How Two High School Teachers Conceive of Student Voice, Value It, and Foster It

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ABSTRACT

HOW TWO HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS CONCEIVE OF STUDENT VOICE, VALUE IT, AND FOSTER IT

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Northern Illinois University, 2019
Elizabeth A. Wilkins, Director

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory study was to examine two high school English teachers’ experience as they worked together to purposefully implement increased student voice in their classrooms. The study focused on how a convenience sample of teachers designed, implemented, and reflected upon classroom assignments and lessons with the intention to increase student voice and ownership in the classroom. Teachers each participated in four individual interviews, four partnership observations and three classroom observations as they related to student voice implementation.

Data from the interviews, partnership observations and classroom observations were analyzed using qualitative methods and through the lenses of positioning theory and discourse theory. Five key findings emerged from the study. Teachers’ values and belief systems influence their perception of student voice. Teachers must be aware of their own positioning in the classroom to make space for student voice. Student voice implementation in the classroom includes elements from all four domains in the Danielson framework. Authentic opportunities for student voice can be a struggle due to mandated district assessments. Finally, teachers benefit from utilizing various instructional and classroom management strategies to purposefully increase student voice in the classroom. Recommendations for the field and for future research are also presented.
HOW TWO HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS CONCEIVE OF STUDENT VOICE, VALUE IT, AND FOSTER IT

BY

KATHERINE MCCLEARY
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Doctoral Director:
Elizabeth A. Wilkins
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” – Isaac Newton

I have so many giants to thank for helping me reach this goal. First, to Dr. Beth Wilkins, for chairing my committee and providing ongoing motivation and guidance. To Dr. Tom McCann and Dr. Daryl Dugas for their wisdom. To my cohort for helping me get through our coursework and have fun while doing so. To Alison, for her friendship and for always being my champion and my cheerleader. To Lizzy and Amanda, for coming through in the clutch and for helping me climb the mountain. To Monica, for her friendship and for coaching me through countless aspects of this process. To Bob and Noreen, for encouragement from afar. To my dad, Mike, for teaching me about grit, perseverance, and that a job half done is a job undone. To my stepmother Karla for her love and support. To my mother, Mary Jean, whose love and ongoing sacrifices allowed me to do this work. To my husband BJ; there are not enough words to express how much your support and love means. To my children: Laine, Molly and Theo. Mama loves you. And finally, to Janie and Pheoby, for helping me to get to my horizon and back.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to students everywhere, and all of my students from years past, present, and to come. You have shaped my thinking so much, and you are so incredibly important to me! May your voices be heard, acted upon, and celebrated.

To my own three children: Laine, Molly and Theo.

May you always feel as if you have a voice.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“I have a lot to say about the classes I’m in, and how my teachers teach, but sometimes I’m not sure how to say it. Or if I even can say it.” This statement came from a 15-year-old in my English 10 class years ago. Ever since then, the problem of getting more authentic student voice into teacher learning and ultimately classroom practices has been burning in my brain. Alison Cook-Sather (2009), a seminal researcher in student voice in America, reminds us that

Students, just like anyone else, just want to be heard and validated. When they experience this validation (especially from teachers), I find that they are more proactive in their learning. If someone can make them feel important, then they can feel good about themselves and their own learning. (p. 176)

If students find that they are not being heard, this is a multi-faceted problem. This is a problem for our educational institutions striving to create meaningful and realistic learning experiences for students, a problem for the teachers and educators designing those learning experiences, and most of all, a problem for the students themselves, striving to be engaged in learning that might not make them feel acknowledged or important. There is a need for increased student voice, or students having meaningful and acknowledged presence in schools, including having power to influence decisions within their school experience (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363).

There is much existing research on the incorporation of student voice at an international level. Researchers in Australia (Holdsworth, 2000; Simmons, Graham & Thomas, 2015), the United Kingdom (Fielding, 2001; Keddie, 2015; Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006;
Robinson & Taylor, 2007), and Canada (Lamb, 2011) have all examined getting more direct student voice into schools and into teachers’ practices. Likewise, there are several researchers in the United States who are also working on the concept of increased student voice in schools. The preeminent American researcher is Alison Cook-Sather (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2009; 2010), who is joined in the field by Friend and Caruthers (2015), Mitra (2006), and Mitra and Serriere (2012). These researchers have examined student voice at various levels (elementary, secondary and postsecondary) and are champions of getting more student voice into teacher practice.

Increased student voice is part of a larger movement regarding instructional strategies that empower students, including an emphasis on self-advocacy as an element in the Illinois Social/Emotional learning standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 2016). Student voice also falls under the umbrella of students taking ownership of their learning, which places a teacher in the “Distinguished” column in the Danielson evaluation framework, the chosen evaluation framework of the state of Illinois (Danielson, 2011). For the purposes of this study, student voice at the classroom level means students having the ability to share their thinking and reflections about their class in a variety of ways, being able to see what others in the class have to say and seeing their teacher be transparent about taking that feedback and putting it into action (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2010).

However, a crucial framework to examine before increased student voice can go from theory to actual practice is positioning theory. By closely looking at power structures within educational contexts, and specifically classroom settings, and by understanding the roles students, teachers and content represent within those contexts, teachers can understand the nuances of the dynamics at play. By understanding the larger concepts of positioning theory and taking a critical look at the current power structures in schools, classroom teachers can work to
purposefully design experiences in which they listen to and act upon students’ ideas and voices, thereby authenticating students’ voices and experiences in their classrooms (Cook-Sather, 2002a, 2006, 2010; Quaglia & Corso, 2014).

Frameworks

This study included the use of two frameworks to frame the thinking and analysis of the findings: positioning theory and discourse theory. Given that positioning theory deals with power structures and discourse theory deals with language and how it is used to transmit knowledge, including how language is used with regard to power structures and by those in positions of power, the two theories work well together to frame the study.

Central Concepts and Principles of Positioning Theory

Having a position is a concept that was first introduced in the social sciences by Wendy Hollway in 1984. In this initial research, Hollway analyzed the construction of subjectivity in relationships. Continuing from this work came the concept that everyone in a social interaction has a position within that interaction; Hollway characterizes these positions as “relation processes” (p. 69). That is, each of these relational positions inherently has an element of power – superior, neutral or inferior – within it (Hollway).

The larger concept of positioning theory was truly brought to light by Davies and Harré in 1990. Davies, with a background in education, and Harré, with a background in psychology, introduced the concept of positioning as a “discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p. 48). Positioning theory was created to better understand how an individual interacts
with and is shaped by interactions with others. While it is certainly present in conversations and speech acts, positioning theory considers all aspects of communication, including the background and previous experiences a person is bringing to his/her current experience. Davies and Harré expand on this idea, stating that by “speaking and acting from a position people are bringing to the particular situation their history as a subjective being, that is the history of one who has been in multiple positions and engaged in different forms of discourse” (p. 49).

Therefore, positioning is ongoing in an interaction and occurs at multiple levels (Davies & Harré, 1990; Gordon, 2015).

There are many principles that make up the concept of positioning theory. One is the principle of “personhood” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 52) in which a person, or self, both shapes and is shaped by his/her interactions. Davies and Harré call these interactions the person’s “narrative” (p. 55), or the aspects that make up their story. While two (or more) people can be engaged in the same narrative, their positioning within that narrative can be different based on their perspectives, the power structures at play, or their backgrounds. Therefore, two (or more) people can be living in very different narratives without even realizing they are doing so (Davies & Harré, 1990). An example would be how one story, say that of a person telling their friend about an interaction with their shared boss, could be interpreted and told very differently from the perspective of the first person, the friend receiving the story and reacting to it, and the boss himself/herself. This ties in with other principles of positioning theory, in that of self-positioning or how one positions oneself as well as other-positioning, or how one positions others (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1998). For instance, the person may take on the self-position as deserving of sympathy because the boss was mean to him/her as he/she other-positioned him/her. These positions can be deliberate, called “intentional positioning,” or unintentional, called “tacit
The concepts of positioning theory can easily be transferred to the high school classroom. Researchers Harré and Van Langenhove (1991, 1998) state that in any interaction between two or more people, there is first the position each member holds. Secondly, there is the positioning that occurs between each person with a position. This positioning is negotiated and is constantly changing; thus, positioning is a relational process. This positioning in a high school classroom can be seen in the interactions between the teacher and the students. Finally, inherent within positioning theory are stances held by each member. These stances revolve around an object or entity that the subjects are focused around (du Bois, 2007). In the case of a high school classroom, the two subjects would be the teacher and the student(s), and the object would be the classroom interactions or knowledge being constructed, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The original stance triangle and how it applies to the classroom.

Figure 1 shows a visual example of positioning theory. The first image shows Positioning theory’s stance triangle, where Subject 1 and Subject 2 are constantly aligning themselves or renegotiating power between themselves. They are also continually evaluating and positioning
themselves in relation to an object. The second triangle shows this theory as it relates to the high school classroom. In this instance, Subject 1 is the teacher, and Subject 2 is the student(s). While these two subjects are aligning themselves to one another’s power positions in the classroom, they are doing so by constantly repositioning themselves in relation to the classroom context. For example, a classroom context may be a student complaining about an assignment she believes to be unfair, sharing their excitement about an upcoming project, or having input on the way the classroom functions. The way the teacher responds to that student, how she responds back, and so forth is all part of the stance triangle.

Adding to this concept, Harré and Van Langenhove (1998) established three orders of positioning: first-, second- and third-order. First-order positioning relates to how the individual positions him/herself and others based on experiences and morals. Second-order positioning happens when the first-order position is questioned or discussed. Third-order positioning happens when telling a narrative in which the individuals are positioned or are interacting in relation to one another (Gordon, 2015). For instance, in a high school English classroom, this may be seen when a teacher gives a large take-home writing assignment because he / she believes writing is crucial for students (first-order). This belief is part of the teacher’s moral values about the pedagogy of writing. How the student reacts to the assignment, such as grumbling “Why do we have to do this?” or attempting to negotiate “Can we have time in class to work on this?” would be a second-order position. The teacher’s reaction, such as taking an authoritative stance like “Because writing is important!” or “Yes, we can work on the rough draft in class, but you’ll have to do the final draft at home” would be a changed first-order position, as she has repositioned herself from her original position.

Applying the concept of positioning theory to interactions in life is helpful, as it
“provides a framework to explore selves as discursive constructions, and to investigate different aspects of identity, including the development and negotiation of these aspects” (Gordon, 2015, p. 336). Therefore, the concept of positioning theory also ties in with that of discourse analysis and one’s place in various discourse communities, including those of students and their teachers in the secondary classroom.

Central Concepts of Discourse Theory

The dominant discourse practices in a classroom reveal much about the relationship between teachers and students and the level of agency each student experiences. The term discourse has many meanings. Discourse theory, originated by Foucault, seeks to examine how knowledge is created within societal power structures (Hall, 2001). Noted sociolinguist James Gee (1996) relates that “discourse is an association of socially accepted ways of using language, other symbolic expressions and artifacts of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify yourself as a member of a socially meaningful group” (p. 144). He further distinguishes between Discourse with a capital “D” as that of belonging to larger cultural groups and concepts present for hundreds of years and discourse with a lower case “d,” which is language in everyday use, such as stretches of words, text, oral language, and the like. Rogers (2011) suggests that when examined critically, discourse and the act of making meaning are also inherently an exploration into power structures, including the power of oppression.

According to the National Council of the Teachers of English (2017), English teachers have both the educational and moral obligation to invite students into various discourse practices and communities. They urge educators to facilitate conversations in the classroom around difficult and controversial topics and move students beyond their current and potentially narrow
discourse experiences. The NCTE states that classrooms should be a safe place in which diverse ideas are recognized and where students have as much of a voice and an authentic agency in those discourses as the instructor. Therefore, the NCTE considers it crucial that teachers today not only facilitate and invite students into various discourse communities and topics, but they challenge the status quo of the power associated with classroom discourse in which the teacher typically assumes the role of power and control above the student(s).

However, this is not the current reality in many secondary classrooms today, where dominant discourse practices reveal students still feel their voices are not being heard in the sense that they do not have influence over their educational experience. Quaglia and Corso (2014) report that a survey administered in the 2012-13 school year to over 56,000 students in grades 6-12 found just 46% of students felt as if they had a voice in decision making at their school. In that same survey, barely half (52%) of students felt their teachers were willing to learn from them. The problem becomes worse as students continue through their secondary school experience: while a majority of students (61%) believe they have a voice in sixth grade, only 37% of them say they have a voice by twelfth grade (Quaglia & Corso). Secondary schools are supposed to be preparing students for lives as productive and curious citizens, workers, and human beings. Mayer (2012) contends that in a democratic society, one of the aims of school should be to give all students the chance to “acquire intellectual authority” (p. xi), which is not just what facts you know but how you respond to divergent viewpoints. Yet this is not likely to happen if students consistently feel that their voices do not matter within the current power structures and discourse practices of schools today.

There are many ways students are currently silenced, evident both in local classrooms and in schools across the nation. Nystrand (1997) points out that the dominant discourse pattern
in the classroom is monologic, or a one-sided stream of teacher talk in which the teacher is the keeper of the knowledge and the students are expected to complacently listen and absorb the information. This is akin to Freire’s (1970) concept of the banking model of education, where teachers deposit knowledge and the essential right answers into students’ brains. This monologic form of classroom discourse is seen not only in a verbal fashion, such as when teachers come into lessons with both the questions they will ask and the answers they will accept already in mind, but also via the teachers’ actions, such as giving students activities like worksheets and organizers to fill out with specific correct answers predetermined by the teacher. While this research is from the late 1990s and 1970s, respectively, I have found in over a hundred classroom observations as an instructional coach for the past decade that these monologic instructional practices still dominate in the 2000s and the 2010s. At a national level, students are mandated to take the ACT, SAT, and other standardized measures of achievement, yet they have no say in the content, structure, or relevance of those tests to their actual lives. Students are further silenced by policy makers at the state and national level who make decisions about the structure, content, and funding of schools for millions of secondary students, yet they fail to include students whatsoever in the discussion (College Board, 2015).

Nystrand (1997) advocates for a more dialogic form of classroom discourse, one marked not by the teacher and students simply taking turns but instead “is continually structured by tension, even conflict, between the conversants, between self and other, as one voice ‘refracts’ another” (p. 8). We need schools and classrooms structured in a dialogic way and need to provide students with multiple access points into the discourse and power structure of the classroom. There is room for our most crucial stakeholders, the students, in the discourse
practices of classrooms today. Teachers as instructional leaders can use their voices and power to foster democratic and dialogic classrooms. These are the crucial topics my study will address.

Connections between Positioning Theory and Discourse Theory

There are many connections between the two theories: positioning theory and discourse theory. In essence, positioning and power relations between individuals and systems could not exist without the language to define them. Positioning theory is informed by discourse theory and vice versa. As Rogers (2011) suggests that when examined critically, discourse and the act of making meaning are also inherently an exploration into power structures, including the power of oppression. Typically, teachers and the language both they and the culture of school tend to use place the teacher in the position of power in the classroom. However, by being aware of their positioning and the inherent power that comes with that positioning, teachers can work to challenge the current status quo and invite more student voice into their classrooms. By being aware of the language they use, teachers can create a classroom space where student voice is invited in instead of shut out.

Problem Statement

Students are a major stakeholder in the process of learning and school, yet their direct voices are consistently overlooked and left out (Cook-Sather 2002a; 2006; 2009). There has been much research done internationally, as researchers in Australia (Holdsworth, 2000; Simmons et al., 2015), the United Kingdom (Fielding, 2001; Keddie, 2015; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006), and Canada (Lamb, 2011) have all examined various ways of incorporating more student voice into districts, schools, and teachers’ practice.
In the United States, the topic of student voice has been studied at various educational levels. For instance, Cook-Sather conducted research about student voice as it impacts pre-service teachers in their university courses (2002b; 2009). She did this by partnering pre-service teachers with focus groups of high school students and continued with this concept as college students’ voices could impact university professors’ practice (2010). DeFur and Korinek (2010) examined the responses of focus groups of secondary students from rural and suburban schools as they pertained to the students’ overall educational experience. In addition, Friend and Caruthers (2015) examined secondary students’ attitudes towards learning experiences within urban schools. Finally, Mitra (2006) and Mitra and Serriere (2012) examined the inclusion of student voice at the elementary level.

So, while past research has focused on the larger system-wide level of the student-voice movement and on students themselves, studies have not been conducted about student voice influencing high school classroom teachers’ practice directly. Considering Positioning Theory, teachers are a group integral to student voice in classroom instruction. Furthermore, no research has been done at the suburban high school classroom level with regard to how implementing instructional strategies designed to foster increased student voice impacts a single classroom teacher. Therefore, there is a need for research examining student voice in the high school classroom.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of student voice on high school English teachers’ instructional decisions and how they made meaning of student voice, both in their thinking about instruction and in their classroom practice. In order to understand and
explore this purpose, I focused on the following questions:

1. How do high school English teachers invite student voice into the classroom?
2. How do high school English teachers make meaning of student voice?
3. How do high school English teachers instructionally respond to student voice?

Significance of the Study

This study filled a gap in the current literature regarding student voice and the impact on teacher practice at the high school classroom level. Currently there is much international research as well as research done in the United States that discusses student voice as an influencer on teacher practice (Cook-Sather 2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2009; 2010; Fielding, 2001; Friend & Caruthers, 2015; Holdsworth, 2000; Lamb, 2011; Mitra, 2006; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Simmons et al., 2015). However, this research has been limited to the larger system-wide level of the student-voice movement and did not address the classroom level. While they are major stakeholders in the educational process, students rarely have the opportunity to directly influence teacher practice with their own voice, ideas, and input. Therefore, research is needed on the implications for student voice as its influence on high school teachers and their classroom practice.

This study adds to the existing research as it examined student voice impact on teachers’ instructional practices as they worked together to make meaning of data from their own students. This study offers many benefits. For classroom teachers, this study is valuable as it chronicled the journey of two teachers as they sought to gain a deeper insight into what students thought about their instruction. This study also showcased the learning teachers can do around student voice when they reflect deeply with the support of a peer. This study is also valuable as it
approached the topic of student voice in a different manner. The review of the literature revealed no studies in which a partnership studied the topic of student voice and then worked together to implement strategies and ideas into their classroom practice.

For high schools looking to incorporate more student voice into teachers’ instructional practice this study will provide the benefit of the insights from the partnership that tried out this type of professional learning. Considering that the majority of this learning was done within the school day, no additional money on teacher training was spent by the school or district, which makes it a potentially attractive option. Research shows that learning done in a Cooperative Inquiry style, such as within this study, may be more impactful on teachers and their instruction than learning done alone (Reason, 1994).

For designers and facilitators of professional learning, this study has benefit as it incorporate a new element to teacher learning. By seeing the perspective of students as a valid teaching and learning tool, designers and facilitators may have a new and potentially highly motivating source of learning for teachers.

The most recent version of the Danielson Framework for Professional Practice (2013) is currently used in the state of Illinois as the teacher evaluation instrument; student voice is featured in some way in all three domains that relate to teacher planning (Domain 1), classroom environment (Domain 2), and instruction (Domain 3). The highest rating, that of Distinguished, is impossible to obtain without student voice in the form of students taking ownership of their learning and the direction of the class, students directly contributing to the classroom environment or instruction, or students initiating questions and discussions amongst themselves. For instance, in domain 3C, titled Engaging Students in Learning, to obtain a rating of Distinguished, the educator must facilitate a classroom where:
Students take initiative to adapt the lesson by (1) modifying a learning task to make it more relevant to their needs, (2) suggesting modifications to the grouping patterns used, and/or (3) suggesting modifications or additions to the materials being used. (Danielson, 2013, p. 51)

Utilizing student voice and purposefully making space for it in both instructional practice and classroom environment is one of the main ways classroom teachers earn the mark of distinguished teaching in the Danielson framework. Therefore, this study can be beneficial to educators and administrators looking to learn more about this crucial aspect of instruction.

Finally, a benefit of this study could be that students will possibly feel more satisfaction with their learning, as the partnership will seek out ways to include students in the instructional process. Students’ voices and ideas are often left out of the instructional process, yet they have much insight to offer (Cook-Sather 2002a; 2006; 2009). This study encouraged students to have more of a direct say in their learning.

Definition of Terms

Classroom environment: The physical space of a classroom as well as the emotional state of the interactions between a teacher and students (Danielson, 2011).

Classroom instruction: The practice of teaching and learning among students and their teacher (Danielson, 2011).

High school classroom level: For the purposes of this study, this term refers to grades 9 - 12.

Reflective tendencies: The mental abilities of teachers to think deeply about their classroom practice and consider various pathways and reasons why something does or does not happen in the classroom (Danielson, 2011; Lawler, 2003).

Student voice data: These data in the classroom include a multitude of things, including student
feedback surveys, class discussions, exit slips, nonverbal data from students, writing from students, students choosing their pathways through assignments, and other contributions to the classroom environment and instruction as a whole (Quaglia & Corso, 2014).

Teacher partnership: A group of two teachers who collaborate to seek out solutions to challenges they face in their instruction, reflect, and share practices (Heikkinen, Jokinen, & Tynjälä, 2012).

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to study a pair of English 10 honors teachers who worked together to examine student voice in their classrooms. The case included a partnership of two teachers of the English 10 honors course at a suburban high school in the Midwest. At Midwest High School, ‘honors-level’ is a label the school puts on courses that progress at an above-average pace and expect skills that are developmentally accelerated with regards to that age group. However, any student can choose to enroll in an honors-level course, regardless of aptitude or standardized test scores. Data were collected through interviews, observations of the partnership’s interactions, and observations of the teachers’ classrooms. McCann, Johannessen, and Ricca (2005) relied in part on a process that called on outside readers to produce conceptual memos for analyzing qualitative data such as interview transcripts and observation notes. This is where the researcher reads over all of the notes and writes down summaries of her findings. Then, additional researchers outside the study do the same thing, independent of the original researcher. However, the original researcher provides the outside researchers with prompts and questions to guide their conceptual memos. Finally, as a team, the researchers review “the set of summaries to find common observations about the trends” (p. 10) in participants’ responses and observational notes. Methodology will be described in more detail in Chapter 3.
Delimitations

This study was limited in scope as it focused on a partnership of only two English 10 honors teachers both teaching the same course rather than focusing on all teachers in the English department or in the school. It was also limited to one academic “quarter” (March - June of a school year) at one high school.

Organization of Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the study by introducing the problem, discussing positioning theory as it relates to the study, and providing the purpose and research questions. Chapter 1 concludes with the significance of the study, the methodology to be used, and definitions of key terms.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the current literature on the topic of student voice. It discusses the movement’s history and the research—both national and international—that has been published on the topic. Chapter 2 also includes a discussion of the literature surrounding Positioning Theory and its foundations and implications.

