced trauma growing up that I kept to myself. I've always felt that if ONE PERSON would have shown me kindness or made me feel like I mattered it would have made all the difference in my life.

We need to open our eyes and our hearts to those students who don't stand out because they're either excelling or struggling academically. They're not loud or vocal, they don't have challenging behaviors. They don't do anything at all to draw attention to themselves. Sometimes those students are the ones who need us the most."

~ Paraeducator
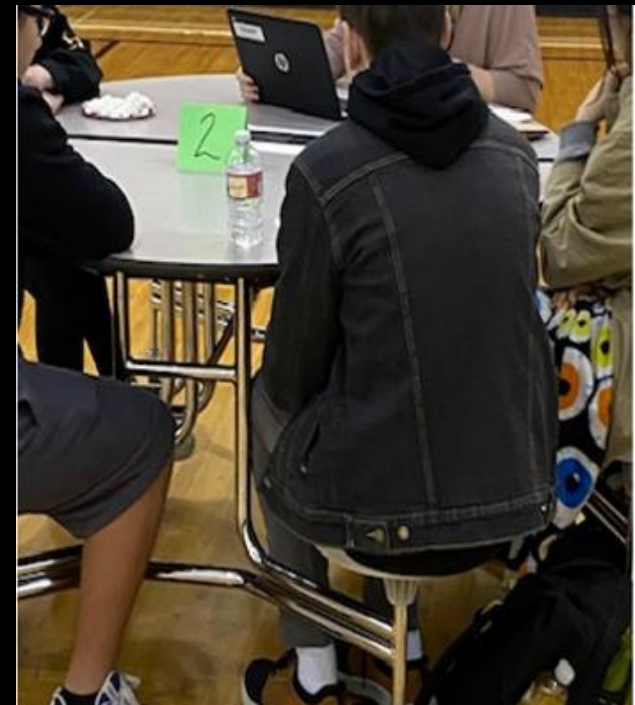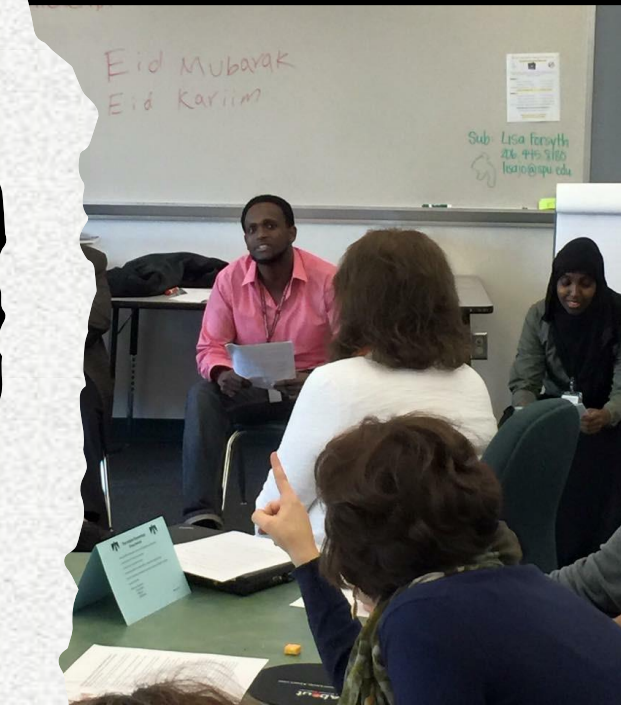
#3

Relationships Matter

Caring adults are required to serve as Champions for student voice circles. However, how do we identify caring adults? From what lens? The student or the adult?

Relationship Mapping

Please write your name in the space provided. *

Kathryn Page

Please choose your grade from the drop down menu. *

7th grade

Is there a staff member at _____ school you would choose to go to if you were sad, needed help, or had something exciting to share? If you don't have anyone yet, please mark the second box. *

○ Yes,

○ Not yet, I can't think of anyone at my school

What is the name of the person you would choose to go to for support, someone to listen, someone to assist you. (drop down list would be placed of staff member names) *

Your answer

*Student pics are posted and staff indicate who they have a connection with. Students without a connection are then matched with an adult (according to the adults).

or

*A 2-question survey where students identify their connections.