Chapter 3 details the methodology used to conduct the study. The results are reported in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings, implications for teacher practice, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Many classroom teachers focus on honing their craft, including efforts to cultivate a classroom environment most conducive to learning; yet educators as a whole typically fail to include students in that process (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2010). As a result, students are marginalized, as their voices are usually not included. In this context, voices refer to the opportunities that students might have to express their preferences for the instructional materials and learning activities and their literal voices in daily oral interchanges in the classroom. For the purposes of this study, I will rely on researcher Alison Cook-Sather’s (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2010) concept of student voice, which honors the idea that young people have insightful and unique ways of thinking about their education and schooling and adults involved at all levels of the students’ education should listen to students’ voices and act upon them when possible. In honoring students’ interests and preferences, a teacher should give young people opportunities to shape their experiences within the educational setting. While lack of student voice is frustrating, large-scale efforts are underway to change how students are included in decisions and classroom discourse in secondary English education in particular, and to draw more attention to student voice (National Council of Teachers of English, 2018).

This review of literature includes a definition of student voice, a survey of the history of the student voice movement both in the United States and internationally, a review of student voice in the progressive education movement, a consideration of the potential positive and
negative aspects of student voice, a discussion of discourse theory as it relates to student voice and social justice in the classroom, an explanation of positioning theory and how it relates to putting student voice into classroom practice.

**Defining Student Voice**

A definition of student voice and its history are included, as the term has many meanings. Clarity of the term and an understanding of its history, including a discussion of its roots in the progressive education movement and discourse theory, are presented in the following section.

**Why the Term Student Voice?**

The concept of student voice is a large and potentially confusing topic since student voice can mean many different things. This confusion is further compounded by the term’s use in secondary English classrooms, where my study will take place. Student voice can mean the students literally speaking or having a discussion. It can mean young people having a say and ownership in their classroom, learning, and lives as students. In the context of the English classroom, voice can mean a purposeful tone that comes across in a piece of student writing. However, this study utilizes the term in the sense of Cook-Sather’s (2006) definition of “students experiencing meaningful and acknowledged presence, [including] having the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in schools” (p. 363). While Cook-Sather’s (2002a) earlier writing and research focused on an idea of “authorizing student perspectives” (p. 1), over time she evolved to utilize the specific term student voice (Cook-Sather, 2002b, 2006, 2009, 2010). This term is recognized and used by many researchers and scholars in the field—
most notably Quaglia and Corso’s (2014) in their book *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change*, which details their extensive work on this topic. Both Cook-Sather and Quaglia and Corso point out that student voice does not necessarily mean students making 100% of the decisions in their education; clearly the expertise of the teacher is still valued. Student voice means students having a sense of ownership in their own learning via their teachers listening to them and designing meaningful ways for students to have authentic input into the class. For instance, this input might be seen in shared instructional decisions, such as student and teacher co-creation of a rubric or student input in texts to be used in class, or it may be seen in the environment of the classroom, such as students generating and enforcing the classroom ‘norms’ and how the class is governed. Therefore, the term *student voice* is what I will use in my study.

Contemporary Discussion of Student Voice in the United States

“Sometimes I wish I should sit down with one of my teachers and just tell them what I exactly think about their class. It might be good, it might be bad, it’s just that [I] don’t have the opportunity to do it” (Cook-Sather, 2002a, p. 21). While there is much literature on student voice in education, this high school student’s thoughts succinctly sum up one definition. He alludes to many of the struggles of student voice inclusion, such as the danger of the teacher not liking what the student has to say and not having the time or opportunity to give his input. And while it is appropriate to begin this literature review with a quote from an actual student, it is helpful to see what other notable researchers in the field have to say as well.

The preeminent American researcher is Cook-Sather (2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2009, 2010), who is joined in the field by Friend and Caruthers (2015), Mitra (2006), and Mitra and Serriere
These researchers have examined student voice at various levels (elementary, secondary and postsecondary) and are champions of including more student voice in teacher practice.

Cook-Sather (2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2010) provides a broad definition of the term student voice: a way of thinking based on the idea that young people have insightful and unique ways of thinking about their education and schooling, that their voices should be listened to by the adults involved at all levels of the students’ education, and that young people should also be given opportunities to shape their experiences within the educational setting. Specifically, she contends that

‘student voice’ as a term asks us to connect the sound of students speaking not only with those students experiencing meaningful, acknowledged presence but also with their having the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in schools. (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363)

Adults involved in education need to be ready to not only provide opportunities for students to share their ideas and perspectives but to listen deeply and be ready to work with students to actually change practice, systems, and pedagogical mindsets. She warns that the term student voice is used loosely to refer to many aspects and approaches to this concept and calls for work toward a “clear and definite conception” of it (p. 360).

Mitra (2006) builds on this concept and argues that partnering with students to discuss and identify problems and solutions within schools “reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate” (p. 315). However, she warns that to gain legitimacy, student voice must be valued among powerful stakeholders in the school.

Increased student voice is part of a larger movement regarding instructional strategies that empower students, such as self-advocacy, analysis of conflict in the classroom and ways to
proactively resolve it, or discussing efforts to promote increased awareness of bias and stereotyping in the Illinois Social/Emotional learning standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 2016). Student voice also falls under the umbrella of students taking ownership of their learning, which places a teacher in the Distinguished column in the Danielson (2011) evaluation framework, the chosen evaluation framework of the state. Finally, according to the National Council of Teachers of English ([NCTE], 2009), increased student voice and agency in the form of a more democratic classroom and for the learning and enactment of social justice are crucial to English educators today. The organizers of NCTE think student voice is so essential they have made it the theme of the 2018 Convention.

Contemporary Discussion of Student Voice Internationally

Researchers in Australia (Holdsworth, 2000; Simmons et al., 2015), in the United Kingdom (Fielding, 2001; Keddie, 2015; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006), and in Canada (Lamb, 2011) have all examined including more direct student voice in schools’ and teachers’ practice. Fielding, one of the more noted student voice researchers in the United Kingdom echoes Cook-Sather’s (2001) sentiments. Fielding relays that student voice includes many ways in which youth can shape their educational experience and participate in decisions on their own behalf, and he proposes nine clusters of questions educators can use to guide their work as they evaluate the conditions for student voice inclusion.

The overall concept of a voice in anything relies on the belief that those who have a voice have a legitimate perspective and role in the process—in this instance, students having a voice in “decisions about and implementation of educational policies and practice” (Holdsworth, 2000, p. 355). Bovill, Cook-Sather, and Felten (2011) point out that unlike teachers and administrators,
students have a unique perspective regarding their education and should be listened to as seriously as any other stakeholder. The student voice movement seeks to put students’ own perspectives, insights, interests and suggestions at the forefront of educational policy and practice, and the educators involved need to not only pay attention but also actively respond to the students themselves (Fielding, 2001; Rudduck, 2007). Children do have voices that are worthy of being heard and acted on, as evidenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which concluded in 1989 that children and young people were worthy of dignity, status and voice and should be afforded due respect and voice in matters that impact them (Lundy 2007; Simmons et al., 2015).

Finally, Rudduck and Fielding (2006) remind us of the teachers’ role in the student voice movement. Students cannot obtain their voices alone; they need the adult stakeholders in the process to realize their part. Rudduck and Fielding state that educators must be mindful to not put “so much emphasis on students we forget the pivotal role of the teacher in managing change… they [the teachers] need to feel that they have a voice in the review and formulation of policy” (p. 227). Teachers have a crucial role in the student voice movement. Without their understanding and support, the student voice movement will not happen. While the term student voice encompasses many concepts, ultimately work by educators to both include and listen to students’ authentic, direct and purposeful voices is crucial.

History of the Student Voice Movement

Rudduck and Fielding (2006) report that schools in the United Kingdom that made student voice a priority existed as early as 1890. Three secondary schools in the UK founded in the 1890s, the 1920s, and the 1940s put student voice at the forefront of their mission of
Bedales, an independent boarding school founded in the 1890s, emphasized “freedom, trust, [and] responsibility” (p. 221). The headmaster wanted students there to feel as if they had a role in the school’s government and organization. Furthermore, students participated in their own progress monitoring and had choice in learning activities. The second school run by headmaster Harold Dent focused on making students participants rather than passive receivers of their own schooling. Dent organized an entire term where the 12- and 13-year-old students designed and worked on their own extended projects, a precursor to today’s inquiry teaching movement (Colburn, 2000). Finally, the school of St. George-in-the-East was founded in the 1940s. This school held the “expectation that everyone in the school would feel committed to the community which they were part of and want to contribute to its wellbeing” (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 222) and also had weekly teacher and student panels that worked together to solve problems. Every student had the opportunity to be a part of this panel. The driving force of all three of these schools was students contributing to, monitoring, and taking part in the construction of their own learning, showcasing student voice as not only a forum for students to speak and be heard but also highlighting social justice undercurrents utilizing students as change agents.

History of the U.S. Progressive Education Movement Related to Student Voice

The concept of progressive, or democratic, education has a strong history that can be traced back to the roots of the progressive education movement of the 1930s and 1940s in America. According to Bravmann (2011), John Dewey was the leader of the Progressivist movement in America. While this movement was initially sparked in the 1800s by Horace Mann’s idea of a common school for all (Cremin, 1964), Dewey deeply valued the concept of
democracy in action and felt that if one of the missions of America’s schools was to educate future citizens, then the schools themselves should uphold democratic values. His concept of democracy included idealized values that together seek the wellbeing of all individuals within a vital and healthy community. He believed that democracy should be organized around shared authority and mutual responsibility and that it is reliant on knowledge that is not fixed but instead ever expanding. This view relates to my ideas for authorizing student perspectives, as I am curious about what happens when teachers purposefully design instruction and a classroom environment to foster this mutual responsibility. Along with the Progressive Education Association, or the PEA, Dewey realized that teachers in the 1930s were too limited in their instructional choices by college admission requirements that “emphasized particular academic courses and unit requirements” (Kahne, 1995, p. 5).

This sounds ironically familiar to the plight of teachers today. Bravmann (2011) describes that Dewey and the PEA wondered about an ideal secondary education system, one in which teachers and students could be free to uphold democratic ideals in not only the curricular content but in the structure of the schooling system as well. Dewey and the PEA asked what would happen if teachers were free from college admissions requirements but could still be assured their students would be accepted to college? What would or could the curriculum look like and how would students fit in? The result: two entire school districts as well as approximately 25 other schools participated in the Eight-Year Study in which “the common problems of American youth [became] the heart of the curriculum” (Kahne, 1995, p. 5). Finally, Dewey and the PEA believed they had developed a schooling system in which students’ voices, perspectives and problems were acknowledged and where students took strides toward becoming equal stakeholders in their learning. However, the PEA realized that teachers would need
training to teach in this radically new fashion. Funded by grants from Carnegie, Rockefeller and other foundations (Bravmann, 2011), the PEA gave support to the schools participating in the Eight-Year-Study by training teachers in school-based decision making.

Before this time, some progressive reformists wanted to create high schools that would better serve students. However, the PEA took it one step further. The organization wanted to transform educational practice in America (Kahne, 1995). Progressive education pioneer Ralph Tyler and his team from the University of Chicago designed a measurement tool (Cremin, 1964). They matched each of the 1,475 graduates from schools in the Eight-Year-Study with a student who graduated from a traditional school that emphasized a college prep curriculum. These pairs were matched as closely as possible in regard to race, gender, scholastic achievement scores, and general background. Overall, students from the schools in the Eight-Year-Study went to college and scored better than their counterparts in traditional schooling in academics (Chamberlin, Chamberlin, Drought, & Scott, 1942). They also functioned as well in other areas, such as higher intellectual curiosity and drive, resourcefulness, participation in student organizations, and development of clear ideas about the meaning of education and how it was personally relevant to them (Cremin, 1964). This spirit from students is sorely needed in schools today. If our aim as educational systems is to create students ready to function and contribute to a democratic society, we must allow the spirit of that democratic society to also flourish in our classrooms (Quaglia & Corso, 2014).

Although progressive educational practices in the schools set up under the PEA in the 1930s clearly worked well, they unfortunately began to decrease in the 1950s in response to pressure to compete with the Russians in the space race. According to Joseph (2011), while pride in the democratic ideas of American schools had been high just a few decades before, fear
of falling behind in math and science skills and losing the space race quickly took over. School
was seen as a place to transmit crucial information, and the attitude pervaded that students could
not be trusted to direct their own learning in a democratic fashion.

The fear of American schools falling behind continued with the seminal report A Nation
at Risk in 1983, where unsubstantiated statistics were presented about American students’ failure
to achieve adequate scores on standardized tests, the lack of rigor in schools, and as a result,
America’s potential inability to compete economically at a worldwide scale (Joseph, 2011). This
blame was placed on the shoulders of the public schooling system, leaving little room for a
philosophy that included democratic educational ideals as a shift to a more teacher-centered
classroom was encouraged.

Another potential blow to student voice came in the form of the standards-based No
Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. This federally funded act demanded that students,
especially those from poorer and typically urban areas, achieve certain scores on standardized
tests and encouraged schools to prepare students for the workforce and economic success
(Joseph, 2011). Ironically, while the American ideal of economic success predicted by higher
test scores was being promoted, the American ideal of democracy in the form of students having
a say in their education was being dramatically attacked, if not completely forgotten. The
purpose of learning and school became a way for students to get ahead, and value was measured
by test scores and potential future earnings rather than by schools fostering curiosity about the
world or the development of well-rounded human beings (Joseph, 2011).

Finally, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by many states led to
a standards-based movement in 2010 (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). The CCSS
were a list of purposefully scaffolded standards and skills written for each grade level or grade
band in the areas of English Language Arts and mathematics (such as 6-8; 9-10). While the initial list of standards and skills was innocuous, how states and districts chose to implement them varied greatly. Some states and districts put the power to implement the CCSS in teachers’ hands, but the implementation in many areas was extremely top-down, with curricula dictated by states or textbook companies (Porter et al., 2011). While student ownership does show up in small ways in the CCSS, the pressure on teachers to cover standards in a highly rigorous fashion once again left little room for true student voice and perspective in classrooms.

However, there is a current backlash in public education against the over-standardization of student learning. NCLB largely failed in its goal to close the achievement gap between rich and poor students, and even worse, student dropout rates subsequently went up (Joseph, 2011). Since teachers now have a greater understanding of the CCSS, a change in educational philosophy is needed. Moving into the tech age of the 21st century and the adoption of 21st century learning skills—such as creativity and innovation, critical thinking, communication and collaboration in conjunction with content knowledge—requires students to be more than good standardized test-takers. This new era in public education calls for the reemergence of the democratic progressive ideals in education first seen nearly 100 years ago.

Unfortunately, modern day public secondary schools that faithfully operate under democratic ideals by using full participation of all involved are difficult to find (Mikel, 2011). Teachers today are trapped between the past and the future, between the NCLB aftershocks that are still being felt and the world they know they need to prepare their students for. Even in the face of pressures to standardize curriculum and measure performance repeatedly, teachers need to remain true to progressive ideals and focus on what they can control, which is how their classrooms can include students as purposeful and equal stakeholders in the learning process in
as many ways as possible. The study examined the extent to which it is possible for high school teachers to operate their classrooms in an essentially democratic and dialogic spirit.

Recent History of the Student Voice Movement

Cook-Sather (2006) notes that the modern concept of student voice in the United States emerged in the 1990s as both educators and social critics alike noted the startling absence of student voice from conversations about school and worked to address this issue. American educational reformist Jonathan Kozol (1991) pointed out how students’ voices were missing from the discussion, and in Canada, expert Michael Fullan (1991) posed the simple but powerful question: “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?” (p. 170), moving away from the sage on the stage modality of teaching where the teacher is the keeper of all knowledge (Cook-Sather, 2010) or the myth of the banking model of education where teachers deposit knowledge to be withdrawn later by students (Freire, 1970).

Robinson and Taylor (2007) clarify that sometimes pupil voice and student voice are used interchangeably, though typically pupil refers to younger, primary-aged students, whereas student may refer to older secondary-aged students. However, they raise caution that the singular use of the term voice can be problematic as it may imply that a “pupil group has only one voice” (p, 6). They also point out that voice is not just limited to the spoken words of students but includes their actions, tone, and ways they share their feelings or views on schooling. In their article on the values and perspectives on student voice, they state that there are four core values:

1. A conception of communication as dialogue
2. The requirement for participation and democratic inclusivity.
3. The recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic.

4. The possibility for change and transformation. (p. 8)

Despite the student voice movement’s rich history, Cook-Sather (2010) points out that there still “is a prevalent assumption that young people are neither able to offer nor interested in offering insights about teaching and learning” (p. 3). This leads to consideration of both negative and positive aspects of including student voice in schools.

Potential Warnings about the Misuse of Student Voice Inclusion

When reviewing the literature, far more cautionary tales and warnings of the misuse of student voice in schools are seen than positive examples. Lodge (2005) contends that student voice and involvement are promising but problematic and identified a range of views “about the extent to which young people should be or can be empowered” (p. 125). To some, students are capable change agents. But others see students as too immature or ignorant to lead change efforts. Lodge is also concerned about differing views regarding the purposes and participation levels of young people: Are they engaging in token participation in predetermined or safe issues? Holdsworth (2000) gives examples: Are students being asked to lead surface-level change efforts, such as the appearance of the school or the name of the mascot? Or are they engaging in deeper topics such as the improvement of their own learning? What can they handle, or what are they being allowed to handle? As Prout (2003) puts it, “While some people see children as potential persons in the guardianship of adults, others view them as people in their own right. Children are seen simultaneously as in danger and as a danger” (p. 127).

Fielding (2001) brings up another danger—that of well-meaning adults speaking for children instead of allowing them to have their own voice directly represented. While students’
views are often sought out, Fielding says that “teachers, researchers, parents and adults in
general speak too readily and too presumptuously on behalf of young people whose perspective
they often misunderstand and, in many contexts, frequently disregard” (p. 123). Lodge (2005)
echoes this concern, discussing how often adults directly or indirectly manipulate children’s
voices to represent their own voice or district- or state-imposed concerns. This may lead to
student voice being used and manipulated not for purposes related to student-generated concerns
but to raise standards and possibly increase test scores (Robinson & Taylor, 2007). In her work
with urban schools, James (2007) furthers this concern of adults manipulating children’s voices
to “simply confirm established prejudices rather than to present new insights based on children’s
own perspectives” (p. 262). She worries that rather than become actual participants in their
learning, children may be merely used as the subjects for adult concerns and research.

Holdsworth (2000) cautions against over-simplifying student voice. This happens when
schools think they have included student voice yet have merely allowed them to be heard: “A
simple focus on ‘being heard’ can merely serve to make it appear that young people are active
participants; this may, in reality, act as a ‘safety valve’ to easy pressure for real changes… [and]
be a way of letting decision makers feel as if they are ‘doing the right thing’” (p. 84). He is also
concerned that student voice may mean developing skills in a select group of chosen students,
such as those in “honors” classes, those who volunteer or those on a school’s student council.
He contends that this marginalizes entire groups of students, and he asks “Whose voices are
being heard? Those with whom we most readily agree?” (p. 359).

Simmons et al. (2015) discuss how often student voice means participation in places such
as student councils that typically deal with more surface-level policy in school rather than direct
implications for teaching and learning. In this instance, student voice and involvement are
“tokenistic” (Tisdall, 2006, p. 104), an adult-led process that typically does not allow for student-led voice and change, or at least not regarding issues that truly matter to students. This, Simmons et al. (2015) contend, is ironic given the role education is supposed to play in students’ lives and the amount of time they spend at school. Should schools not be teaching students to have a voice and allowing them to use it rather than fostering trite systems that indirectly oppress it?

Finally, while promoting student voice and involving students in educational policy is actively promoted in the United Kingdom (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008), in America it is quite different. America has seen virtually no inclusion of student voice in its public educational national policy. As Cook-Sather (2006) points out, legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act has no student presence and, therefore, no student power. Regarding students’ rights, “educational research that does not elicit or respond to students’ ideas violates students’ rights, and educational reform that does not include students… reinforces the U.S. school as a locus of social control that keeps students captive” (p. 372) to adults’ interests.

While there is much documented in the literature that represents warnings related to student voice being incorporated to represent adult interests at a tokenistic level or not at all, there is also much to support student voice movements both in the United States and abroad.

Potential Positive Aspects of Student Voice Inclusion

As Cook-Sather (2006) points out, “Advocates of student voice in educational research and reform embrace the term because speaking does generally signal presence, involvement, and commitment” (p. 365); however, if students speak, she highlights, adults must listen. Often these “forums for listening” (Cook-Sather, 2002a, p. 380) must be created anew. A number of students-as-researchers structures, where students take active, structured roles in their education
and adults listen and act accordingly, are happening in America (Cook-Sather, 2002b, 2009, 2010; Friend & Caruthers, 2015; Mitra & Serriere, 2012), the United Kingdom (Fielding, 2001; Keddie, 2015; Lodge, 2005), Australia (Simmons et al., 2015), and Greece (Mitsoni, 2006).

Multiple large-scale studies point to benefits of increasing student voice in schools. In a meta-analysis of student achievement, Bovill et al. (2011) found that student learning is “deepest when students become their own teachers and when their teachers learn from them through feedback and other means” (p. 2). Similarly, a large-scale mixed methods study in Australia studied over 600 students, ages 6 to 17. These students all attended schools that were focusing on increasing well-being through a sense of belonging fostered via increased student voice. Simmons et al. (2015) found that through this increase of purposeful student voice, there were improvements across all age groups in the pedagogical experiences of students, an improved school environment via socio-emotional and physical means, improved relationships (both among peers and with authority figures), and not surprisingly, improved opportunities to have a say in their educational lives.

Student voice measures in schools also actively model democratic ideals, an objective for many schooling systems around the world. Pearl, Grant and Wenk (1978) discuss this idea as a theory about the value of youth; therefore, if adults are to truly value young people, then these young people must be participants rather than just recipients of policy and ideas. Rudduck and Fielding (2006) also build on this notion, pointing out the irony of a schooling system that purports to teach students the values of democracy but does so in a way that only prepares them for their lives as future citizens rather than facilitating their thinking about and acting on issues that matter to them in their lives now. True student voice movements show students democracy in action as they allow students to express ideas and become change agents in their own lives and
in their own schools (Bravmann, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2002a, 2010; Cremin 1964; Quaglia & Corso, 2014).

Finally, increasing student voice leads to better teaching, demonstrating a mutually beneficial relationship. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) found that by listening to what students had to say, teachers were better able to understand how the students learned. This listening resulted in teachers making adjustments and reflecting on their classroom practice to better meet the needs of their students. Similarly, in her Teaching and Learning Together program at Bryn Mawr College, Cook-Sather (2002a; 2002b; 2009) facilitates conversations in which pre-service teachers consult with groups of high school students about pedagogy, instructional approaches, and empathy and understanding while the pre-service teachers are doing their student teaching. She mimicked the same arrangement with college professors learning from undergraduate students (Cook-Sather, 2010). In each of these situations, teachers reported numerous benefits of learning from students and were able to reflect more deeply about their own teaching when questioned by researchers. Bovill et al. (2011) categorized these mutual benefits into three areas: “students and academic staff gaining a deeper understanding of learning, students and academic staff experiencing enhanced engagement, motivation, and enthusiasm, and students and academic staff relating differently to one another” (pp. 137-8). However, to get to this more ideal environment, appropriate structures must be in place to foster this dialogue, especially structures that take into consideration power between groups within schools.

Discourse Theory and Dominant Discourse Practices in Schools Today

The dominant discourse practices in a classroom reveal much about the relationship between teachers and students and the level of agency each student experiences. The term
discourse has many meanings. Discourse theory, originated by Foucault, seeks to examine how knowledge is created within societal power structures (Hall, 2001). Noted sociolinguist James Gee (1996) relates that “discourse is an association of socially accepted ways of using language, other symbolic expressions and artifacts of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify yourself as a member of a socially meaningful group” (p. 144). He further distinguishes between Discourse with a capital “D” as that of belonging to larger cultural groups and concepts present for hundreds of years and discourse with a lower case “d,” which is language in everyday use, such as stretches of words, text, oral language, and the like. Rogers (2011) suggests that when examined critically, discourse and the act of making meaning are also inherently an exploration into power structures, including the power of oppression.

According to the National Council of the Teachers of English (2017), English teachers have both the educational and moral obligation to invite students into various discourse practices and communities. They urge educators to facilitate conversations in the classroom around difficult and controversial topics and move students beyond their current and potentially narrow discourse experiences. The NCTE states that classrooms should be a safe place in which diverse ideas are recognized and where students have as much of a voice and an authentic agency in those discourses as the instructor. Therefore, the NCTE considers it crucial that teachers today not only facilitate and invite students into various discourse communities and topics, but they challenge the status quo of the power associated with classroom discourse in which the teacher typically assumes the role of power and control above the student(s).

However, this is not the current reality in many secondary classrooms today, where dominant discourse practices reveal students still feel their voices are not being heard in the sense that they do not have influence over their educational experience. Quaglia and Corso
(2014) report that a survey administered in the 2012-13 school year to over 56,000 students in grades 6-12 found just 46% of students felt as if they had a voice in decision making at their school. In that same survey, barely half (52%) of students felt their teachers were willing to learn from them. The problem becomes worse as students continue through their secondary school experience: while a majority of students (61%) believe they have a voice in sixth grade, only 37% of them say they have a voice by twelfth grade (Quaglia & Corso). Secondary schools are supposed to be preparing students for lives as productive and curious citizens, workers, and human beings. Mayer (2012) contends that in a democratic society, one of the aims of school should be to give all students the chance to “acquire intellectual authority” (p. xi), which is not just what facts you know but how you respond to divergent viewpoints. Yet this is not likely to happen if students consistently feel that their voices do not matter within the current power structures and discourse practices of schools today.

There are many ways students are currently silenced, evident both in local classrooms and in schools across the nation. Nystrand (1997) points out that the dominant discourse pattern in the classroom is monologic, or a one-sided stream of teacher talk in which the teacher is the keeper of the knowledge and the students are expected to complacently listen and absorb the information. This is akin to Freire’s (1970) concept of the banking model of education, where teachers deposit knowledge and the essential right answers into students’ brains. This monologic form of classroom discourse is seen not only in a verbal fashion, such as when teachers come into lessons with both the questions they will ask and the answers they will accept already in mind, but also via the teachers’ actions, such as giving students activities like worksheets and organizers to fill out with specific correct answers predetermined by the teacher. While this research is from the late 1990s and 1970s, respectively, I have found in over a hundred
classroom observations as an instructional coach for the past decade that these monologic instructional practices still dominate in the 2000s and the 2010s. At a national level, students are mandated to take the ACT, SAT, and other standardized measures of achievement, yet they have no say in the content, structure, or relevance of those tests to their actual lives. Students are further silenced by policy makers at the state and national level who make decisions about the structure, content, and funding of schools for millions of secondary students, yet they fail to include students whatsoever in the discussion (College Board, 2015).

Nystrand (1997) advocates for a more dialogic form of classroom discourse, one marked not by the teacher and students simply taking turns but instead “is continually structured by tension, even conflict, between the conversants, between self and other, as one voice ‘refracts’ another” (p. 8). We need schools and classrooms structured in a dialogic way and need to provide students with multiple access points into the discourse and power structure of the classroom. There is room for our most crucial stakeholders, the students, in the discourse practices of classrooms today. Teachers as instructional leaders can use their voices and power to foster democratic and dialogic classrooms. These are the crucial topics my study will address.

Need for More Dialogic and Democratic Forms of Discourse in Secondary Schools Today

My study fills a gap in the literature in that it examined two high school English 10 honors teachers as they worked to purposefully design instruction to include more dialogic and democratic forms of discourse in their classrooms. This type of instruction and classroom management also works to respect students as knowledgeable and autonomous individuals.

Many scholars argue the need for classrooms that do this. Meier (1995) points out that by allowing students to participate in frequent and engaging learning activities such as debates,
writing and discussions, classroom teachers are fostering democracy. However, there needs to be a purposeful, linked set of learning experiences for this to happen. Meier suggests that by designing these active and engaging learning experiences, we as educators can foster more tolerance and deeper thinking by students and, as a result, create an overall democratic ideal and feel in our classrooms. McCann (2014) points out that when given the opportunity to engage in meaningful and relevant topics, students deepen their speaking, writing, and inquiry skills.

If small children learn how to speak, write, and read by having a voice (literally and figuratively) as well as by reacting and responding to others, why are so many secondary classrooms predominantly monologic in nature? We know this is not how humans best learn, yet this is a traditional model seen in many secondary classrooms today (Stern, 1995). No one would expect a three-year-old to sit, listen, and only answer with the right answers in rote fashion. Stern (1995, p. 24) offers the following representation (see Figure 2) to demonstrate what she means by the traditional model.

**CURRICULUM → TEACHER → STUDENTS**

Figure 2. Traditional model (teacher-processed curriculum).

Unfortunately, Stern (1995) decries how the overall structure of school really has not changed much in the past 150 years. While educators know that a co-creative, student-centered approach can be beneficial, it still rarely happens in practice (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). Stern states that teachers need to both seek out and listen to their students’ perspectives and then derive the curriculum from students’ realities, interests and what is meaningful to them. In doing this,
teachers can teach with their students instead of to them. To that end Stern (p. 24) suggests the co-creative model (see Figure 3) to demonstrate what she means.

![Diagram of co-creative model](image)

**STUDENT REALITY** → **TEACHER**

**CURRICULUM**

**STUDENTS AND TEACHER**

Figure 3. Co-creative model (student-centered curriculum).

Classroom teachers are essentially the gatekeepers of student voice; they can choose to authorize their students’ perspectives and voices. They can purposefully take on a “co-creative” (Stern, 1995) model of teaching and learning, or they can stay in a traditional mindset. I argue that educators who are preparing students for the 21st century and to be happy, intelligent and contributing members of society must strive for the co-creative model. As Kutz and Roskelly (1991) caution, we must be aware of our classroom discourse models, as these models “assert a larger set of values” (p. 77) to the students we are teaching. Do we want to reinforce a message of top-down instruction, learning, and thinking for tomorrow’s problem solvers? Or do we want to include students in the process by valuing their voices? When students in the English secondary classroom feel a sense of ownership in the form of the topics or curriculum chosen, in the tasks they are to take on, in what they discuss, and in how the classroom is structured, they can “bring to class their greatest strength: the ability to teach one another” (Sterns, 1995, p. 5). These questions motivate my interest in this study.
The concepts and structures surrounding discourse also relate to the concept of social justice theory. One of the tenants of social justice theory is that those in power use their voice to represent those who do not have power. In schools, students comprise the silent majority, and they typically hold a position of less power in the classroom. But teachers can speak up for this silent majority and create not only a more democratic experience but also engage in a type of classroom-level social justice as well. As Gee (1996) contends, there is Discourse with a capital “D” and discourse with a lower-case “d,” and I argue there is a form of Social Justice with capital letters and social justice in lower-case. On a large scale, Social Justice deals with the power structures and inequity regarding issues such as race, socioeconomic class, and gender. On a smaller scale, the power relations seen at the classroom level among the teacher, students, curriculum and classroom environment are examples of social justice of a lower-case nature. This is not to say that classroom power relationships are unimportant; they simply occupy a different psychological and physical space than their Social Justice counterparts. However, I argue that if we want to prepare students to take on issues of Social Justice, both as adolescents and adults, classroom teachers need to start by modeling social justice at a classroom level.

While Dewey, Tyler, and other earlier progressives made the case for including student voice at the classroom level nearly 100 years ago, current research that examines adolescents voicing their thoughts and ideas about their educational experience is a recent phenomenon, according to Selvester and Summers (2012). Intrator and Kunzman (2009) contend that adolescents are yearning for experiences in school that engage and inspire them as well as
empower them to share their voice. My study of two secondary English teachers at Midwest High School examined just that.

**Positioning Theory as it Relates to Student Voice**

Power structures or positional relations between people are inherent in any social interaction, and the daily interactions between teachers and their students are no different. If students are to have increased voice in classrooms, teachers especially need to be aware of the positions they hold.

**Positioning Theory and its Use in Educational and Classroom Contexts**

Positioning theory has been used to examine educational contexts in various ways. Researchers have used this framework to investigate how students form identity and how their identity develops (Wortham, 2004a; 2004b) as well as how a teacher’s self and identity develop (Watson, 2007). Menard-Warwick (2007) researched how gender and social positioning in a second language learning classroom impacted students, while Yoon (2008) examined regular classroom teachers’ views of their role as they related to the English language learners in their classroom. Anderson (2009) examined both the macro- and micro-scales of positioning in the classroom by looking at the larger categorizations of persons and activity and the smaller-scale lived interactions of the classroom, respectively. Hall et al. (2010) examined multiple literacy teachers’ identities and how they were constructed in the context of secondary literacy classrooms. By looking at the social functions of language, they examined how both “teachers’ and students’ understandings of identity can promote or inhibit literacy teaching and learning” (p. 2). Positioning relates to this study of the classroom and student voice because the teacher is
typically perceived as the one in the position of superior power in the social construct of the classroom. The student, therefore, is typically perceived as the person in a position of less power.

The concepts of positioning theory can easily be transferred to the high school classroom. Harré and Van Langenhove (1991, 1998) state that in any interaction between two or more people, there is first the position each member holds. Secondly, there is the positioning that occurs between each person with a position. This positioning is negotiated and is constantly changing; thus, positioning is a relational process. This positioning in a high school classroom can be seen in the interactions between the teacher and the students. Finally, inherent within positioning theory are stances held by each member. These stances revolve around an object or entity that the subjects are focused around (du Bois, 2007). In the case of a high school classroom, the two subjects are the teacher and the student(s), and the object is the classroom interactions or knowledge being constructed, as seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: The stance triangle (original) and the stance triangle as it relates to this study.
Figure 4 shows a visual example of positioning theory. The first triangle shows positioning theory’s stance triangle, in which Subject 1 and Subject 2 are constantly aligning themselves or renegotiating power between themselves. They are also continually evaluating and positioning themselves in relation to an object. The next triangle shows this theory as it relates to the high school classroom. In this instance, Subject 1 is the teacher and Subject 2 is the student(s). While these two subjects are aligning themselves to one another’s power positions in the classroom, they are doing so by constantly repositioning themselves in relation to the classroom context. For example, a classroom context may be a student complaining about an assignment they believe to be unfair, sharing their excitement about an upcoming project, or having input on the way the classroom functions. The way the teacher responds to that student, how the student responds back, and so forth are all part of the stance triangle.

While past research has focused on the larger system-wide level of the student-voice movement and on students themselves (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2009; Friend & Caruthers, 2015; Kane & Maw, 2005; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Quaglia & Corso, 2014; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006) studies have not been conducted about student voice influencing high school classroom teachers’ practice directly. Considering positioning theory and the stance triangle, teachers are a group integral to student voice in classroom instruction. Furthermore, no research has been done at the suburban high school classroom level with regard to how direct student voice impacts the classroom teacher. Therefore, there is a need for research examining student voice in the high school classroom, which my study aims to do.
Central Concepts and Principles of Positioning Theory

Having a position is a concept that was first introduced in the social sciences by Wendy Hollway in 1984. In this initial research, Hollway analyzed the construction of subjectivity in relationships. Continuing from this work came the concept that everyone in a social interaction has a position within that interaction; Hollway characterizes these positions as “relation processes” (p. 69). That is, each of these relational positions inherently has an element of power – superior, neutral or inferior – within it (Hollway).

The larger concept of positioning theory was truly brought to light by Davies and Harré in 1990. Davies, with a background in education, and Harré, with a background in psychology, introduced the concept of positioning as a “discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p. 48). Positioning theory was created to better understand how an individual interacts with and is shaped by interactions with others. While it is certainly present in conversations and speech acts, positioning theory considers all aspects of communication, including the background and previous experiences a person is bringing to his/her current experience. Davies and Harré expand on this idea, stating that by “speaking and acting from a position people are bringing to the particular situation their history as a subjective being, that is the history of one who has been in multiple positions and engaged in different forms of discourse” (p. 49). Therefore, positioning is ongoing in an interaction and occurs at multiple levels (Davies & Harré, 1990; Gordon, 2015).

There are many principles that make up the concept of positioning theory. One is the principle of “personhood” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 52) in which a person, or self, both shapes
and is shaped by his/her interactions. Davies and Harré call these interactions the person’s “narrative” (p. 55), or the aspects that make up their story. While two (or more) people can be engaged in the same narrative, their positioning within that narrative can be different based on their perspectives, the power structures at play, or their backgrounds. Therefore, two (or more) people can be living in very different narratives without even realizing they are doing so (Davies & Harré, 1990). An example would be how one story, say that of a person telling their friend about an interaction with their shared boss, could be interpreted and told very differently from the perspective of the first person, the friend receiving the story and reacting to it, and the boss himself/herself. This ties in with other principles of positioning theory, in that of self-positioning or how one positions oneself as well as other-positioning, or how one positions others (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1998). For instance, the person may take on the self-position as deserving of sympathy because the boss was mean to him/her as he/she other-positioned him/her. These positions can be deliberate, called “intentional positioning,” or unintentional, called “tacit positioning” (Gordon, 2015, p. 332).

Adding on to this concept, Harré and Van Langenhove (1998) established three orders of positioning: first-, second- and third-order. First-order positioning relates to how the individual positions him/herself and others based on experiences and morals. Second-order positioning happens when the first-order position is questioned or discussed. Third-order positioning happens when telling a narrative in which the individuals are positioned or are interacting in relation to one another (Gordon, 2015). For instance, in a high school English classroom, this may be seen when a teacher gives a large take-home writing assignment because he / she believes writing is crucial for students (first-order). This belief is part of the teacher’s moral values about the pedagogy of writing. How the student reacts to the assignment, such as
grumbling “Why do we have to do this?” or attempting to negotiate “Can we have time in class to work on this?” would be a second-order position. The teacher’s reaction, such as taking an authoritative stance like “Because writing is important!” or, “Yes, we can work on the rough draft in class, but you’ll have to do the final draft at home” would be a changed first-order position, as she has repositioned herself from her original position.

Applying the concept of positioning theory to interactions in life is helpful, as it “provides a framework to explore selves as discursive constructions, and to investigate different aspects of identity, including the development and negotiation of these aspects” (Gordon, 2015, p. 336). Therefore, the concept of positioning theory also ties in with that of discourse analysis and one’s place in various discourse communities, including those of students and their teachers in the secondary classroom.

Case for Incorporating Student Voice into Teacher Learning

The importance of teacher learning has always existed, although methods have changed over time. More recently, this learning has traditionally come either in the form of “professional development,” where there is a more direct instruction style of an expert to a group of teachers, or “professional learning,” which is more constructivist and where the teacher is in charge (Webster-Wright, 2009). As Cook-Sather (2006) points out, even notable researchers such as Brown and Darling-Hammond “focus on teachers’ or other adults’ perspectives on what students need” (p. 372). The idea of directly incorporating student voice into learning for teachers is happening, although it is relatively new. For instance, research studies from England by Peacock (2001) and Raymond (2001) interviewed students about schooling and tried various methods to incorporate student voice. Peacock’s study was an interview set-up; it included primary-aged
students sharing their ideas about what did and did not work with regard to school. However, Peacock did not include what the teachers’ reactions were to these interviews, making this interview set up more passive and organized as a free-flowing series of vignettes. These case studies offer few ideas that can be generalized and applied to the larger population, but they are excellent starting points for future research. Raymond (2001) had a more systematic approach to using student voice as a significant driver behind school improvement. This research study details findings from the “Students as Researchers” project about the role of student voice in a secondary school in England. It includes a spectrum from least to most effective: using students as a data source, such as taking their scores on a test (least effective); using students as active respondents in a dialogue that is teacher-led; and using students as actual researchers (most effective). While Raymond did make judgments about what was least or most effective, he does include an entry point for all schools or professional learning facilitators, which provides an idea of how to incorporate student voice into teacher learning. However, these studies have limitations: the sample sizes were relatively small and were both conducted in England.

Cook-Sather’s (2002a) Teaching and Learning Together (TLT) project in the teacher preparation program at Bryn Mawr College included a focus group of purposefully chosen students representing the overall population of their high school who interacted with a group of pre-service teachers in Cook-Sather’s program. Over the course of several months, the two groups had discussions with each other as the pre-service teachers prepared, partook in, and then reflected on their student teaching experience. By requiring the pre-service teachers to listen to and reflect on what the high school students had to say, Cook-Sather (2002a) worked to overcome “the mindset of ‘teacher knows all’ that so many even young teachers enter the profession with, either knowingly or unknowingly” (p. 26). A strength of this study is that it
includes direct student voice from the high school students; it is not a compilation of selected interview quotes or anonymous survey data. Subsequently, the pre-service teachers reflected that this resulted in powerful reflection and learning for them.

Cook-Sather continued to evolve the student voice movement in the late 2000s as well. In an article published in 2009, she took the TLT model a step further by having a one-on-one email pen pal exchange set up between a high school student and a pre-service teacher instead of using the focus groups. This allows a closer bond to be formed as the pre-service teachers could go deeper with their questions for the high school student. Ultimately, the transcripts of the emails became the coursework for the pre-service teachers. Cook-Sather (2009) also included suggestions for how others can create opportunities for teachers to listen to students.

Finally, Cook-Sather continued the evolution of her ideas about student voice as a driver for teacher learning in a 2010 article, which is a case study format. While this format cannot be generalized to a larger population, it provides fascinating examples of student voice in action. The groups involved were not only high school students communicating with pre-service teachers, but also a group of college students communicating with college faculty. Cook-Sather highlighted the importance of shifting the power in traditional schooling away from teacher knows all to a more reciprocal relationship in which all involved contribute important ideas to learning. Both groups of teachers reported deep reflection and that they were taking their learning into practice.

While Cook-Sather (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2009; 2010) has focused her studies on pre-service teachers or veteran college professors, it is not a far stretch to suppose that teachers in any stage of their career could incorporate these concepts to further student voice in their own classrooms. Overall, there are clear gaps in the research. There have been multiple qualitative
studies and work in many areas relating to student voice; however, this qualitative work is not substantial enough to provide a strong foundation. While Cook-Sather has done the majority of her work with pre-service teachers, a clear gap exists focusing on the work of in-service teachers and student voice incorporation.

Much of the research literature reviewed thus far has provided rationales for getting incorporating student voice into teacher learning. But what about the question of “how to put it into practice”? The following discussion provides ideas and practical suggestions for schools or facilitators of professional learning to use. DeFur and Korinek’s (2010) study utilized focus groups to examine rural and suburban students’ perspectives about school rather than urban youth, the focus of much of the research. The students discussed five questions ranging from the nature of schools, how students learn, and which teaching methods they found effective. A team of teachers then met to examine the transcripts from each focus group and searched for themes. They found that not only were students excited to share their perspectives, but that their ideas aligned with those of nationally recognized experts.

In a similar vein, Kane and Maw (2005) conducted a case study at one secondary school in New Zealand. Their focus for capturing student voice was for a slightly different purpose; they wanted to hear from students about the school’s culture and values, which contributes to the literature in a unique way. Kane and Maw discuss how problematic many schools are in the first place, as often the values of the school do not match up with those of the students. Kane and Maw posed the question: How can educators help to align student voice with school values? The idea for the case study was first presented to all teachers at a whole staff meeting. Six teachers volunteered to take part and focused on students from one of their senior (grades 11-13) classes. Research was thorough and conducted over 10 weeks in a multi-method fashion. It focused on
students’ ideas regarding three key areas: the positioning and autonomy of the students, the role and dispositions of the students, and the conditions for authentic student involvement (p. 314). This study offers a practical, yet an authentic and safe, way to directly include student voice in the secondary English classroom.

There are a variety of practical ways to incorporate student voice, but is the inclusion of student voice always a good thing? Lodge (2005) questions this very assumption and used an analytical model to examine student involvement, focusing on four approaches to including students. She identified that student voice can be used in two ways in regard to school improvement: for community purposes (such as the improvement of learning), and institutional purposes (such as the improvement in the appearance of school). Lodge warned that if done incorrectly, student voice can coerce teachers into compliance by making them include but not necessarily listen to student voice, and she ultimately concluded that using a dialogic model between teachers and students is best. This way, adults are not speaking for students but with them. While more negative than other articles in this literature review, Lodge adds an excellent perspective that there is danger in speaking for students rather than letting them speak for themselves.

These articles are interesting in that many of them are either conducted by researchers in the field or by well-known college professors. But, what about research done directly by a classroom primary or secondary teacher? Mitsoni (2006), a secondary school teacher in Greece, saw a gap in the “idea of engaging students in discussion of teaching and learning” (p. 159) in her native Greece and sought data from direct interviews with groups of 12 to 14-year-olds and teachers in 10 different schools in both the urban and rural regions of Greece. Listening to the students, she found they expressed a need for content connecting with their everyday lives,
lessons that encouraged them to partake in active involvement, and requests for their teachers to give them greater responsibility for their own learning. Overall, she concluded the students were grateful to have an adult actually listen to them, something that appears to be uncommon in many parts of Greek schooling. She discussed the tremendously positive impact these students’ voices had on her own reflection and practice as a teacher early in her career. While the study was relatively small and limited to students in Greece, aspects of it can be replicated in other schools across the world.