Teacher/Staff Selection

Please select any teacher or staff member that you feel you have a connection with or can go to for help.
If the person isn't listed, please write their name in "other" field. You can select more than one staff member.

☐ Ms. Stoner

☐ Mr. Padilla

#2

It is all about the question

Is the vocabulary clear and simple?

Does it encourage the guest to speak from their lived experience?

Did we avoid questions that are based on assumptions

Did we avoid complex questions?

"If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on it, I would use the first 55 minutes determining the proper questions to ask."

~Albert Einstein

Is it truly a genuine question for which you do not have the answer?

Is it an open-ended question that does not lead a guest to a singular response?

What if we had the answer to the following questions collected at this conference yesterday?

CHOOSE YOUR ROLE AND RESPOND

"Safety-Focused Voice Circle"

MY ROLE IS.....	QUESTION
Parent	What do your children share with you about school safety? How do **YOU** feel about the safety of your children at school? Is there anything we can do to improve as a school? (Developed by a building administrator)
SRO	Please share what you believe we can learn to do better in our schools (developed by a teacher). What question do you wish educators would ask you about safety? (Developed by a teacher). Have you witnessed a staff member handling a potentially dangerous situation well? What did they do that resulted in a positive outcome? (Developed by a principal)
Building Level Administrator (Principal/Assistant Principal)	What keeps you awake at night when thinking about safety? (Developed by a state employee).
Student	Do you or your friends ever worry about coming to school? Please share why. (Developed by a special education teacher). Are there places on our campus where you don't feel safe? Please explain. Where do you feel most safe on our campus? What makes it safe?
Teacher	How do you determine if a student's behavior is attention seeking or connection seeking? (Developed by an assistant principal) Where is there evidence of promise and potential in your school as it relates to safety? (Developed by a state employee).
Community Organizations	How can schools partner with the community to keep our students safe? (Developed by a school nurse)?
Law Enforcement	What do you believe we could improve upon as schools to keep our students, staff, and community safe (Developed by a School Principal). What can I do as a counselor to help keep our students safe? (Developed by a counselor)
ANY School Staff	Do you feel like there is enough training for you on the topic of safety? If not, share what you would like to receive. If training is adequate, please share what training you receive and how frequently. (Developed by OPI-State employee)

Ask "THE" Question

When we hold another voice circle, is there a topic you would like to discuss?

*Racism, sexism

*Sex offenders: there are students whom we know never to be alone with--students. Victims don't speak up so no charges are brought. It's gross. Start to talk about issues early so people will speak up.

*Inappropriate touching, molestation… Couple people go after middle schoolers (juniors and seniors) which is disgusting.

#1

(movie clip)

#1

Who can now tell us what #1 is, as well as the new and improved name for this presentation?
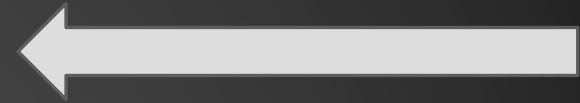
(Prize for the person who names it.)

#1

Be Curious (not judgmental)

Dr. Kathryn Page

~Doanld McGannon

Kathryn's Wish for 2023-2024

1. Every student in the upcoming year has their "go-to" caring adult and doesn't answer "not yet"
2. Perceptual data is not a survey that ends where it begins. It is a first step. It is examined and we continually ask…what do we need to know more about. Where is there a story that needs to be revealed?

What if….

"Uncovering the barriers to successful and sustainable improvement related to school safety, can be as easy and challenging as an authentic question."

NOTHING
CHANGES
IF
NOTHING
CHANGES

What is your next move?

Voice Matters

For additional Information about the process and benefits of using voice circles, please contact …

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