Finally, a practical and positive source in the literature is not an article but instead a toolkit for schools, districts, and/or professional learning facilitators to use in teacher learning. Harris et al. (2014) detail “three tools educators can use to gather and analyze local data to listen to students on school-related topics or problems” (p. 1). This toolkit includes sample resources such as questions and possible responses as well as worksheets and facilitation guides with the end goal of greater empowerment on the students’ behalf. The tools are organized from least to most complex and all include both discussion and action steps.

Conclusion

The term student voice encompasses many concepts, but for the purpose of this study the term referred to educators’ purposeful efforts both to include and act on students’ authentic, direct and purposeful voices to result in positive action. But despite the student voice movement’s rich history and the current revived interest, there are both negative and positive aspects of including student voice in schools. Overall, the literature shows multiple benefits for both adults and students alike when there is an increase of true student voice within classroom practice. However, to create this more ideal environment, teachers and other adults must be
willing to first listen to students and appropriate structures must be in place for students to share their perspectives. *How Two High School Teachers Conceive of Student Voice, Value It, and Foster It* created this structure and collaboration between two English 10 honors teachers and their students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of student voice on high school English teachers’ instructional decisions and how they made meaning of student voice, both in their thinking about instruction and in their classroom practice. To understand and explore this purpose, I focused on the following three questions:

1. How do high school English teachers invite student voice into the classroom?
2. How do high school English teachers make meaning of student voice?
3. How do high school English teachers instructionally respond to student voice in their classroom practice?

This chapter presents the qualitative methodology used and includes sections about the research design, school site and participants, data collection tools, data analysis methods and validation procedures.

Research Design

This research study used a qualitative case study design with foundations in discourse theory and positioning theory. It focused on how two teachers identified, created knowledge about, implemented, and reflected on instructional strategies related to student voice. Three data gathering tools were used: individual interviews, observations of the two teachers working together, and classroom observations. As few studies have examined implementation of student
voice at the high school classroom level (Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Mitsoni, 2006; Quaglia & Corso, 2014), a qualitative case study such as this one offers data to deeply examine this timely educational issue.

Type of Study

This study explored the influence of student voice on two high school English teachers’ instructional decisions as well as how they made meaning of student voice and authenticated their students’ voices and ownership within the class. Examples of student voice included students speaking and sharing their ideas in class on immediate topics, teachers asking students for input in the direction of the class in terms of either curricular choices or the classroom environment and then acting on that input, or other aspects of the teacher-student or student-student relationship in which students became active participants in their learning and in the power relationships in the classroom (Cook-Sather, 2002a, 2006, 2010). The teachers worked together to define student voice as it pertained to their classrooms, to design learning experiences related to student voice, and to reflect on the results in their classroom practice.

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach, as this type of research honored the complex work of teacher-student and teacher-teacher interactions and best allowed for a rich description of the voices of all stakeholders to be heard (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research also allowed me to answer the research questions. Specifically, I utilized an action research approach in my case study, as it “focus[ed] on research and learning through intervening and observing the process of change. It is a continuous process of learning and change where researchers and clients develop a long-term interest in understanding and resolving a problem or issue” (Cunningham, 1997, p. 406). Case studies as a whole do not have one specific agreed upon
definition, but instead Hesse-Biber (2017) states that this approach is “a decision about what is to be studied” (p. 220), and the ‘case’ itself puts some sort of boundary on the study taking place. Stake (2005) notes the duality of case studies in that they are both the way a researcher proceeds with research as well as the result of that research: “A case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 444).

Case studies and action research work well together specifically because of this duality as the case study is both a process and a product. Action research has similar qualities in that it is both a process and a result. The field of student voice in education has many examples of researchers undertaking action research via case studies (Cook-Sather, 2002a, 2009, 2010; DeFur & Korinek, 2010; Kane & Maw, 2005; Mitsoni, 2006).

School Site

The chosen school site was Midwest High School (pseudonym), located in a suburban community in Illinois. Midwest High School was a large high school of approximately 2,000 students and 165 certified teachers and nine administrators (Illinois State Report Card, 2018). Teachers were typically well established in the school, with most (approximately 85%) having taught for five years or more. The student population came from middle to upper-middle class homes, and the student body was 85% Caucasian, 1% African-American, 5.5% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 2% other races (Illinois State Report Card, 2018). The school performed above state averages with 66% of students meeting or exceeding standards on the state testing benchmark for 2017, was named as a 2010 U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon High School, was on the National AP Honor Roll, and has been recognized by two national magazines as a top high school in the nation (Illinois State Report Card, 2018).
This school was selected because it met several criteria. First, the building had a school-wide goal of getting more student voice into classrooms and teacher learning. This was evidenced by the building leadership’s actions. For example, the principal had monthly “Pizza with the Principal” sessions during which she had lunch with a group of current students to ask for their input on aspects of school culture, including instruction. The principal then sent this information out in her weekly newsletters to the staff. While the principal was clearly setting the tone for her expectations of including and listening to students, there was no formal follow up done by her or any administrator to observe or measure student voice in classroom practice.

Secondly, teachers at this school were also encouraged to take professional learning classes that focused on building social-emotional bonds and positive classroom culture with students. Some of these were in-district classes written by teachers and instructional coaches, such as “The Art of Questioning,” “Student Engagement,” and “How to Give Effective Feedback.” However, other classes were provided by outside organizations, such as “Capturing Kids’ Hearts” facilitated by The Flippen Group. These classes included specific strategies for teacher facilitation of student voice, such as ways for students to have a say in the rules or norms of the class and instructional methods that were best for them. As of 2017, approximately 75% of the staff at Midwest High School had taken “Capturing Kids’ Hearts” a class that specifically focused on building positive classroom environment and culture, including getting student voice into instruction. However, specific follow up data as to how many teachers actually did this in their classroom practice was informal at best. According to informal administrative walk through visits of classrooms, most teachers encouraged student voice to some degree at the start of the school year, but these instructional practices tended to decrease over time. Only one of the two teachers in this study had taken “Capturing Kids’ Hearts.” This made these two teachers
interesting cases as they were surrounded by a culture of student voice inclusion and worked closely together, yet only one of them had received formal training on this topic.

Finally, this school had access to technology in the form of student and teacher Chromebooks. Therefore, methods of obtaining input from students could be done in a variety of ways. For instance, the teachers in the study asked for student input through an anonymous Google Form, with a shared Google Doc, and with a shared Google Slides presentation.

Participants

In this study, two high school English 10 honors teachers at Midwest High School were the “case,” as their thoughts, teaching methods and reflection were the focus of my in-depth exploration (McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008; Yin, 2014). Both of the teachers in this study were veterans with 12 or more years of experience, and both had achieved tenure. Together the two teachers reflected both individually and as partners. I captured their voices, thoughts and ideas about their learning experience in three ways: individual interviews with each teacher, observations of the two teachers as they worked together on the topic of authenticating student voice in their classrooms, and direct classroom observations of the work in practice.

The subject area of English was selected specifically due to the curricular opportunities English provided for student voice, as the department at Midwest High School had shifted to a skills-based rather than content-based curriculum over the past eight years. This shift encouraged flexibility for teachers to pursue other areas in the classroom such as student voice inclusion. Additionally, these two teachers had already taught units of instruction that promoted student voice. Finally, at a national level, student voice is pertinent to English instruction; as
evidenced by the theme of the National Council of Teachers of English’s 2018 convention: “Raising Student Voice” (2018).

The teachers were given a consent form detailing their participation in the study (see Appendix A). I described the study verbally during a mutually agreed upon time at school and then gave the teachers the consent forms to read over and return within 48 hours. Confidentiality for the participants was assured through pseudonyms, and all data were kept either in a locked file cabinet or on a password-protected computer and network throughout the study.

This study was purposefully kept to only two teachers for several reasons. First, these two teachers both had common planning time during the school day, which lent itself to collaboration about the topic. It could be difficult as a teacher to take on a multi-faceted topic such as student voice all by yourself. Second, these two teachers already had a very trusting relationship, both with one another and with the researcher. Again, this could be very helpful when learning about and designing instruction around increased student voice. If a larger number of teachers were involved, familiarity and trust needed might have been compromised. Third, these two teachers made for an interesting case as while they had many similarities, including a willingness to learn more about and implement strategies related to student voice, they had intriguing differences as well. For example, one teacher had taken multiple formal professional learning classes regarding student voice; the other had purposefully chosen to take none. The two teachers had a rich variety of approaches to this topic, which enhanced the research. Finally, the two teachers agreed to be in the research study and were at a point in their teaching career in which they felt comfortable and confident enough to participate in the numerous interviews, videotaped partnership discussions, and classroom observations that this
type of research study required. No other teachers in the school or district met all of the above criteria.

The two teachers were available and willing to participate in this case study. Additionally, they both taught the same course. This was helpful as curricular decisions about the English content had already been made, and the two teachers could focus on the topic of student voice. Each teacher focused on at least one English 10 honors class of up to 30 students. A detailed description of each teacher follows in Chapter 4.

Timing of Study

The length of time of this study was one academic quarter, or roughly two and a half months, from April to mid-June. This was to keep the immediacy and use of the student voice data fresh in the participants’ minds, so they were able to act upon it as they saw fit. Furthermore, at that point in the school year the teachers knew the students well and had built a relationship with them over the past seven months. More immediate content-related questions such as the teacher’s expectations in terms of writing and reading, getting to know the students on a basic level, and overall classroom dynamic had already been established. Therefore, it was a good time in the school year to try out strategies related to student voice. Also, the specific content presented in the English 10 honors curriculum during that time period lent itself well to student voice.

The time for the study extended until after the school year was over – until mid-June. According to Howard (2003), critical reflection that leads to action needs cognitive processing time to adequately address social issues in education. Therefore, giving the two teachers some time away from the topic was helpful, especially given typical stressors faced at the end of an
academic term. Coming back to reflect in mid-June gave the two teachers this cognitive processing time for a more holistic reflection on the student voice strategies they tried.

The theme of the English 10 honors curriculum was “Messages in Literature and the World” with an emphasis on social justice. Assignments during the fourth quarter included students participating in a risk-taking unit in which they pushed themselves to take various risks and then reflect on the experience through writing and speaking. However, it was totally up to the student what types of risks they took on and why they opted to take them. They also read short stories and poems where positive risk-taking was portrayed and connected the stories to their own lives. Next, they wrote and performed a Spoken Word or Slam poem for their peers; topics the students took on in the classes studied included LGBTQ issues, poverty, human trafficking, family members or themselves dealing with a significant life issue such as a major illness, issues of sexuality, gender equality, fighting stereotypes, and the overall high school experience as seen through a sophomore’s eyes. Finally, they ended the year by writing their capstone piece, a narrative story in which the content, organization and genre were totally up to them.

These social justice themed readings and assignments lent themselves well to authenticating student experiences and voice, and the purposeful inclusion of student voice at the classroom level was a form of social justice. Furthermore, the curricular time span of one quarter was a realistic amount of time for these two teachers to discuss, design, and implement new instructional strategies regarding this concept.
Bracketing the Researcher’s Experience

Whenever a researcher is involved in qualitative research, bracketing the researcher’s experience is important (Fischer, 2009). This allows the researcher to reflect on and acknowledge their own biases as they pertain to the study. In this study, I was a colleague and fellow teacher of English 10 honors at Midwest High School. I was also an instructional coach in the building and had been for the past nine years. I sponsored two clubs at the school: one that centered on student mental health and well-being, and another that was a lunch club where upperclassmen served as peer leaders for freshmen. My experiences in teaching, as an instructional coach, and as a club adviser all shaped my outlook toward the topic of student voice. In short, I think educators have a moral and professional obligation to increase student voice whenever possible. I believe that as adults in the educational field, we must use our position to make way for increased student voice. However, I know that many other educators would not agree with me. Therefore, I was fascinated by the idea of studying how teachers work together to take on the issue of student voice.

As a teacher, I have found increased student engagement, trust, buy-in, performance in terms of grades and test scores, and overall happiness from the students I teach when I utilize strategies to increase student voice in our classroom. I regularly include reflection surveys, open discussions, one-on-one conversations, and team building activities designed to show my students how their voices matter. If they give me a suggestion, I act on it or specifically discuss why I cannot if that is the case. I am open to feedback in terms of both the content of the class and my style as a teacher; for instance, I regularly include questions like “My teacher should do more of… less of” on anonymous class surveys. When the students take these types of surveys,
we immediately look at the feedback together and discuss trends and changes to be made. While daunting at times, I truly believe that if a teacher is not asking his or her students for regular ongoing feedback and then acting on their suggestions, they are not as good a teacher as they could be.

As an instructional coach, I have been in a hundred or more classrooms and worked with hundreds of teachers in various capacities over the years. I have witnessed a variety of strategies and attitudes regarding student voice from pre-service teachers up to veterans with over 30 years of experience. These experiences have all shaped my bias toward student voice. I have been encouraged and required to take additional courses regarding student voice and am looked to as both a leader and a learner in my school and district. In my district, I am a facilitator of adult learning as well. I have taught multiple classes that either directly or indirectly relate to student voice a dozen or more times over the years.

Finally, as a club adviser for many years, I have gotten to know students outside of the classroom. This has allowed me to hear what students think about their educational experience without the power structure of a grade looming over our relationship. They often tell me about how they want to share their ideas and voice but are not sure how, are worried about retribution if they do so, or are simply not asked. This saddens me and was one of the biggest motivators for me to initially learn more about student voice.

I acknowledge that these experiences and outlooks may have impacted how the two teachers in the study interacted with me. While I had no formal authority over them as we were colleagues and had worked together for years, they were aware of my bias toward student voice. We had established trust as we taught together, and there was a familiarity in interviews and observations that occurred between us. However, both had their own teaching style and a
confident nature. They were both strong members of the department who were not easily swayed by others’ opinions; I had professional disagreements with both of them at times, and we have had honest discussions as we have worked through those disagreements. In short, these two teachers did not just tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. They were both learners themselves, as one had taken numerous professional development courses whereas the other ran her own teaching blog and resource store. Therefore, I believe the positives of our relationship outweighed the potential negatives and biases in this study.

Data Collection

Three data collection techniques were used in this study: individual interviews, observations of the two teachers interacting with one another in a partnership, and observations in the teachers’ classrooms. The study took place over the course of one academic quarter, or two and a half months. While observations occurred in the teachers’ rooms, no direct student data were included. The focus of the research was only on the teachers’ reflections, reactions, and changes in their thinking (or not) based on the individual interviews and partnership observations as well as changes in their instructional practices (or not) based on the classroom observations.

Interviews

The intent of this study was to understand how and why two English 10 honors teachers incorporated student voice and authenticated student input into their instruction. Therefore, it was important to gather data about the perceptions of these individuals through four in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Three of these interviews were conducted throughout the academic quarter and one interview was conducted two weeks after the quarter ended (Hesse-Biber, 2007;
As the researcher, I conducted the interviews. My semi-structured interview protocol had open-ended questions that allowed for elaboration of an answer and for the interviewee to have some control of the questions and direction over the interview. A crosswalk of the interview protocol questions as they related to the research questions appears in Appendix B. To increase accuracy and validity, all transcripts from the interviews as well as the interview protocols were checked by the interviewees, as I did a member check with each of them at the conclusion of each interview. The transcripts were also peer checked by another colleague (Hesse-Biber, 2007). This peer examiner was a colleague who was also an instructional coach and teacher at Midwest High School and was also in a doctoral program completing her dissertation in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in qualitative research. She was a tenured teacher with 20 years of experience and was an excellent interviewer according to peers and administration.

To improve the validity and clarity of the questions, another member of the English department not participating in the study first reviewed the interview protocol. This English department member had expertise in the field of interviewing, both in the position he holds in our school as well as having already gone through the dissertation process himself doing a mixed-methods study. In his course work he had taken multiple qualitative courses detailing the skill of interviewing. He had also served as a dean of students for several years and was trained in interviewing techniques. He was a teacher for over 20 years.

The four total interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes each. Three took place during the academic quarter. One interview occurred after the school year concluded. The first round of interviews happened at the beginning of the quarter, the second around midway, the third round near the end of the academic year, and the fourth and final interview was conducted two
weeks after the school year was over. These interviews helped capture the teachers’ experiences as they were going through the process in the moment. They also supported the authentic outcome desired for this study, which was examining how teachers could work to authenticate student experiences and voice in their classrooms and the reflective thinking that went into this practice (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2006; Weiss, 1994). To best accommodate the teachers’ schedules, the interviews took place during a free planning period, after school, or on the weekend. As the interviewer, I made sure to find a place that was free from distractions to ensure no interruptions occurred during the interviews. Finally, all transcripts were video- and audio-recorded and then transcribed. Also, all transcript notes and summaries of the conversations were available to the interviewees for member checks and to ensure validity.

The interview protocols are in Appendix C. Subsequent interviews were informed by the results from the previous interviews (Oakley, 2005). Basing the subsequent interviews on the results from previous interviews as well as the progression in thinking as the partnership planned and reflected together strengthened the validity of the study (Hesse-Biber, 2007, Seidman, 2013; Weiss, 1994).

**Observations of Teacher Partnership**

Partnerships of teachers have been around for decades. When structured well, they can provide teachers with a positive and trusting environment to take risks and promote constructive change and reflection regarding their instruction as the teachers serve as resources and encouragement for one another (Firestone, 1996). In this study, observations of the two teachers, or the teacher partnership, were conducted as an important element of the data set. These were observations of the partnership in which the two teachers gathered to discuss, define, plan and
reflect on their chosen strategies, as well as ways to incorporate student voice into their instruction. To record the partnership meetings, there was a video camera set on a tripod in a corner of the room. Four sessions were videotaped. These sessions occurred roughly every two to three weeks, which was appropriate given the timeframe the teachers chose to design, implement, and reflect on strategies. They did not begin until after the first set of baseline individual interviews. This was so that I as the researcher could establish what each teacher thought about the topic as an individual before they began to collaborate and have their thinking impacted by their partner. The use of video was helpful as video captured the nonverbal as well as the verbal communication between the two teachers. The verbal and nonverbal data from the videos were only transcribed for the moments that directly related to the research questions (Adler & Adler, 1994).

Videotaping also allowed for a record of the partnership observations so a second outside researcher could also watch the interviews and take notes. Both the second researcher and I utilized the protocol that appears in Appendix D. Before we utilized this protocol, however, I field tested it with a sample videotaped observation of a different partnership of English teachers. The outside researcher and I compared notes to do inner-rater reliability, which ensured greater accuracy with the observation protocol. Ultimately, this process allowed me to crosscheck my own observational notes of the English 10 honors partnership of teachers with the outside researcher’s notes (Adler & Adler, 1994).

The benefits of observing the two teachers interact were that much thinking and reflection happened during the partnership’s interactions (Firestone, 1996). Ideas were shared and problems discussed, which led to deeper levels of reflection and thinking than if either teacher was working in isolation. It was interesting to compare the data from the interviews to
the data from the partnership interactions. This comparison allowed me to see how the thinking of the teachers changed when they were working together. This type of observation also worked to answer all three of the research questions.

Observations of the Teachers’ Classrooms

While many rich discussions can take place during the planning and reflection stages of teaching, I was also interested in learning about what types of instructional actions actually took place as a result of those discussions. Observations of classroom practice regarding student voice were a crucial element of the data in this study, as these data further reinforced the data gathered from the interviews and observations of the partnership by showing how the ideas discussed were actually utilized, or not utilized, in practice (Yin, 2014).

Over the course of the quarter, the partnership decided how many instructional strategies to try with regard to student voice. I then did observations of the two teacher’s classrooms to see the potential influence of these strategies on students and the classroom. There were three rounds of observations in each teacher’s classroom during the quarter. The protocol used for each observation had questions based on past research and appears in Appendix E. The protocol needed to have a clear focus and relate to the research questions, yet still be open-ended enough to allow for honest notes and reflections as I observed the classroom instruction and interactions. After I crafted the initial protocol based on past research, I sought input on its clarity from both an instructional coach in my building who had done many classroom observations as well as the principal at Midwest High School, who held focus groups around the topic of student voice and had been in hundreds of classrooms. Finally, I field tested the observation protocol in another English teacher’s classroom who was not directly involved in the study. All of these steps
helped me to more deeply understand the strengths and limitations of the protocol and make refinements as necessary. Ultimately, the protocol was shown to the two teachers beforehand. This increased trust and buy-in from them (Reason, 1994). These data were then brought back to the partnership for use in the next cycle of discussion.

Data Collection Timeline

A visual of the data collection timeline can be seen in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week in Study</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>First set of individual interviews</td>
<td>* To establish each teacher’s thinking about student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>First partnership observation</td>
<td>* To establish how the teachers collaborated about student voice and what they choose to act on instructionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First set of classroom observations</td>
<td>* To establish baseline data about classroom practices regarding student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Second set of individual interviews</td>
<td>* To gather data about individual teacher reaction to student voice in their classroom practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* To gather data about individual teacher reaction to collaborating with another teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>Second partnership observation</td>
<td>* To gather data on teacher collaboration regarding student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second set of classroom observations</td>
<td>* To see student voice strategies in classroom practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Third set of individual interviews</td>
<td>* To gather data about individual teacher reaction to student voice in their classroom practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* To gather data about individual teacher reaction to collaborating with another teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>Final partnership observation</td>
<td>* To gather concluding data about teacher collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final set of classroom observations</td>
<td>* To gather concluding data about student voice in classroom practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ (after implementation)</td>
<td>Final set of individual interviews</td>
<td>* To allow processing time for teacher to reflect on the experience holistically</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

I used triangulation (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2014) to ensure credibility within my qualitative research. The data analysis protocol is explained in the following section, including the transcription protocol and the analysis procedures for the individual teacher interviews, partnership observations and classroom observations.

Transcription Procedures

For the individual interviews, I used my skills honed as an instructional coach to deeply listen, probe for clarity, and paraphrase when necessary to make sure I understood each teacher’s response. I video-recorded each interview and transcribed what was said. Each interview was videotaped so that I could go back and review the interviews as necessary for accuracy. Videotaping also allowed for a record of the interviews so that a second, outside researcher could watch the interviews and take notes. I then crosschecked my own observational notes with the second researcher’s notes, furthering accuracy and decreasing potential for researcher bias (Adler & Adler, 1994).

As suggested by Stake (1995), at the end of each interview, I summarized the ideas in the teacher’s responses and their overall meanings for a quick member check. Stake (1995) suggests building in time at the end of the interview or observation to immediately paraphrase what the teacher(s) said and meant. He argues against taking notes on everything and then presenting it to the interviewee for review, as this often takes so long that the person forgets what the interview was about, much less the subtle meanings they meant to get across. Instead, the overall meaning
is what is most important. Therefore, I presented ideas and meanings right away at the end of each interview to ensure I had captured what the participant(s) truly meant.

For the partnership observations, I did not contribute or question in any way. I utilized the protocol in Appendix D. This protocol placed me in the role of “observer as participant” (Merriam, 1998, p. 101). With this protocol I recorded each teacher’s thoughts about the partnership’s current goal as it related to student voice and how each teacher’s thinking was impacted by the other. As with the individual interviews, overall trends from the discussion were presented at the end of each observation to the teachers for clarification and member checking (Stake, 1995). These partnership observations were also videotaped for accuracy and peer checking, as the individual interviews were.

For the classroom observations, I was also a silent observer. I set up my location in a corner of the room to gather data about how the ideas and instructional strategies regarding student voice were being put into classroom practice. Merriam (1998) suggests that a careful observer takes into consideration both verbal and nonverbal messages to get a fuller grasp of meaning. Therefore, I used the observation protocol seen in Appendix E to track this data from the teachers, using a simple code for the non-verbal messages. These data were analyzed for concepts as they related to the student voice goals of the teacher(s). At the end of the classroom observation I gave a copy of my raw notes back to the teacher so they could use the data from the observation as they saw fit in their individual reflection on student voice and in their next partnership discussion.

An overview of the transcription procedures is seen in Table 2.
Table 2

Overview of Transcription Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data</th>
<th>Videotaping</th>
<th>Member Checks with Participant(s) at end</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership Observation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis Procedures

McCann et al. (2005) suggest a process that invites outside readers to analyze qualitative data such as interview transcripts and observation notes and produce a “conceptual memo” to summarize the trends they have discovered. The researcher reads all of the notes and writes down summaries of their findings. Then additional readers outside the study do the same thing, independent of the original researcher. Finally, the researcher reviews “the set of summaries to find common observations about the trends” (p. 10) in participants’ responses and observational notes. For my data analysis, I had two readers in addition to myself read through and summarize the initial data. Each reader produced her own summary of the data, including emerging themes. I then read through both of these summaries to identify themes that were common among all three summaries. Before the readers began their work, I prompted their thinking by giving them the research questions for the study, the working definition of student voice according to Cook-Sather, and some basic background information about the study and participants. After we discussed major themes the readers and I agreed that in order to be a subtheme, an idea had to be substantiated by coming up at least five times across the data.
Both readers were fellow doctoral candidates; both were instructional coaches; both had 20 years or more worth of experience in education; and both were doing their doctorates in qualitative research as well. However, one of the readers was at one point a sixth-grade literacy teacher in the district of the study. She was familiar with the curriculum although she was not a member of the English department at Midwest High School. The other researcher was familiar with the study in general but worked in an elementary building, had no working knowledge of the two teachers and only a vague knowledge of the curriculum. By purposefully picking two outside readers who each brought unique perspectives to produce conceptual memos of the data with me, my own bias as the researcher during the data analysis phase was greatly reduced.

Validation Procedures

To address researcher bias during data collection, I had to first think through my own strengths and weaknesses as a researcher. As Merriam (1998) points out, in qualitative research the “investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data” (p. 20), but this has both positive and negative aspects. On one hand, the researchers can use their sensitivity, intuition and listening abilities to deeply probe and investigate the topic at hand and the people being studied. The human element is extremely helpful as the researchers can maximize their own empathy and nuance to the situation at hand, as they “emphasize, describe, judge, compare, portray, evoke images, and create, for the reader or listener, the sense of having been there” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 149). However, being human, the researcher will inherently make mistakes, miss opportunities, and have personal biases they must be aware of and work to minimize (Merriam, 1998).

There were six ways I worked to minimize bias in the data collection phase of my study:
1. Per Sikes and Goodson (2003), I practiced “interior reflexivity” (p. 48). With this process, I questioned my own thoughts, biases and assumptions at each point in the process. I did this via informal journals after interviews and observations. By journaling and putting my thoughts into words, I became more aware of my own reactions and assumptions, which helped me to keep my actions in check as I continued with the research. I also had a peer checker who was knowledgeable about my study, the teachers in my study, and my preexisting thoughts about student voice read over my reflexive journals and give me honest feedback. This peer checker was an instructional coach in the building with 20 years of experience in education and was also going through a doctoral program and was knowledgeable in qualitative research and interviewing. Having this peer checker read my thoughts helped me become even more aware of potential biases that could influence my data collection. I had the peer checker read my journals immediately and report back what they noticed to me; as such, I was able to change my behavior (e.g. use more neutral phrasing to ensure objectivity) and make it as bias-free as possible during the data-gathering phase.

2. Collecting three different types of data in the form of individual interviews, partnership observations, and classroom observations allowed me to achieve triangulation of the data (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Mertens, 2010) and allowed for validity across the data. This was not to say I expected the data to be consistent in content; I realized that the multiple forms of data could provide multiple realities. However, from a data collection standpoint, triangulation ensured that I was being honest in my reporting of the data. Three different forms of data helped to ensure that
the participants’ stories were told more accurately and were not just my reactions or
take on one aspect of them.

3. I performed member checks of notes from interviews and observations right away
(Stake 1995), making sure that I truly understood what the teacher meant, not just
what they verbally said.

4. I provided informed consent (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). A standard part of any
qualitative study is providing your participants with informed consent. The two
teachers received a consent form that detailed the study, their role in the study, and
how they could opt out at any time. This helped to reduce my potential bias
influencing the teachers during data collection, as they knew that they had the power
to not be involved in the study. Informed consent helped them to feel free to answer
questions as they saw fit and not as they thought I wanted to hear.

5. Videotaping (Adler & Adler, 1994) two of the forms of data, the individual
interviews and the partnership observations, also helped ensure that I avoided bias as
I collected the data. With videos, I went back and watched the interviews multiple
times to ensure I was accurately collecting the data. Additionally, a peer checker
watched the videos as well to ensure my notes were accurate. Finally, videos allowed
me to watch and reflect on my own verbal and non-verbal communication to ensure
that I was as bias-free as possible while conducting the interviews and doing the
observations.

6. Peer checking of my interview questions and observation protocols (Merriam, 1998;
Hesse-Biber, 2017) helped to reduce my bias as a researcher as well. I had an
instructional coach who had 20 years of teaching experience and was familiar with
my personality, stance towards my topic, and the research study, work with me as my peer checker. She made sure that my questions and protocols were not written in a loaded fashion or were only seeking certain kinds of observational data.

**Conclusion**

This study was designed to collect data from a partnership of English 10 honors teachers at one suburban high school in Illinois to gain understanding about student voice in the classroom. Data were collected through interviews, partnership observations, and classroom observations. After the data were collected, I analyzed it, with the assistance of the conceptual memos produced by outside readers. The data were made available for member checking and other validation procedures. The next chapter will describe the two teachers prior to detailing the findings collected from them.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter includes a description of the two teachers, the three major themes from the data, and a presentation of the data organized by the themes and subthemes. The major themes were how teachers define student voice in their classroom, how teachers invite student voice into their classroom, and perceived obstacles to student voice. After the data are presented, answers to the three research questions follow.

Participants

Two high school English 10 honors teachers at Midwest High School were the focus of this study as their thoughts, teaching methods, and reflections were captured as an in-depth exploration (McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008; Yin, 2014). The two teachers had worked together for approximately seven years and were both eager to take on the topic of student voice. They chose the names “Janie” and “Pheoby” for this study. A description of both follows.

Janie

Teacher A chose the name Janie for this study. With shoulder-length curly brown hair, glasses, intense blue eyes and a calm demeanor, Janie rarely jumped in right away to answer a
question or contribute an idea, but instead she thoughtfully considered her words and their impact first. Janie stated that she was committed to the topic of student voice and believed,

You need to keep it student-centered. Not be the Sage on the Stage, but finding ways for students to take ownership in and responsibility for their own learning… I think that is something that as I get more and more experience, I continue to find ways to shift it more and more in that direction vs. my first years teaching, where I was desperately trying to get by, [thinking], ‘What can I do to make this better?’ But the question is really, ‘What can THEY do to demonstrate their learning and take ownership?’ (Janie, Interview # 1)

In subsequent interviews, Janie maintained this stance of shifting her instruction towards students sharing their voice. This often this manifested itself by Janie designing assessments that allowed for student choice. She would often use the terms student voice and student choice interchangeably: “And voice, you could look at it also I suppose as student choice if they’re presented with different options on an assignment, they’re voicing their opinions, demonstrating their voice through the choices they make” (Janie, Interview # 1).  

Janie was, by nature, an introvert, something she described in our conversations as an aspect of her personality that made teaching draining and difficult at times. She said she had considered leaving the teaching profession and ideally desired to be a curriculum writer or blogger devoted to teaching, something she was doing on the side. Janie was extremely creative and tech-savvy; as such, she got immense personal fulfillment from creating and designing new lessons and activities to implement in her English 10 honors classroom. She spent hours searching the web for new and innovative ideas and tools to implement in her lessons, and she enjoyed learning about new ideas for her classroom on the web. Due to this desire to learn from online sources, her introverted nature, and the scheduling conflicts that came with having two young children, Janie chose not to participate in district-sponsored professional development classes offered in the summer that focused on student voice. Janie enjoyed being creative with
her teaching materials. She created professional looking slideshows and handouts that she sold at her “Teachers Pay Teachers” online store. Janie had two small children and lived in the school district where this study took place. Janie had 13 years of teaching experience, all of them spent in the same position and department at Midwest High School. She was 37 at the time of the study.

**Pheoby**

Teacher B chose the name Pheoby for this study. With glasses and long straight brown hair often pulled back into a ponytail because she was always on the move, Pheoby elaborated at length when given the opportunity to discuss her feelings about student voice or any area related to students, often peppering her answers with excited hand motions and numerous examples. When asked about her beliefs regarding student voice, Pheoby had to physically pause to organize her thoughts because she was so excited and overwhelmed by the volume of her responses. After stating how much she believed that “you as a teacher have to love what you’re doing!” and that “teaching is all about helping kids be better human beings” (Pheoby, Interview # 1), her response regarding student voice touched upon the concept of student ownership in the classroom:

> Student voice, to me, is student choice and having the ability to have a say in not only what they study, but in what they do and what they apply their work to as well… that ability to have ownership over what they are responsible for. Most kids, sometimes they’re engaged and sometimes they’re not, and that’s more to do with what choices did they have? When I’m thinking about student voice, I’m thinking of their ability to speak to something, to have a say in what’s happening in their educational life. (Pheoby, Interview # 1)

Pheoby also brought up the idea of teachers soliciting feedback from students, being transparent with students about this feedback, and changing their instruction accordingly. Her
pace quickened with excitement as she discussed a trend she was seeing “...more and more, where teachers are giving students surveys, and [trying to] get feedback from their students. They’re taking in what students have to say and then changing up things from there. That was not always the case” (Pheoby, Interview # 1).

Pheoby had a high energy about her and an extroverted personality that showed in her classroom. She often joked around and laughed with her students, and excitedly encouraged them and told them how she was proud of them, boosting them up when they felt overwhelmed by reminding them of past successes. She spoke about not feeling fulfilled in her teaching role at the middle school level in her previous job, so when a spot opened up in the English department at Midwest High School, Pheoby applied for a transfer and was ultimately much happier with her teaching assignment and level of students. Pheoby was one of the first teachers to sign up for a district-sponsored class in the summer that addressed student voice. She also served as faculty adviser for the school’s writing club as well as adviser for the slam poetry team. In her latter role, she would go above and beyond in that role by organizing an “All Sophomore Slam” at the end of each school year. This poetry slam was an exciting part of school culture.

Pheoby was a teacher with 18 years of experience, with five of those years at Midwest High School, and five of them at two middle schools in the same district. She had also spent eight years teaching at a 7-12 grade school outside of the current district. She was 40 at the time of the study.

Janie’s and Pheoby’s Partnership

Janie and Pheoby worked extremely well together in their professional learning community (PLC), and they spoke fondly of their collaboration with one another. Pheoby
greatly admired Janie’s ability to design engaging lessons, and often cited Janie as “the creative one” who was “amazing to work with” (Pheoby, Interview #1). Both Janie and Pheoby saw Janie as the lead creator of the partnership, but Janie said that working with Pheoby was satisfying as “she and I are on the same wavelength… when thinking about our units, we often ask ourselves the question ‘how could it be cool?’ as sort of our litmus test” (Janie, Interview #1). Janie appreciated that Pheoby was always so willing to go along with her ideas. In turn, Pheoby would often come up with concrete ways to make Janie’s creative visions and ideas a reality.

Both Janie and Pheoby saw themselves as teachers who believed in and promoted student voice in their classrooms. They also both agreed that the time period of this study (the last nine weeks of the year) was a time that lent itself extremely well to implementing instructional strategies that promoted student voice, due to the content of the curriculum and the comfort level students had with one another and their teacher. They were both eager to participate in the study and saw the promotion of student voice in the classroom as an important yet often overlooked topic in education today.

Findings: Major Themes

Gathered from the two participants were 44 pages of transcribed interview data, 38 pages of partnership observation data, and 40 pages of classroom observation data. By identifying points of agreement between two outside readers and the intersection of these points with my own observations, I was able to note three major themes to answer the study’s research questions: a) how teachers define student voice in their classroom, b) how teachers invite student
voice into their classroom, and c) perceived obstacles to student voice. Each of the major themes had multiple subthemes.

After we discussed major themes the readers and I agreed that in order to be a subtheme, an idea had to be substantiated by coming up at least five times across the data. When this occurred, we noted this trend as a subtheme. This benchmark became the standard for identifying subthemes across the entire data set. For the purposes of this study, a ‘data point’ was any instance or occurrence where the teachers either discussed or showed evidence of attention to student voice. These data points were found in the interviews, the partnership observations, and/or the classroom observations. Due to the limited number of teachers in the study, the data point(s) could have come from both teachers or from only one. Furthermore, data points could come from one, two or all three of the data sources. Table 3 provides a list of each theme, the related subthemes, and the number of data points to support each.

Findings for each of the three major themes and related subthemes follow, including narrative participant comments as supporting evidence.
<table>
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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Data Points</th>
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<td>How Teachers Define Student Voice in Their Classroom</td>
<td>Creativity and Student Voice</td>
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<td>Relationship Between Student Voice and Student Choice</td>
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How Teachers Define Student Voice in Their Classroom

The first major theme centered on how the teachers themselves defined student voice and its place in their classrooms. Considered through the lenses of positioning theory and discourse theory, this theme was all about first-order positioning as it dealt with how the teachers positioned themselves with regards to student voice, and the discourse and language they initially used to define student voice. Both Janie and Pheoby were asked about their overall teaching beliefs in the first individual interviews. I intentionally asked this question to see if student voice was initially valued or recognized before the purposeful and intensified work around this topic began. Then, I individually asked them for their definition of student voice before giving them the definition from Alison Cook-Sather (see Appendix B). When interviewing both Janie and Pheoby, two ideas about student voice emerged. They both stated that student voice was a deeply held personal value and a way of thinking through lesson design and classroom culture. However, although both spoke to the importance of student voice, their personal definitions varied. Janie’s definition included “valuing each individual’s perspective” and knowing that “every student should have at some point the ability to demonstrate leadership” (Interview # 1). She also spoke to students voicing their opinions through choices in class or on assignments, and then how she as the teacher honored those opinions and student voice. Finally, Janie saw the ability for students to be creative within the classroom as going “hand-in-hand with student voice” (Janie, Interview # 1). For Janie, students being ‘creative’ meant students being able to take a unique spin on an assignment, to make an assignment or task their own, and/or to personalize their learning experiences. In comparison to Cook-Sather’s definition, Janie’s focused more on creativity and valuing each individual’s perspective. While Cook-Sather’s
definition did speak to those ideas somewhat, it also included acting upon students’ suggestions and insights, and giving students opportunities to shape their educational experiences. Initially, Janie’s idea of student voice was a more conceptual one, whereas Cook-Sather’s definition spoke more so to action on the part of the educator to help student voices and ideas be realized within the educational setting.

Whereas Janie saw student voice as an endeavor that honored each individual, Pheoby’s definition spoke to not only individuals having a voice, but also ‘voice’ in a broader sense. That is, her definition tied in with the concept of social justice and teachers utilizing their power in the classroom to make space for student voice. Pheoby defined student voice as having “choice and having the ability to have a say in not only what they study, but what they do and apply their work to” (Interview # 1). She spoke passionately about the idea of student voice equaling ownership over what was happening in their lives as students. She also believed that teachers should use their power to make space for their students’ voices, as she stated that teaching “always has to change as we move through various times of society” (Pheoby, Interview # 1). Therefore, Pheoby believed that educators had to reflect on their role in the classroom and allow for student voice, as that was what she understood where education was moving. In comparison to Cook-Sather’s definition, Pheoby’s definition initially aligned more so in that she also spoke to action and ownership in the classroom. Pheoby also brought up the idea of the teacher acting as a change agent in the classroom setting as well as being the conduit through which student voice could be realized. This aligned with Cook-Sather’s ideas. Neither Janie nor Pheoby spoke to the idea that adults involved at all levels of the students’ educational experience should listen and act upon students’ voices, which was an important part of Cook-Sather’s definition. This may have suggested that Janie and Pheoby saw their main role and influence as that of classroom
teacher, and the power they had for change at that level, instead of seeing themselves as part of the larger school and district that was responsible for actualizing student voice.

Each teacher’s definition of voice manifested itself in a variety of ways. These definitions, examples, and ideas were ultimately grouped into a major theme, How Teachers Defined Student Voice in their Classrooms. Within this theme, seven subthemes emerged: (a) creativity and student voice, (b) relationship between student voice and student choice, (c) teacher’s role in making space for student voice, (d) student’s role in increasing student voice, (e) strength-based use of student voice, (f) use of direct student feedback and (g) helping all students, even reluctant students to embrace their voice. To qualify as a subtheme, at least five data points were needed as determined by the team of outside readers and myself. In the following sections, each subtheme is described, with qualitative comments from both Janie and Pheoby included to substantiate and justify the existence of each of the subthemes.

Creativity and Student Voice

Both teachers in this study saw a connection between the first subtheme, creativity and student voice (8 data points). This subtheme dealt with either the teachers or the students themselves utilizing creativity in various ways, and how that resulted in increased student voice in the classroom. While Janie spoke of this topic in a broader sense as it pertained to teacher creativity as a way to promote student voice, Pheoby shared more specific reflections and examples of the students being creative and in turn enhancing their voice in the classroom.

Janie first spoke to creativity when discussing her general philosophy about teaching and student voice. As she defined it, student voice included student choice and options on assignments,
and she stated that the element of creativity went hand-in-hand with student voice (Janie, Interview # 1). She also discussed how her awareness of student voice impacted her lesson design:

I like to think that I’m responsive, and the things I create… like my first test, does it make me excited? But then I always think, would this make students excited and give them opportunities to be creative? (Janie, Interview # 1)

For Janie, creativity clearly tied in with student voice, but her answers indicated that she saw the teacher as the person who needed to be creative with their lesson design first if student voice were to be achieved. Janie believed that creative assignments would lead to more student voice, as they would allow her students to express their voices via creativity. However, at no point did Janie mention the students being the initial source of creativity.

Finally, in her last interview Janie reflected on how being more aware of student voice would impact her in future courses. Janie explained that she continued to see her students as “creative and thoughtful” and if presented with the right options, people who would rise to the challenge of increased student voice (Interview # 4). She reflected that she was “more confident that students will rise to the occasion, and not slack off, if presented with the right set of tools and opportunity to take ownership of their learning” (Janie, Interview # 4). So, while Janie saw teachers as the initial sources of creativity in the classroom, she also saw students as able to be creative if they utilized options presented to them by the teacher.

Conversely, Pheoby had a number of specific examples of student-generated creativity as it pertained to student voice. This mindset was shared in her interviews and witnessed in her classroom observations. A striking example of this was when Pheoby reflected on students who initially did not see themselves as creative. Because she knew some students had this self-perception, she designed a prompt to help them through the creative process in order to utilize
their voice and creative freedom to write something personally meaningful for an upcoming narrative assignment:

They started their brainstorming processes, and some of them, oh, you know they know exactly what they want to do, but my fear are those students who feel that they are not creative. And who feel ...maybe they struggle with this type of writing.

I worry they are going to go to their old standby, they're not going to feel as connected to the assignment because they're going to ...write a story, about a couple of teenagers, going into a haunted house blah blah blah. So, one of the questions on the brainstorming sheet I gave them was Why is the story important? And, Why is this story important now?

And that word ‘now’ is hopefully going to trigger some thoughts from them. What is meaningful? And, the next question, Why should you be the one to tell it? So I'm hoping that [the brainstorming guide] will guide them into something a little more meaningful for them (Pheoby, Interview # 2)

In describing the process she used with the students, Pheoby recognized her role as a teacher in terms of purposeful lesson design that promoted creativity and student voice. She spoke to the importance of helping all students see themselves as creative and having ideas and voices worth sharing.

This trend continued in a follow-up observation in Pheoby’s classroom. In this instance, she facilitated a conversation where she recorded the students’ ideas on the whiteboard as they reported out from their small groups. By designing an extremely open-ended assignment, Pheoby encouraged creativity from her students. However, knowing that it might have been overwhelming and intimidating for honors students -- who were often preoccupied with points and getting the ‘right' answer -- she made sure to encourage this initial creativity in a low-stakes environment. As she paraphrased and recorded students’ voices on the board, the ideas started flying. Pheoby’s was clearly excited as she repeated and scribed ideas that were totally generated by the students:
Pheoby: So this is sort of like – choose your own adventure!
So, let’s talk about what are some other things you could write about…? Besides personal narrative?
Yes, mystery! Scooby Doo!
Oooh, suspense! What else could you write?
Oooh! Sci/Fi! Yeah!
Ha ha -- romance novel! What else could you do?
Yes, action! Adventure!
You could do historical fiction. Oooh, you could do horror, yeah!
You could write a myth! So, if you like Greek mythology. So, hmm, what else could you do?
No, you cannot do non-fiction. You cannot do that at all. Yes, that’s right -- that would not be the purpose of a narrative.
Yeah, you could do a graphic novel and yes, that would have pictures! (, Classroom observation # 1)

Pheoby’s excited nonverbal communication of a happy tone of voice, increased volume, and gestures to show excitement, and numerous smiles at the students all conveyed the message that she was excited for them to share their voice via their creativity garnered through this brainstorming activity.

She continued to reflect on the relationship between creativity and student voice in a follow-up interview where she discussed how the purposeful timing of the narrative assignment, after the Slam Poetry, encouraged creativity. She noticed that the students “felt so proud, and they felt so powerful with their voice through their slam poems, they felt such a victory in slamming… for each other and hearing what each other could do” (Pheoby, Interview # 3). Therefore, one creative assignment that highlighted student voice, the Slam Poem, paved the way for further creativity in the narrative assignment. Pheoby also brought up the idea of her students recognizing that both they and their fellow students had a voice in the classroom.
In the final interview, Pheoby reflected on how allowing for brainstorming and creativity from students led to increased student voice and ultimately, better writing. When she compared her students’ writing performance from the beginning of the year to the end, she mused:

Well, you’ve heard me talk about my kids. They were just sort of mediocre. But then, 4th quarter… they got a say in everything -- what really MEANT something to them. Even earlier in the year, when they got a chance with their ‘IDEA’ projects, well… it was so research-y, and it was the first time they had a choice, so they almost didn’t know what to do. Whereas fourth quarter, they were allowed to brainstorm, go different directions, and brainstorm again. They could change and their voice could lead the way. (Pheoby, Interview # 4)

When she used her voice to facilitate students’ voices, Pheoby saw her classroom come alive with creativity and ownership. Likewise, as she reflected on the quality of writing she saw in their narrative pieces, she was shocked at how few of them were at a “basic” or even “meeting standard” level on the rubric. Instead most of them met the criteria for “exceeds standard.” Her eyes shone as she bragged that they really had some amazing depth. They were thinking outside the box, far more than what I had even asked them to do. Some of their stories were 12 pages long! And their comments along the side for their organization, characterization, and the like… well, they were totally going to the word level -- they were analyzing stuff I wouldn’t have even realized. (Pheoby, Interview # 4)

By facilitating increased voice from her students, Pheoby saw an increase in their creativity, which in turn led to an increase in performance on the final writing assignment of the year.

Relationship between Student Voice and Student Choice

In the second subtheme the relationship between student ‘voice’ (having a say in the classroom) and student ‘choice’ (various options students could choose for assignments, work time, etc.) was examined. When planning with each other as well as within individual interviews, Janie and Pheoby often used both “student voice” and “student choice” as they
described their philosophies, their lesson design, or their work (6 data points). They saw themselves as promoters of student voice by the choices they permitted students to have, both in the process and product of their work. As seen in the data, they saw a relationship between choice and voice in that increased choices for students led to increased student voice. For instance, Janie discussed how choices during work time allowed an especially introverted student to utilize her voice:

She had the option to meet with her group in the other room, yet she chose to kind of multitask in a quieter space. She’s definitely one that tends to be quieter and more introverted, so I think that was kind of her exercising her preferences there. (Janie, Interview # 3)

During their partnership observations, the two teachers reflected about what they had control over and what they did not in terms of their curriculum. They were required to teach certain skills and use common rubrics; because of this they felt that they needed to search for other ways to promote student voice. Therefore, increasing student choice when possible was a concrete way for them to do this. Both saw student choice as a pathway to promote student voice, even if it wasn’t 100% authentic in terms of ideas coming directly from the students themselves. This concept of authenticity or lack thereof in assignments came up multiple times within Janie and Pheoby’s conversations. The teachers discussed how they felt constricted at times by common assignments and rubrics mandated by the district that did not necessarily allow for direct student voice (Partnership Observation # 1 & # 2). Therefore, they had to look for other ways to define and invite student voice into their teaching. Pheoby reflected on this step when thinking about ways she began inviting student voice into her thinking and practice:

I think you have to, even if its starting small… one of the steps you can take is to give a few options here or there. If there’s an assignment where it is more structured, you can allow them choice of text [to read]. Or choice of something so that way as you’re starting
or beginning to go towards that [increased student voice], you have a place to start. (Pheoby, Interview # 2)

In a subsequent interview, Pheoby continued to share examples of how purposeful choices and freedom in the product students produced led to greater student voice and powerful learning and realizations from her students. For example, when discussing a narrative piece at the end of the year, Pheoby stated that she and the students went through the rubric strand together, and that the students “…could reflect however they wanted to reflect. They just needed to tell me how they met that [rubric] strand” (Pheoby, Interview # 3). During our conversations about reflection, Pheoby was visibly excited as she recapped the thinking and realizations her students were having: “There’s been a lot of ‘a-ha!’ moments for a lot of my kids; they’re like ‘Oh, the writer really thinks this way when they have full freedom to write whatever they want!’” (Pheoby, Interview # 3). Pheoby saw positive changes in both her students’ writing and attitudes towards writing when she increased choice for her students, which also led to increased voice.

Examples of the teachers defining student voice through student choice also showed up frequently in classroom observations. In all three of Janie’s classroom observations, she designed lessons in which students had choice in their writing work for the day based on their individual goals. Students, for instance, could choose from these options: conferencing with the teacher, working independently, working with a partner, working in a small group where everyone was focused on developing the same skill in their piece, or writing comments on their Google Doc for one of the school’s online Writing Center consultants to respond to. Although Janie chose the initial options for work time, students ultimately chose where and how they wanted to work. In a later interview, Janie stated that to her, this student choice was an example of increased student voice (Interview # 3). Although the teachers often initiated the choices for work time (such as
working on introductions, sentence structure, etc.) increased choices for students led to increased student voice and students having more control in the classroom. This control was seen in students choosing what they wanted to work on, when they wanted to work on it, and with whom they wanted to work, within certain parameters set by the teacher. This resulted in students playing more of a role in shaping their educational experiences, a key component of Cook-Sather’s (2006, 2010) definition.

**Teacher’s Role in Making Space for Student Voice**

Regarding the third subtheme, an important part of how teachers define student voice in their classroom is what role they see themselves playing in making space for student voice or utilizing their own power and voices to create ‘space’ or opportunities for student voices. Taken through the lens of positioning theory, this could also be seen as how the teachers see their first-order positioning as related to their students. However, the teachers had different viewpoints on this role. In this instance, the data (6 data points) revealed that Janie saw herself as the person primarily in control of allowing student voice, whereas Pheoby saw herself as a co-facilitator of student voice along with the students themselves.

Janie, in particular, reflected on the students’ maturity level as an indicator of whether they could handle increased voice in the classroom. In her second interview, Janie realized that a hindrance to giving students more voice was often the teacher’s perception of students’ maturity levels. She explained,

> Sometimes we think maybe about those students that can’t necessarily handle a lot of choice or aren’t mature enough or don’t have some of those functional skills to maybe be able to go someplace cool and creative with the choices we give them. (Janie, Interview # 2)
The use of the pronoun “we” in the phrase “the choices we give them” reveals that Janie saw herself as the gatekeeper of student choice, and therefore, voice. In this instance, she saw her first-order positioning as a teacher who allows for increased student voice only if the students can “handle it.” which was the second-order positioning she felt from the students, i.e. students not being able to handle increased voice in the classroom. While Janie had reflected in previous interviews that she believed every student should have a leadership role in the classroom and that she was in support of student voice for all, her response revealed how she saw her role: that of allowing for student voice for students that are mature enough to use their voice appropriately, or in this case, take advantage of the choices Janie has already prepared for them. This contrasts with Cook-Sather’s (2006) idea that all young people should be given the opportunity to develop their voice.

Janie continued with the idea of the teacher knowing best when she described a time she had purposefully not given students voice or choice within her instruction. She discussed how she made all of her students do a reflection speaking assignment on Flipgrid, a website where students can record themselves for a brief period of time and turn in to their teacher. As she thought through this assignment, she stated firmly “I did not give them an option. But I did give them the choice in how they wanted to reflect on the performance. So, there was some feet dragging with that… but well, that decision was needed” (Janie, Interview # 2). In this instance, Janie believed that she was still giving students voice as they had a limited amount of choices in terms of the prompts they could use to reflectively write. However, as the teacher in charge of the classroom, she saw her role as someone who needed to make the decision for the students. She felt they needed to reflect on their performance, and it needed to be done via a video upload. In a classroom observation of this lesson, I did not see Janie have a discussion with the students
about other ways to reflect, nor a discussion with the students as to the purpose of the reflection, if it should be done at all, or if they had other ideas. Again, in this example, Janie did not see her role as a teacher as one of providing increased opportunities for student voice, and she positioned herself as the teacher who ultimately needed to be in control of how the students reflected on their performance.

Finally, in an interview in which Janie was reflecting on aspects of student voice that she would like to continue trying, the concept of the teacher as gatekeeper came up again. In future classrooms, Janie stated that she would

definitely continue to try to differentiate through offering different choices, and even offer different students different options depending on where they are at, though I’m not sure if I could do this or how I would do this. So, that would be me kind of stepping in but then still giving them choice. I definitely will continue to work on the ‘I vote to work on this today’ [choice in class] and going to the Hyperdoc of resources and different tutorials as I think that has been very successful. But I think all of this is something that you kind of have to build up to. (Janie, Interview # 2)

In terms of the teacher’s role, Janie clearly saw herself as the creator of options for students, which was supported through all three classroom observations. While she spoke to the instructional strategy of differentiation, she was not sure if she could or would actually do this in her future practice. With the last line of her quote, she also saw student choice as something that needed to be built up to, implying that students early in the year could not be trusted to make their own choices and, in turn, promote their own voices. Again, this contradicts Cook-Sather’s (2006) concept of student voice as honoring young people’s thinking and decision making about their own education.

In Pheoby’s interviews and classroom observations however, she portrayed a different idea about the teacher’s role in making space for student voice. In the first classroom observation, Pheoby encouraged her students to share their voices with each other and with her
and she positioned herself as a teacher who used her power in the classroom to facilitate her students’ voices as she scribed their direct statements on the board. When introducing an assignment that she knew would cause anxiety in some students as it was more unstructured, she readjusted her first-order positioning as she responded to the students’ anxiety when she used a gentle yet positive and excited tone as she said to the whole class “Okay, I’d like you to read through the narrative assignment sheet. How about together as a table?” As she facilitated the students exploring the assignment and its options with the support of their peers, she encouraged her students to view their own and each other’s voices as valid. As a result, the mood of anxiety and nervousness in class noticeably lifted after a few minutes. The sounds in the room went from very quiet to loud as the students shared ideas and possibilities for the narrative assignment with one another. During this initial brainstorming time, Pheoby circulated around the room but never dominated any one group’s conversation, instead peppering them with thinking prompts such as “Okay, what do you think will be the requirement for this project?” or “Talk it through with one another – what are you seeing in terms of the learning targets to be achieved?” After this initial brainstorming was complete, Pheoby then moved to the front of the room, but not to assert her own voice. Instead, she spent the next 30 minutes in class recording the students’ ideas on the white board as they brainstormed options and topics for the narrative and facilitated their conversations as they thought through what the project could encompass, letting them share out their concerns as well as excitement. Ultimately, Pheoby used her position of power at the front of the room to write down direct student ideas, thereby using her voice to promote student voice (Pheoby, Classroom observation # 1).

This was not the first instance of Pheoby using her role in the classroom to listen to and act upon suggestions from the students. In her second interview, Pheoby shared a time when she
listened to her students about what they needed for their learning, in this case processing time. As she reflected on the pacing of an assignment and time spent in class and how she would change it for the future, she mused:

I feel like some of them really need that time to ponder. They need that time to think in their own space, at least that’s what I hear from my students. For instance, I don’t like to write in class -- I’d rather think about these things in my room. (Pheoby, Interview # 2).

Again Pheoby saw her role as the teacher as someone who was there to listen to what her students needed and adjust their instruction accordingly, thereby using her voice to make space for her students’ voices.

Ultimately, Pheoby reflected on the variety of teaching approaches and mindsets she had seen in the English department at her school. She stated that there were some teachers who inherently gravitated towards including and promoting student voice, as they positioned themselves as facilitators of students’ voice. However, she stated that she saw a bigger group of teachers that were “on the verge of it, that [were] starting to become more open to it” (Pheoby, Interview # 1). Yet, there were still a number of teachers in the department that were more controlling in their instructional style and less open to including student voice, positioning themselves as more traditional teachers with a belief that the teacher should be the one in charge. As Pheoby reflected, she stated that “this particular school is the most open-minded of any school I’ve worked at, but obviously, we still have a way to go” (Interview # 1). Indeed, there was a continuum of attitudes regarding the teacher’s role in making space for student voice at Midwest High School.
While there were many factors and people involved with student voice, in the fourth subtheme, the students’ direct role in the process emerged. The responsibility the students took on in increasing their own voice was also seen. However, this role was initially ascribed to them by their teachers. Janie and Pheoby reflected on this subtheme in their individual interviews and partnership conversations (6 data points). Janie saw student responsibility coming in to play when the students took advantage of the options and choices she had created for them in the classroom. She reflected on the students’ role in a general sense but questioned if all students could take on the increased responsibility:

I think that we do give them a lot of opportunities to talk about things, but not all students are perhaps as developmentally ready to consider multiple perspectives, or to have insightful conversations. So, we most likely have to teach them how to use their voice and how to have an opinion. (Janie, Interview # 2)

Janie’s perspective was intriguing considering the students were taught about multiple perspectives and forming their opinion at length in their ninth-grade courses as well as in their middle and even elementary schools. However, Janie also mentioned that it was the teacher’s role to teach the students how to use their voice, implying that this was a skill that could be taught. This mindset further added to Janie’s belief about and definition of student voice.

This attitude was also seen later in the same interview when Janie reflected on a specific lesson where she saw students taking a proactive role in using their voices. She stated that she gauged the lesson in which students could self-select how to use their work time in class and work through the options she created for them as a success. She gauged this from the on-task behavior and productivity she saw, as all of the students moved forward in their writing pieces
and took on more ownership of the process. Janie said a lot of the students were coming up to her “impromptu, saying ‘Hey, look at this’ or making goals for their writing and thinking through what they needed to do next. [Some] came in the next day having looked at the resources and ready with questions for me” (Janie, Interview # 2). This tied in with Janie’s idea that students could be taught to use their voices, which was also seen in her fourth and final interview. She explained, “I am more confident that students will rise to the occasion and not slack off if presented with the right set of tools and opportunity to take ownership of their learning” (Janie, Interview # 4). While teachers may initially need to be the ones to pave the way for student voice, ultimately Janie thought that if given opportunities and the right ‘tools,’ such as choices in instructional activities, students could increase their ownership in the classroom. However, this increased voice was still within the framework of teacher-crafted options.

Janie and Pheoby also discussed the students’ role in increasing their own voice in their second partnership observation. When brainstorming ideas for the students to directly critique one another’s work, they excitedly thought about the idea of partnering each writer with an online mentor or “writing buddy” from Midwest High School’s student-led writing center. As the idea took hold, they excitedly brainstormed ideas and started almost finishing one another’s sentences:

Pheoby: Okay, what about that handful of kids that you know will need extra support? How can we group them? Like, how could we use the online writing center because, Janie, your English 10 honors classes are in the morning…

Janie: Oooh, do you mean like a mentor -- an online mentor!

Pheoby: Yes, and that person could check in every so often… ‘Hey, I notice you’re missing such and such -- check in with Mrs. ____.’ Or we could create folders of resources and make sure both the students and the online mentors knew about them.
Janie: That would be cool to set up that type of partnership. And then in class, too, we can have them be teams.

Pheobey: And then, we can meet with them as teams, and have check ins… okay, as you’re working together, what are you noticing you need more resources for / help with?

Janie: Could we even have them make their own check point sheet? (Partnership observation # 2).

As they brainstormed an idea materialized: the idea of other students outside of the English 10 honors classes becoming online peer mentors. This work, in turn, helped the tenth-grade English honors students as they advocated for support they needed, as they further developed ideas in their narrative writing, and as they reflected on their own writing process. Therefore, this was a strong example of how students could utilize their and other students’ voices in the classroom.

Pheobey further expanded on the idea of student involvement in student voice in the third interview. She discussed various student reactions to having more voice and choice in their writing. Some were positive, while others were not. While trying to co-create a more authentic environment with her students, she stated:

So there’s been a lot of A-ha moments for many of my kids. They’re like, ‘Oh, the writer thinks this way when they have full freedom to write whatever they want.’ So I feel like this has been a really good process for a lot of my students who are self-motivated and who want to do well. On the opposite side of that, it’s been a difficult process for my students who have always been able to slide through, or maybe have kind of seen some of their other classes as more important and English as kind of a blow off. (Pheoby, Interview # 3)

Again, Pheoby’s experiences showed how she valued students’ taking ownership of the class; but similar to Janie, she felt that while some students welcomed this increased responsibility and voice, others did not. Discussions between the two teachers in their partnership observations supported the idea that both teachers saw these same student reactions to increased voice in their classrooms (Partnership Observation # 2). This was an example of second-order positioning.
The teachers were trying to position their students differently in terms of their desire for increased student voice in the classroom. While some students embraced this new positioning, others were hesitant. This raises an interesting question: If a student responds to their teacher’s re-positioning of them with a desire for a more traditional classroom set up where they as the student have less control, how should the teacher respond? How does a teacher work to help her students reposition themselves as more active change agents in their own learning?

Ultimately, Pheoby reflected on her students’ need to understand the bigger ‘Why’ behind what they were doing if they were to have a more powerful role in their own voice in the classroom. She mused that to have truly effective student voice, the students had to reach some sort of cognitive level of self-reflection or understanding so they could be informed consumers of choice and voice. She stated how they ultimately had to understand why they were making a purposeful choice in any aspect of their learning (Pheoby, Interview 1) and how she needed to set up those cognitive self-reflective opportunities for the students at times. Indeed, both Pheoby and Janie saw teacher involvement as still intertwined in their students more so realizing their own voices in the classroom. They realized the crucial role they played in helping students understand the ‘why’ behind utilizing their own voice.

**Strength-Based Use of Student Voice**

Throughout the interviews, partnership observations, and classroom observations, within the fifth subtheme both teachers cited examples (6 data points) of student voice as a largely strength-based endeavor. A ‘strength-based’ instance would be where teachers looked for ways to build upon students’ potential strengths in order to foster greater student voice, which led to an overall better experience or outcome in the classroom.
There was an interesting example of Janie taking an initially unplanned opportunity in the classroom into a strength-based use of student voice. In the second interview, she calmly told the story of how she had planned a whole-class instructional activity to help her students with various elements of style on their narrative drafts: taking them through a series of PowerPoints covering the material. Janie reported her disappointment:

I checked in my first hour’s drafts folder that first day, and I was just like UGH! They [were] all just needing such very different levels of support right now that I wasn’t sure if it would have been beneficial for some of them to go through that PowerPoint as a whole class.

So then, and I’m not sure if this is a good thing, but on the fly I came up with the idea of a question to give them some options for what they wanted to work on for the day and to help them find different resources. (Janie, Interview # 2)

In this instance, Janie provided differentiated instruction that ultimately included more opportunities for student choice and voice. Therefore, Janie utilized a strength-based approach in this instance, as she looked for ways to build upon student strengths, in this case the different places they were at in the writing process, and encouraged them to choose where they needed support. While Janie was the initial driver of this decision, it did allow for the students to take more control and ownership of their learning.

Building on this idea, Pheoby relayed two examples of when she utilized the strength of her students’ voices to lead the way in class. The first came from when she was discussing a celebration in her class with Janie during one of the partnership observations. She described how she gave her students a challenge in class where, after they had drafted independently for a while, they then had to “pick their favorite line. They shared it on Google Classroom where everyone could see it. It was something small, but the students were really proud” (Partnership observation # 1). Pheoby excitedly went on to say how it was a celebration of their voices and
choices. In turn, Janie said how she’d like to try the same thing to invigorate her students as they were drafting (Partnership observation # 1).

Pheoby continued with the strength-based mindset when discussing another strategy and what she observed as a result when she tried out some student-teacher individual conferencing in class. She described how she

Left it up to them, and I gave them a form that they could fill out to set up conferences with me. I told them that this was a capstone piece, so it was up to them if they wanted to conference with me or not, and some of the students took me up on that and did little conferences with me and some did not. So, it was interesting to see that choice and that piece of student voice in that as well. (Pheoby, Interview # 3)

Pheoby’s eyes lit up when she discussed how proud she was of the students who choose to conference with her, and how she respected the voices and choices of those who did not, as many of them truly didn’t need to. In this instance, the students had to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in their writing and use their voices accordingly to make the appropriate choice as to whether or not to have a conference with their teacher. Pheoby then followed this strength-based use of student voice and trusted them to make the right choice, following their lead and only having conferences with those students who requested them.

Finally, Janie and Pheoby spent quite a bit of time discussing a resource Janie was utilizing in her class: other students. In the final partnership observation, Janie discussed how she invited some of her honors students into her standard level class to perform slam poems and give advice. Her voice raised in pitch as she described the result: “It was fantastic!” She went on to say that there were kids who were disappointed their off hour did not coincide with the classes where the other students were visiting poets. Some of her take-aways were that standard level students were “amazed by their peers and said it was SO cool.” They also saw a range of subjects within the performed poems: cars, people in students’ lives, and getting through high
school. These examples ultimately made the English 10 standard students more confident in writing their own poems. After hearing about this, Pheoby was excited about the possibility of inviting the student poets into her classes as well (Partnership observation # 4). This exchange showed how when authentic student voice was promoted in a strength-based way, students could serve as powerful resources and motivators for one another.

Use of Direct Student Feedback

The sixth subtheme revolved around how both Janie and Pheoby defined student voice in their classrooms. This subtheme was related to how they used, or did not use, direct student feedback. ‘Student feedback’ could be an instance of them giving feedback to students about how to utilize their voice, or it could be the teachers themselves seeking out feedback from the students in order to better shape the students’ classroom experiences. This data point was found in both the interviews and classroom observations (5 data points). While Pheoby and Janie usually asked for and acted on direct student feedback to promote and encourage student voice, this was not always the case.

In the first interview, Pheoby reflected on a trend in instruction she witnessed in her department, that of some teachers asking students for their direct input on the class:

I’m seeing it more and more, where teachers are giving students options for things to complete, or they’re maybe doing more student surveys, after the fact, where they’re trying to get feedback from students, which was not always and is not now always the case for everyone. They’re taking in what students have to say and then changing things up from there. (Pheoby, Interview # 1)

This was an example of Pheoby’s belief in soliciting and acting on direct student feedback, and how she recognized that as a driver of authentic student voice. While she saw it “more and more,” she was also quick to point out that this state was not the “case for everyone.”
In a subsequent interview, Pheoby shared an example of how she asked for and used direct student feedback and voice when she had individual conferences with students about their writing progress. She mused that:

it’s been interesting to see their progress: what they started with and then what they ended up with has been kind of... it’s been kind of all over the board. I’ve actually had conferences with them where we talk about how much they’ve grown as writers from the beginning of the semester or the beginning of the year, to now with their writing it’s just... so much more exciting and insightful and so much more descriptive and they’re thinking differently about how they’re writing. (Pheoby, Interview # 3)

In this instance, Pheoby saw clear growth of her students as writers; by asking for her students’ direct voices in the form of individual conferences, she ensured that her students did as well. This was an example of students being the ones to assess their own progress as writers, not just their teacher doing the assessment. By providing the opportunity for her students to conference with her about their progress, Pheoby repositioned her students as the assessors, and listened to their feedback about where they saw their strengths and progress as writers.

Classroom observations also supported Pheoby’s stories and reflection. Near the end of the school year, Pheoby gave her students a survey in class in which she asked for their direct feedback. She was clear to point out that the survey was anonymous and encouraged them with statements such as “This is your chance to share your opinions! This is your chance as your future junior selves to help out next year’s sophomores” (Pheoby, Classroom observation # 3). However, it was what Pheoby did after the students started taking the survey that was interesting. As the responses started coming in on the Google Form, she projected the results in real time on the screen in class for everyone to see. When around half the responses had come in, she excitedly started talking through trends she was noticing and told the students how she would ultimately share all of the responses and trends with them. By clearly modeling transparency
with the results of the feedback survey, Pheoby showed her students how their voices were valued.

Janie also had examples within her classroom observations in which she asked for and acted on direct student feedback. During one of the classroom observations, a student approached Janie for help with their slam poem. Janie had an inquisitive face as she pointed to the student’s work and talked to her about certain lines, and warmly advised them “Well, this part here… hmm. Could this be about someone’s personal experience, or their family?” At that point the bell rang but the student kept on talking to Janie. Janie asked her “Can you show that to me? Or, even you can add quick lists…” The student continued to ask questions with a worried look on her face. At that point, Janie asked her “Do you feel like you need an extra day to work since you missed some?” With relief, the student responded that she would work on it more and would also try to have other people or peers in the class read it over for her (Janie, Classroom observation # 2). In this one-on-one interaction with a student, Janie asked for specific feedback from the student in terms of their readiness, listened to them, and adjusted her expectations accordingly. Likewise, the student showed engagement in the task by staying after class and through their levels of questions.

However, there were also examples of when Janie did not seek out or utilize direct student feedback. In the second classroom observation, Janie showed the students a tool she told them would keep them accountable for drafting every day, a Google Chrome extension called Draftback. She had a firm tone as she told them they would need to print out the sheet of their revisions to their document so she could keep a record of how they were advancing their story every single day. As the classroom largely fell silent, she prodded them with the question: “This is going to hold you accountable, right?” Some students nodded their heads. She then asked for
someone to “volunteer as tribute” so the class could look at a sample Draftback report together and see how it worked. After the class saw the sample, she directed them to resume writing (Janie, Classroom observation # 2). In this example, Janie was the one who came up with the idea of students needing to draft every day and required them to use a specific Chrome extension when they did so. She purposefully did not ask for student feedback about this idea, nor did she ask them if they felt this was needed or would be helpful. She even used a negative analogy when asking for a student “as tribute” to show their sample Draftback, as it was a reference to characters in the popular book and movie series “The Hunger Games” where people of the villages needed to send a child forward to be involved in a game in which they fought to the death. Students were largely silent when Janie asked for a “tribute”, but eventually one volunteered. So, while most examples of asking for direct student feedback from Janie and Pheoby were positive and regularly occurred, there were still instances where the teacher played the role of authority figure and did not seek out direct student feedback or voice.

Helping All Students, Even Reluctant Students to Embrace Their Voice

While Janie indirectly spoke to this seventh and final subtheme, Pheoby was the source of all of the data points (6 data points) in relation to various examples in which she defined student voice as helping all learners, even reluctant ones, find their voice. One of the ways she did this was by increasing students’ self-confidence, often through a purposeful sequence to student assignments. In the second interview, for example, Pheoby discussed the role that student self-confidence played in creating authentic student voice. She reflected on the timing of a particularly personal and challenging assignment for her tenth-grade English honors students, that of writing a difficult narrative assignment with a lot of freedom and opportunity for
creativity, something many students were not necessarily used to. She stated that “I think students need self-confidence when it comes to student voice” (Pheoby, Interview # 2) and reflected that the timing of this narrative assignment was purposefully placed after a very challenging slam poem. She smiled thoughtfully as she reflected on what she was seeing from even her very reluctant students as their confidence grew. She stated that “they [were] so amazed at not only themselves but also each other, and their abilities to play with language, that this [the narrative assignment] will be their chance to say ‘I can do this’” (Pheoby, Interview # 2). For Pheoby, the timing of her units and assignments directly resulted in many of her students’ self-confidence increasing and furthered even reluctant students finding their voice.

One of the reasons some students were reluctant in the first place was that for many, an open-ended and creative narrative assignment in English class was intimidating. She reflected that when initially rolling out the narrative assignment, some students were excited about the possibilities. However, she also sensed that many of them were hesitant because “especially with honors kids, it’s more of a ‘tell us what we need to write [and] I’ll do exactly what you want me to do’ mindset, whereas this was a ‘you do what you want to do’ type thing” (Pheoby, Interview # 3). In this instance, Pheoby had to work with the mindset her students were coming in with, that of not really having a voice or say in their assignments or being worried that what they produced would be “wrong”.

Another way Pheoby helped all students, even her reluctant students, to embrace their voice and get over the fear of making mistakes was with purposeful modeling in her instruction. As she reflected on allowing them space in class to make mistakes, she spoke to the role of the teacher in modeling a risk-taking mindset:
I think one of the roles of the teacher is [owning] making mistakes and making changes and saying ‘Okay, hey, this just didn’t work out – let’s try this a different way.’ If they don’t hear you model that, then they’re going to be terrified that they are making bad decisions [themselves]. (Pheoby, Interview # 2)

Pheoby knew that to help her students see that it was acceptable to make mistakes on the pathway to finding their voice, they would first have to see their teacher doing just that.

In a subsequent interview, Pheoby spoke to the hesitancy she saw from her students in class one day when she was praising them for how much they had grown as writers and thinkers. She reflected on how she saw some students really utilizing their voice and taking creative risks, whereas “other students [were] still struggling to get outside of the typical boundary lines of what they [were] used to in other classes” (Pheoby, Interview # 3). Pheoby discussed how she had seen her students not taking risks in her tenth-grade English honors classes. She attributed this to not being asked to venture outside of the “boundary lines,” or teacher-created expectations for assignments, in their other classes. This in turn acted as an impediment to students feeling free to be creative in her class or being fearful of doing assignments wrong and getting a lower grade. Pheoby saw her students’ experiences in other classes where they were not given or really expected to have a voice as a contributing factor to their reluctance to embrace their voice within her classes. Pheoby spoke to the challenge created by messages students received in their schooling when they were not asked for their voice; this mindset acted as an impediment in her classroom when she did encourage her students to share and utilize their voices. Therefore, she knew she needed to build in purposeful instructional opportunities where she encouraged all of her students, even reluctant ones, to utilize their voice.
Ultimately, her students specifically noted Pheoby’s efforts within her own class. She said they knew she believed in them, which increased their own self-confidence. In her final interview, she stated that at the end of the semester after the final exam, she had a lot of kids… that said [the narrative] was their best piece they’ve ever done. They were thanking me for that – and I said ‘Well, you’re the one who did that!’ But they were thanking me… and I don’t think they had had that opportunity in classes before. (Pheoby, Interview # 4)

By purposefully designing instruction that allowed for all students, even reluctant ones, to embrace their voice, Pheoby inspired self-confidence in her students. With this instruction, as well as creating a positive classroom environment, Pheoby achieved an instructional experience with her students that was a rare occurrence in their other classes.

**Summary of Theme: How Teachers Define Student Voice in Their Classroom**

The first major theme included 41 data points and emerged as most prominent within the findings. The subthemes included creativity and student voice (8 data points), the relationship between student voice and student choice (6 data points), the teacher’s role in making space for student voice (6 data points), the student’s role in increasing student voice (6 data points), strength-based use of student voice (5 data points), use of direct student feedback (5 data points) and helping all students, even reluctant students to embrace their voice (5 data points). All of these subthemes point to the complex and personal way in which teachers define student voice in their classroom. Furthermore, the data showed how even when teachers were attempting to increase student voice, power structures and the element of teacher control in the classroom was still an element of positioning theory the teacher must consider. Ultimately, student voice was
defined and shown in a multitude of ways, both large and small, within these teachers’ classrooms.

How Teachers Invite Student Voice into the Classroom

Whereas the first major theme revealed how teachers defined student voice in their classroom, the second major theme detailed how teachers invited student voice into the classroom. While the first theme was more theoretical and rooted in beliefs, the second theme was practice-oriented with particular focus on classroom management tools and instructional strategies the teachers used. Considered through the lenses of positioning and discourse theory, this theme was all about second-order positioning as it dealt with how the teachers and students positioned themselves with regards to student voice and one another, and the discourse and language they used while in the classroom.

Data for the second major theme were grouped into subthemes that were rooted in either the classroom environment or instructional strategies. It is interesting to note that from a numerical perspective, the subthemes related to classroom environment had more data points than the subthemes for instructional strategies. This may suggest that at its heart, the work teachers do revolving around student voice starts with a strong foundation in the classroom environment. While specific instructional strategies were certainly important, the data showed that a classroom environment conducive to student voice was key. The subthemes that emerged in the second major theme are represented in Table 4. In the following sections, each subtheme is described, with qualitative comments from both Janie and Pheoby included to substantiate and justify the existence of each of the subthemes.
Table 4
Second Major Theme, Subthemes, and Number of Data Points

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<td>Importance of Classroom Environment</td>
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<td>Social-Emotional Learning</td>
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Importance of Classroom Environment

The first subtheme included seven data points gathered from the classroom observations, partnership observations, and individual interviews from both Janie and Pheoby. This subtheme dealt with instances and examples of when and how the classroom environment related to student voice, either through ways the teachers created an environment conducive to student voice or in ways they invited students in to the classroom space to utilize their voice. In the second interview, for instance, Pheoby spoke about her classroom environment as a whole. She reiterated the need to build “an environment that allows them to have a voice” She went on to say that teachers could not expect students to suddenly utilize their voices if “we’ve been telling them all along exactly what to do, and not making it a safe space” (Pheoby, Interview # 2). When asked what sort of actions teachers could take to promote this type of environment, she explained:

I think one of those actions would be building the community in the room. A place
where they feel they can approach the teacher and have a voice, but also have a voice amongst each other. I mean, we’re working with teenagers who might not feel like they have a voice anywhere. (Pheoby, Interview # 2)

Here Pheoby spoke to the importance of a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable approaching not only the teacher but also each other, thereby utilizing their voice in multiple ways. In this instance, Pheoby reflected on how she invited voice into her classroom by creating a safe space for authentic student voice. Furthermore, this invitation was important in Pheoby’s eyes, especially since her students may not have felt as if they had a voice in other areas of their lives.

Pheoby provided an example of this safe classroom environment in her first classroom observation. The students were preparing to turn in a major assignment, their slam poems that ultimately would be performed for the entire class. This was an assignment in which they would share their voices, literally and figuratively. Pheoby knew her students were nervous, and because she wanted to model risk-taking, she also wrote and performed a poem herself. While giving them a pep talk the day before their performances, Pheoby eagerly reassured them that “you’re going to be awesome. You’re going to be amazing. It’s going to be fantastic! I should tell you that I haven’t finished mine yet -- eek! But I’ve read YOUR poems, and they are seriously so good!” (Pheoby, Classroom observation # 1).

In this classroom interaction, Pheoby modeled the importance of risk taking as she showed students she was also nervous. She followed up that statement with a reassurance that the students’ poems were ‘seriously so good!’ Both of these statements worked to create a reassuring and safe classroom environment to encourage and invite student voice.

Overall, both teachers were positive and welcoming to students and worked to create rapport with them. These actions could certainly have contributed to the creation of a safe
classroom environment that encouraged student voice. While Pheoby was encouraging and outgoing with both her verbal and non-verbal communication, Janie was also encouraging, albeit in a quieter and more subdued manner, such as in the first classroom observation where she calmly and quietly went around the room, checking in with individual students and their progress, which was a way to invite in the voice of even introverted students. This showed how even different classroom management styles and ways of establishing rapport with students can work depending on the teacher’s preferences and classroom style.

In a subsequent classroom observation, Pheoby continued to invite student voice into the space in the form of a student-led celebration. When the students wanted to organize a pizza party to celebrate their writing and goals accomplished that year, Pheoby agreed. She asked the students about upcoming calendar dates and other logistical questions, but then turned it over to a student to ultimately organize. After checking in with students to see that they all agreed to the date of the party, Pheoby exclaimed “Thank you to ___ for organizing this party! Okay, everyone make sure to talk to ___ about what to do next!” (Pheoby, Classroom observation # 2). By encouraging students to celebrate their success, Pheoby created a welcoming and positive classroom environment. As a result, students felt empowered and heard by their teacher and ultimately took control for the party. This action showcased how Pheoby invited student voice in a way that was not directly related to a skill or an assignment, but as a way to celebrate. This relates back to the classroom environment in that Pheoby was showing “genuine respect and caring for individuals as well as groups of students” (Danielson, 2011, p. 66). She also involved students in the creation of classroom events (p. 74).

The importance of the classroom environment as it related to student voice was also seen in the teachers’ third partnership observation. In this instance, Janie and Pheoby discussed the
strategy of setting up their students with an online writing buddy from the school’s Writing Center

Janie: What if we set up the students with writing mentors from the Writing Center?

Pheoby: Yes, if they had a buddy – that could really help them out. I was reading something online about how when you write in isolation, you can really isolate yourself. So if you become a member of a writing group – that can really help you out. (Partnership observation # 3)

Drawing on an outside article she had recently read, Pheoby shared her idea with Janie about the idea of utilizing student voice in the form of writing center consultants, which showed the students “demonstrating genuine caring for one another” and becoming sources of learning for one another (Danielson, 2011, p. 66-7). Later in the quarter, they did not mandate, but encouraged their own students to utilize the writing center consultants to mentor and provide feedback to the English 10 honors students. While this was also an instructional strategy, overall I would argue that this was also part of the positive and student-voice friendly classroom environment Janie and Pheoby worked to promote. Utilizing other students showed how Janie and Pheoby worked together to create an environment that promoted student voice while decreasing student stress levels and feelings of isolation.

In all of her classroom observations, Janie showed how even the physical positioning of the teacher could work to invite student voice into lessons. Nearly every time she worked with students in either a small group or one on one, Janie physically positioned herself at the student’s level or below them when she was working with them. Janie went to the student’s desk and kneeled down at their level, or when a student approached her at the front of the room, she sat at her desk while the student perched on a nearby stool that placed them above her (Janie, Classroom observations 1, 2 and 3). When asked about this in a follow-up conversation, Janie did not realize she was seating herself in this way, but indicated that she was pleased that she did
this. Janie’s choice showed how she was physically allowing for student voice by creating a space where the typical power structure of the student physically below the teacher (i.e. teacher standing and student sitting) was negated. While she may not have initially been aware of this nonverbal cue, ultimately the way in how Janie arranged herself next to the students worked to showed how she valued student voice, something she stated in the first interview. This also showed an example of how even a teacher’s nonverbal communication can work to invite student voice in, showing the benefit of what happens when students know their teacher values them and will treat them with genuine respect (Danielson, 2011, p. 66).

However, there was an instance in which Janie’s physical presence did not invite student voice in. In the second classroom observation, there was an option for students to work in a small group in an adjacent classroom. While I was in this space observing the students, they were initially louder and relaxed as they discussed their ideas with one another. However, when Janie came into the room to check on them and looked over their shoulders, they largely fell silent and reverted to their laptop screens. When Janie left the space, the students eagerly began discussing their ideas again (Janie, Classroom observation # 2). This example showed how Janie’s physical presence did not necessarily encourage student voices, although that was not necessarily her intent. Danielson (2011) states that a well-managed classroom is one in which “even when the teacher is not directly monitoring their activities, students working in groups maintain their momentum, seeking help when they need it” (p. 70). However, the students silenced their own voices, both literally and figuratively, when Janie appeared. This example served as a reminder that even when teachers are working to create a classroom environment friendly to student voice, students may still be conditioned that ‘good’ or expected behavior equates to them silencing their voices. However, Janie chose to not linger for very long in this
classroom space; she may have realized the impact her presence was having, and thus she moved away to the other classroom, therefore working to preserve student voice.

Ultimately, Janie reflected in her last interview about how purposefully focusing on inviting student voice into her classroom environment impacted her relationships with the students:

It [focusing on student voice incorporation] did help me to strengthen relationships with students, and I hope they saw me as a helpful guide and facilitator, someone who was learning and sharing right along with them. (Janie, Interview # 4)

By positioning herself as a learner, sharer, and “helpful guide” rather than the person with all of the wisdom or the dispenser of the grade, Janie showed how the teacher’s role in the classroom environment related to inviting student voice in. Ultimately, by focusing on inviting student voice in, Janie saw a benefit as her relationships with students were strengthened.

Social-Emotional Learning

The second subtheme related to the concept of student voice as a skill that could be taught as part of both students’ self-advocating for their needs and ideas, which also falls under the larger umbrella of social-emotional learning. The subtheme included five data points from Janie and Pheoby. These data were found largely in the individual interviews but also in a partnership observation. Building on previous subthemes, Janie and Pheoby’s belief that student voice was a skill that could be taught to students came through in this subtheme as well. By teaching their students to advocate for their own choices, Janie and Pheoby were promoting student voice. This was seen in the first partnership observation when Janie and Pheoby were discussing how students choosing their topic for their upcoming slam poem as well as advocating for how they wanted and needed to utilize their writing and practicing time were examples of
student voice (Partnership Observation # 1). Students making these choices were also seen in subsequent classroom observations for both teachers. As Janie and Pheoby saw it, their students were using their voice to get what they needed as they drafted their poems, whether feedback from a peer, the teacher, or quiet work time. This student self-advocacy was a way of increasing student voice in the classroom as they advocated for their own needs and make those choices accordingly. This tied in with the classroom environment as it conveyed a strong culture for learning or a place in which everyone was engaged in “pursuits of value” (Danielson, 2011, p. 67).

Janie continued promoting this mindset of student self-advocacy and reflected on it in her second interview. As she contemplated how things were going as her students were working on their narratives, an assignment that came after the slam poems, she explained:

Rather than checking in with every single student on every single day, it allowed me to focus on the students that needed the SOS, or the extra help or just a quick tip to move them forward. So, it was cool to see some of those higher needs realize that they needed that check in. (Janie, Interview # 2)

Here, Janie’s confidence in her students using their own voices was shown as she followed their lead in what they needed as they were the ones who told her they needed the ‘SOS’ or the extra help, which furthered the ideals of a trusting classroom environment, where students take initiative in their learning processes and show that they value the content and their teacher supports them in doing so (Danielson, 2011, p. 69).

These successes in Janie’s classroom continued during the peer editing stage of the narratives, where she also witnessed her students utilizing their voices to give one another meaningful feedback:

So it wasn’t me telling them ‘You have to work on adding in figurative language.’ But some of the comments they were leaving for each other, you could tell they were being
really thoughtful with their writing. (Janie, Interview # 2)

In this instance Janie saw what happened when her students used their voices to help one another, as they took into account their classmates emotions and needs as writers by leaving meaningful and accurate comments. Janie stated later on in the same interview that her students asked for multiple types of feedback, both from her and their peers. This ties in with student involvement with the classroom environment, where the “standards of conduct are clear to all students and appear to have been developed with student participation” (Danielson, 2011, p. 74) as well as a culture of improvement in the classroom environment, where “students demonstrate attention to detail and take obvious pride in their work, initiating improvements in it by… revising drafts on their own or helping peers” (p. 69). As she saw the power shift from her as teacher giving comments to the students giving one another comments on their work, Janie witnessed a form of student social-emotional learning in the classroom, as the students showed care and compassion towards one another.

Pheoby spoke to the idea of students’ social-emotional learning as well. Social-emotional learning is the process through which children learn and apply knowledge, attitudes and skills to understand and manage emotions, set goals, understand and show empathy for others, maintain relationships and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2018). As Pheoby saw it, social-emotional learning was seen when she purposefully taught her students to utilize their voices within the classroom. In the first interview, she reflected on how she saw teachers in her building do this as well:

I think more teachers are using some of the executive functioning factors in that [they are] teaching students to have a voice and to actually being able to understand what works for them and what doesn’t work for them, and to advocate for those things. (Pheoby, Interview # 1)
In this reflection Pheoby showed her belief that students can be taught to have an authentic voice, and the mindset that this was an executive functioning skill. Executive functioning is a social-emotional learning skill that encompasses the ability to organize various aspects of one’s academic, social, and personal lives (Illinois State Board of Education, 2016). Therefore, just as a student could be taught the executive functioning skills of organizing their planner or time management, they could also be taught how to have a voice, placing voice under the umbrella of social-emotional learning. Pheoby followed up her belief about executive functioning with the idea that students can also be taught to advocate for their voices, showcasing a classroom where there is a “culture for learning” and one that is full of instructional activities and assignments that convey high expectations for all students (Danielson, 2011, pp. 67-69). By purposefully teaching students the skill of using their voice, Pheoby reinforced a culture of high expectations and genuine learning.

In the second interview, Pheoby reflected on another social-emotional and executive functioning skill, that of time management and students self-selecting deadlines and checkpoints to use their voices, as social-emotional learning skills include the ability to organize various aspects of one’s academic, social, and personal lives (Illinois State Board of Education, 2016). She discussed how she turned the power and choice of selecting checkpoints for the narrative assignment over to the students themselves:

The proof will come in the next couple of weeks -- can they come up with something? And then this coming Monday, I'm going to tell them they need to have a calendar ready. They need to select their due dates, and you know I think that's going to be hard for them – to take that responsibility, of directing themselves. And having a say and saying, ‘Hey this is what works best for me, and this is the time frame I want.’ And to not just say ‘Yeah I work best in the last 3 hours before something is due.” So, we'll see what happens with that. (Pheoby, Interview # 2)
By both raising expectations for her students and allowing them to choose their own deadlines, Pheoby showed how she created a classroom culture that gave her students both voice and responsibility, demonstrating a high culture of learning (Danielson, 2011, p. 69).

Ultimately, Pheoby reflected on how the choices she made and the classroom environment she and the students created together resulted in an increased level of self-confidence in her students. Was this increase due to the age of the students? Perhaps because they were maturing and coming to a close in their tenth-grade year, the increase in self-confidence would have happened naturally. However, in her final interview Pheoby said that compared to previous tenth-grade English honors classes, this class of students ended up with a higher amount of self-confidence (Pheoby, Interview # 4). This was especially notable because in her first interview, Pheoby described the current class of students as just being “different this year. They seem to be more at a surface level than what my previous honors classes have been at this point in the year… the maturity level is not as developed this year” (Pheoby, Interview # 1). Why or how then was the increase in maturity and self-confidence seen, especially with students who initially did not possess it and were behind where typical English 10 honors students were developmentally?

In the second interview Pheoby discussed how the timing of the narrative assignment in particular, coming after the slam poem, led to this increased self-confidence in her students. In the second interview she stated that, with regard to their writing ability, her students were “so amazed at not only themselves but also each other, and their abilities to play with language, that this will be their chance to say ‘I can do this!’ (Pheoby, Interview # 2). Pheoby saw what happened when her students utilized their voices with the initially intimidating slam poem; their confidence grew. This increased confidence in themselves and each other led to them further
using their voices within the narrative assignment, as they did something they “did not think [they were] capable of” (Pheoby, Interview # 2) by writing and slamming poems for their classmates. Again this type of climate and culture shows how the students demonstrated “genuine caring for one another” (Danielson, 2011, p. 66) as their confidence increased and they saw their English class as a safe place to take risks (Danielson, 2011, p. 76).

While the classroom environment was certainly critical, the purposeful instructional choices Janie and Pheoby made within their classrooms also played a part in amplified student voice. These instructional choices are the foci of the next two subthemes.

**Instructional Strategies**

The third subtheme had six data points from Janie and Pheoby, as found in the individual interviews and in Pheoby’s classroom observations. The data points centered on the teachers’ purposeful use of instructional strategies to invite student voice in. In her first interview, Janie discussed past units of study in her tenth-grade English honors classes that she felt were good examples of student voice:

- Definitely the IDEA project [in second quarter]. You had a partner, and you created this huge exploration into pop culture, and answered an inquiry question that you designed, that was completely student-led with teacher guidance.

- So I think that was a good example of student voice. Also for the social justice unit [during first quarter], just listening to what they had to say about [the topic], and then allowing them to explore it further and then we gave them those four options for publication and made sure it connected with student interests.

- We also let them make a playlist for Their Eyes Were Watching God [unit during third quarter] (Janie, Interview # 1)

These strategies showed how students had insightful and unique ways of thinking about their education and schooling and Janie listened to her students’ voices and acted upon them when
possible Cook-Sather’s (2006, 2010). In this instance, Janie referred to examples from all three previous quarters of the school year, which shows how she recognized opportunities for and implemented student voice instructional strategies multiple times. However, it is interesting to note the language choices Janie used while describing the strategies. She discussed how the IDEA project was “completely student-led” yet still had teacher guidance. Therefore, she as the teacher still felt the need to exercise some form of control over the students. She used the phrase “allowing them” when she reflected on the social justice unit, which again placed the teacher in a position of power. Similarly, she stated that “we also let them” when discussing a playlist assignment. Although subtle, these language choices by Janie reveal that the teacher still perceived herself as needing to be in control, at least to some degree, of the classroom decisions and the opportunities given for student voice. Phrases like “we facilitated the students’ discussion” or “we encouraged them” would have been more student-voice friendly terms.

These reflections and language choices demonstrated the complex nature of power structures and control in the classroom, even with a teacher who is a self-proclaimed believer in student voice.

Janie further reflected on her instructional strategies in the second interview. She structured the class so the students could choose from a variety of options for their in-class drafting time for the narrative assignment. In her mind, students utilized their voices when they self-selected their choice for work time. When asked if she felt the strategy was successful, she said, “I think it ended up being pretty successful. If students’ on-task behavior and productivity was a gauge and if they felt they had a choice, I think all of them were engaged in terms of writing and moving forward” (Janie, Interview # 2). Here Janie equated student productivity to success in terms of increased student voice. Again, this shows how the students initiated choices in their learning (Danielson, 2011, p. 85). Janie continued to reflect on the purposeful
instructional strategy of offering choice into students’ work time in the third interview, which she saw as a way of increasing student voice. She discussed how she first found the strategy to be successful in the slam poetry assignment and ultimately differentiated the work time for the narrative. As seen in Classroom observation # 2, Janie did this by growing and changing the list of individual options for the work time as the students “moved through the writing process. [So I took] some of the more basic options off the table and push[ed] them to do more sophisticated things” (Janie, Interview # 3). Again, Janie found this led to the students having on-task behavior during their work time and “doing what they needed to do, and they were leaving helpful comments for each other on their Google docs, talking about their purpose as writers” (Janie, Interview # 3). Student involvement in assessment was shown here by the students being “fully aware of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated” and working to help one another (Danielson, 2011, p. 89). This differentiation led to students utilizing their voices in a more sophisticated way as they critiqued their peers.

Pheoby also implemented instructional strategies related to student voice. In the first classroom observation, she spent the better part of one class period letting students utilize their voice and creativities to explore possibilities for the narrative writing assignment. Some genres she wrote on the whiteboard from the students’ suggestions were mystery, romance, Sci/Fi, a graphic novel, a diary, etc. (Pheoby, Classroom observation # 1). In addition to a paper copy of the assignment sheet, Pheoby had the students click on a link to the assignment sheet on a Google Doc, which also had other resources hyperlinked within it. By using this purposeful technological instructional strategy, Pheoby showcased her skill in communicating with students, as she used a thorough and imaginative way to explain the assignment and connected it with students’ knowledge and experiences with Google Docs (Danielson, 2011, p. 80). This allowed
her to facilitate student voice in various ways: She used her voice to represent the students’ voices at the front of the board, she used the assignment sheet as a way to get students talking with one another about their ideas, and she used the hyperlinks within the assignment sheet to provide further resources for the assignment.

Pheoby tried out another instructional strategy in the second classroom observation, a think aloud to model risk-taking. With this strategy, Pheoby talked through her thinking about how a strategy was going to help her students as they incorporated the literary element of setting into their narrative stories:

Ok, so we’ll be getting into our writing groups in a bit here and then we will have writing time. And a lot of you indicated that tomorrow was a writing day with your calendars, so…

Ok, so go to PeerDeck-- we are trying something new today -- it’s sort of like Nearpod.

So, we’re going to watch a quick video! [about setting]

So… type here… so, I want to see what will happen when you type stuff in. I’m not sure what will happen.

Oooh, I can see it as your typing! How cool is that? (Pheoby, Classroom observation # 2).

With the PeerDeck strategy, Pheoby was able to get real-time feedback from her students about their questions and connections to the video she was showing. As she used PeerDeck, Pheoby could see directly what each student was writing as they typed in their responses. She modeled risk-taking by trying a new strategy and doing a think-aloud to show her students it was a safe environment to take risks, showing flexibility and responsiveness in instruction (Danielson, 2011, p. 91). By taking risks herself as the teacher, Pheoby was in turn showing the students it was a safe place for them to take risks as well. A classroom environment that is supportive of risk-taking is important when attempting to foster student voice. Finally, Pheoby also modeled
the importance of soliciting student voice using multiple modalities; in this case, her students typed their ideas into a Google app in real time.

There was also an instance where Pheoby chose the instructional strategy of giving students an anonymous survey via Google Forms to share their voice and advocate for their learning needs about what was working in class and what needed to be changed (Pheoby, Classroom observation # 3). This was also an example of Pheoby asking for feedback on her teaching. In one of her interviews, Pheoby reflected on why some teachers might be uncomfortable asking for student voice in the form of feedback on their teaching:

It’s scary, it’s terrifying, to ask for students’ opinions on your teaching. Like doing one of those surveys, and saying, ‘What do you need from me?’

I think another piece of the puzzle is the idea of control, and when you let go of some of that control [and give it] to the students, that’s terrifying too. If you don’t know what the outcome will be, sometimes it gets really messy, and sometimes you have chaos, and sometimes you have to look at your class and say, Okay, this does not work, let’s try again.

A lot of people have difficulty with admitting that in front of their students, and saying, well, this did not work, let’s regroup. Or having that sense of chaos and not knowing what’s going to happen. (Pheoby, Interview # 1)

Here, Pheoby spoke to the vulnerability teachers exhibit when they choose the strategy of asking their students for direct feedback and voice. As she asked her students for their voices and opinions on her own teaching, Pheoby showed how she valued her students, as she asked them authentic questions that were important to their classroom experience (Danielson, 2011, p. 82). She also chose the instructional strategy of modeling, as she demonstrated a way her students could work on the skill of advocating for their needs, and in turn, use their voice.

While the use of purposeful instructional strategies was one way that Janie and Pheoby invited student voice in, they felt frustrated at times by the many skills and standards to taught in their curriculum as well. These ideas are explored in the fourth subtheme.
Curriculum Mandates as Obstacles

The fourth and final subtheme had five data points from Janie and Pheoby’s individual interviews. They reflected on the most challenging aspect of student voice inclusion: working to incorporate it while still balancing the number of skills and standards to be taught as dictated by the state and district curriculum. In her first interview, Pheoby thought through the balance needed in today’s classrooms between student voice and skills to be covered:

I think the hard part of all this is how do we honor students’ interests and student choice, when sometimes their interest and choice doesn’t line up to the academic standards that need to be met? So how often are we trying to jump through hoops - to try to make things engaging?
Over time it [the curriculum / student experience] has become less authentic because we’re trying to apply this, and apply that, just to engage students. (Pheoby, Interview # 1)

Here, Pheoby was concerned about how pressure she was working to make the curriculum relevant and friendly to student-voice might not match up to the standards and skills that needed to be covered. While a teacher’s ability to be flexible and responsive to her students’ needs is an important component of teaching (Danielson, 2011, p. 91), Pheoby was concerned that she was “jumping through hoops” to balance the needs of her students and the mandates from her district and still create an engaging learning experience.

Later in that same interview, Pheoby questioned if overly focusing on skills and standards to cover might also inadvertently put a damper on student voice and authenticity. However, she also spoke to a possible compromise, that of striving for a balance between the two:

So I think there needs to be that balance between students having a choice, and students having input, and how does that feasibly fit with the standards that are set up, or the objectives, or whatever the skills are that need to be met. (Pheoby, Interview # 1)

While the skills and standards that Pheoby was teaching were designed to be “cognitively engaging” (Danielson, 2011, p. 85), Pheoby was worried that she as a teacher was having to pile
too much into the curriculum, therefore making it less authentic for her students. However, she spoke to the balance she hoped to achieve by still working to include student voice when possible.

Janie echoed Pheoby’s concerns in her fourth interview. She reflected how “most of the time, teacher-set goals, and standards shape the form student voices can take. I think that the focus is then on the teacher… rather than the student voices themselves” (Janie, Interview # 4). While clear goals and expectations are important for a teacher as she communicates the expectations for learning (Danielson, 2011, p. 80), Janie was worried that there was too much of a focus on the teacher’s goals and outcomes rather than the students’ voices. These ideas showcase the struggle that both teachers spoke to during the data gathering process: trying to advocate for student voice, yet still having to ultimately make decisions about how to get through content, skills and standards within the curriculum. These concerns were also echoed in Partnership observations 1 and 2.

Pheoby summed up this frustration as well, as she stated with a sigh, “There always has to be some sort of skill attached to that [student] voice” (Pheoby, Interview # 1). However, in another part of the same interview, Pheoby also offered up a potential solution that again spoke to achieving a balance between the often-competing entities. As she thought through the assessments that both she and Pheoby had created as well as assessments she had seen from other teachers at her school, she said that increased student choice and voice was possible. She said how she was seeing more assessments developed, in a way, where students have the ability to make choices. So, they [the choices] are still within a basic umbrella as to what needs to happen, but the students get to go at it in multiple ways or they can at least reflect on what worked for them or what didn’t work for them. (Pheoby, Interview # 1)
This idea tied in with the concept of using assessment in instruction (Danielson, 2011, p. 89) and how the teacher can work to actively engage the student in this learning (Danielson, 2011, p. 85). She and Janie worked together to create assessments and design instruction that allowed for student choice whenever possible as long as students were meeting overall goals and standards. Thus, while mandated skills and standards were initially a source of frustration, Janie and Pheoby were able to work together to attempt to resolve this tension yet still ensure student voice within their classrooms. While their collaboration did not achieve a total negation of their frustration by any means, they did make strides towards more student-voice-friendly classroom spaces.

**Summary of Theme: How Teachers Invite Student Voice into Their Classroom**

This major theme included a total of 24 data points, which resulted in the second most prominent finding in this study. The subthemes included the importance of classroom environment (7 data points), social-emotional learning (6 data points), instructional strategies (6 data points), and curriculum mandates as obstacles (5 data points).

It is interesting to note that the two subthemes related to classroom environment had more data points (13 data points) than the two subthemes for instructional strategies (11 data points). This may suggest that at its heart, work teachers do regarding student voice starts with a strong foundation in the classroom environment. This idea could also be reiterated by the examples of both teachers having strong rapport and demonstrating caring and concern for their students as they worked to incorporate student voice. While specific instructional strategies were certainly important, the data showed that a classroom environment conducive to student voice was key. Furthermore, the data showed that both Janie and Pheoby grappled with the balance
between inviting in authentic student voice and the skills and standards they were mandated to cover within their curriculum. Ultimately, both Janie and Pheoby found multiple ways to invite student voice, whether through their classroom environment or with a specific instructional strategy.

**Perceived Obstacles to Student Voice**

Whereas the first and second major themes centered around how teachers defined and invited student voice into their classroom, the third and final major theme focused on examples of how Janie and Pheoby judged their own efforts to foster student voice. Considered through the lenses of positioning and discourse theory, this theme was all about the ‘bounce back’ of first-order positioning as it dealt with how the teachers and students positioned themselves with regards to student voice and one another after they had initially gone through second-order positioning. It also dealt with the discourse and language they used while in the classroom as they negotiated these positionings. Data for this theme were largely found in the interviews and partnership observations. The three subthemes are represented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

Third Major Theme, Subthemes, and Number of Data Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Data Points</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Obstacles to Student Voice</td>
<td>Locus of Control in the Classroom</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pressure from Grades and Constraints of Rubrics</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surface-level vs. Deep-level</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
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Total 20
In the following sections, each subtheme is described, with qualitative comments from both Janie and Pheoby to substantiate and justify the existence of each of the subthemes.

**Locus of Control in the Classroom**

The first subtheme dealt with aspects of positioning theory and how control shifted in the classroom: did it rest with the teacher, the students, or somewhere in between? This subtheme had eight data points mainly from individual interviews but also from classroom observations. The concept of the ever-shifting locus of control within the classroom was a continuation from previous themes and subthemes. For the students to use their voices, the teacher needed to purposefully give up control, using her voice and power to make space for the students’ voices. However, this shift can be a challenge even for teachers actively working to incorporate student voice. Janie spoke to this shift in her first interview, stating that years of accumulated teaching experience helped with shifting control and ownership to her students in their classroom. She stated,

> You need to keep it student-centered. Not be the ‘Sage on the Stage’, but [to keep] finding ways for students to take ownership in and responsibility for their own learning.

> I think that is something that as I get more and more experience, I continue to find ways to shift it more and more in that direction versus my first years teaching, where I was desperately trying to get by, [thinking], ‘What can I do to make this better?’ But the question is really, ‘What can they do to demonstrate their learning and take ownership?’

(Janie, Interview # 1)

Here Janie reflected on how years of teaching helped her to shift the locus of control in the classroom. Her pronoun change also indicated this shift; she stated she used to think “What can **I** do to make this better?” but shifted to thinking “What can **they** do to demonstrate **their** learning and take ownership?” Janie realized that shifting the power from teacher-centered to
student-centered was a way to increase authentic student voice in her classroom, and this also showed her response to her students’ positioning, and her reconsideration of her own positioning in the classroom. As she continued to reflect, she discussed specific examples as well.

Later in the same interview, Janie reflected on various ways the curriculum that she, Pheoby, and other tenth-grade English honors teachers had designed lent itself to student-led voice whether through small group, partner, or whole class experiences. This thinking was also confirmed by Pheoby in the third partnership observation. Specifically, Janie discussed how the fourth quarter of the curriculum lent itself well to opportunities for student-led voice, stating “I think that quarter four tends to be the quarter where we give them the most freedom, because it's the end of the year, and we built up to this point” (Janie, Interview # 1). When Janie spoke of “freedom” for the students, she meant that authentic shift to student-led voice and control within the classroom. However, what she followed up with next was intriguing, as she explained

But even within the reading of say a canonical text and when they're writing a more traditional paper, there’s still opportunity for that voice in terms of the interpretations they can pull out from the text, and what they're going to do with it, and how we are choosing to discuss that novel. (Janie, Interview # 1)

Here Janie spoke to students having voice by choosing what they could interpret for a traditional paper. While she identified a number of opportunities for student-led voice, what she finished her response with were largely teacher-driven instructional strategies. The duality within this response once again indicated the difficulty of truly shifting the locus of control in the classroom for Janie.

Teacher-determined control came back into the picture in Janie’s first classroom observation as well, in that students were given a variety of teacher-created options for work time with their slam poems. Throughout the observation, Janie checked in with individual
students, and kept track of which option they chose for their work time (Janie, Classroom observation # 1). This demonstrated Janie’s belief that students needed direct teacher guidance regarding their supposedly student-led choice in the classroom. This struggle of teacher-determined vs. student-led voice was evident again in the first partnership observation, where Janie and Pheoby discussed or teacher-determined student voice. The philosophical conundrum of wanting students to lead the way but being unsure if they knew how to do so or knew what skills they needed to develop was a recurring concept in the data.

The concept of the ‘keeper’ of opportunities for student voice was also seen in Janie’s second interview. When asked about the role of the teacher in the terms of student voice in the classroom, Janie stated:

I think that the teacher plays the role of first envisioning and creating the overall experience to make sure that students will be clear enough in their expectations and will then be able to go forth and do whatever. And perhaps, I'm trying to think of good names for this, like the ‘facilitator’ or ‘guardian’, to make sure there are clear boundaries so that although I'm giving you a choice, I'm going to reel you in if you go too far away from what you should be doing. Not that there's a ‘should be’ doing, but just really off task behaviors. And just making sure that everybody gets what they need for where they're at.

(Janie, Interview # 2)

Here, Janie saw herself as a “facilitator” or “guardian” of student-led voice. The word choice of the two nouns she used were interesting to note. While “facilitator” has a connotation of someone setting up an experience but the participant largely leading themselves through the process, “guardian” has a connotation of control, power and that something (in this instance, control in the classroom) needs to be guarded. Again, Janie’s quote spoke to the struggle that even teachers who are in favor of student-led voice deal with as they consider their classroom and lesson design. Ultimately, Janie felt it was on her shoulders as the teacher to make sure everybody got what they needed for where they were in their skill development. So while
students can lead the way some or much of the time, Janie still felt pressure to set up the overall experience for her students. In this instance, opportunities for student-led voice still originated with the teacher.

Perhaps one of the reasons teachers felt this pressure was articulated by Pheoby in her first interview. She reflected on times when she had tried to promote student voice and it failed. In these instances, she stated that there were usually a few students who were only thinking about what would make an assignment easiest for them, or “how am I going to be able to chat more with my friends?” (Pheoby, Interview # 1). This suggested problematic issues connected with second-order positioning, specifically in how students may have been positioning themselves with respect to the curriculum. She stated the need for parameters for students when it came to giving them more voice and choice in the classroom. She reflected that

if I give them choice on something, and it doesn’t have a set parameter, it usually does not work out for me. Because I have expectations in my head, and I’m not getting those expectations out to the students, so they are definitely falling way below those expectations. (Pheoby, Interview # 1)

It is interesting to note how the pronoun usage reflected the pressure the teacher was feeling. In this instance, Pheoby used the pronoun “I” three times within two sentences. She saw herself as responsible for setting parameters for her students and communicating her expectations to them. If they fell short of those expectations, the result was presumably a failure in the classroom in Pheoby’s eyes. This example from the first interview showed Pheoby’s belief that sometimes students could not be trusted with choice and voice and that at times she as the teacher needed to purposefully not include student-led voice to ensure learning. Some instances from Pheoby’s interviews and classroom observations contradicted her express belief in the first interview.
Perhaps one of the reasons Pheoby was initially concerned was that sometimes students struggled with being given the opportunities for student-led voice. This struggle can come from the pressure to get a good grade and because they have largely been taught that compliance on their part, in the form of doing what the teacher wants, is good. Pheoby reflected on a time this happened in her second interview when she stated:

I didn't want my own ideas to be pushed on them. We tried by saying okay here's the assignment, here's the rubric, and again I don't know... was the assignment sheet too specific? Not specific enough?

I asked the students, ‘Okay what would fall into this category of a narrative?’ What would their assignment be? What could they do? And they asked some good questions. They asked those typical questions like how long does it have to be? Do we have to have X, Y and Z? So there were some really good questions coming out of it. They were pretty in line with what I thought they would have in terms of the typical assignment.

I think the hard part was, being honors students, they are so used to being told exactly what they need to do, like here are some examples of what you're going to do, now mimic that example and turn it in. (Pheoby, Interview 2)

This data point indicated the internal struggle Pheoby had when she wanted the students to be more in control of an assignment in class. While she noticed a lot of good questions coming from the students, she was worried that her students would struggle with the independence. It is interesting to note that she saw her honors students as being the group of students who would struggle more so with creativity and student-led voice than say, a group of standard-level students. So while Pheoby purposefully designed this narrative assignment to promote student voice, she still struggled with some of them exhibiting compliant behavior, even when their teacher wanted them to assume some leadership. Again, this speaks to the delicate balance of teacher-led and student-led control in the classroom. Even if the teacher wants the students to take more control because they may have been taught not to in past educational experiences, the students are often reluctant to do so. This speaks to challenges teachers have in figuring out how
to position themselves with respect to the curriculum when they change their positioning with their students by trying to incorporate more student voice. Due to all of these interrelated positions, incorporating student voice can become a real challenge.

Pheoby continued to reflect on this balance in her third interview. In this instance, she asked the students to backwards plan their own timeline of checkpoints and due dates for the narrative assignment. While some students reveled in the control, others were unsure of what to do. Pheoby thought this was due to students never or rarely being given the opportunity to set their own due dates and truly manage their own time, a crucial life skill. She stated that time management “is where I think that student voice and student choice is difficult for some students, because they can’t manage or have never had to manage their own time -- it’s usually a teacher driven management” (Pheoby, Interview # 3). The issue of teachers perhaps controlling too much in the classroom came up. In Pheoby’s experience, she did not believe students could not manage their own time per se, but that they never had to do this because previous teachers always did it for them. Looking at this through the locus of control in the classroom, it paints a “chicken or the egg” concept: Are students truly unable to lead the way with their voices, or are they unable to do so because they have never been given the chance and / or taught to do so?

Janie holistically reflected on the teacher’s role in her final interview. After spending an entire quarter working to purposefully incorporate student voice, she said “I think that this experience and focus on student voice caused me to be even less prescriptive about the final project in particular” (Janie, Interview # 4). As she examined student-led voice and her role within that structure, she realized that she needed to be less prescriptive and controlling as the teacher in the room. By doing this, she shifted power away from herself and more so to the students. When thinking ahead to the future, she stated, “I’m eager to keep exploring ways to
listen to student voices throughout the year and allow student interests and ideas to shape the
course and my students’ experience” (Janie, Interview # 4). As she realized that her students’
voices could lead the way during the fourth quarter, Janie also realized that they needed to be
listened to “throughout the year.” As Janie concluded, student-led voice is not just something
that can only happen if, and when, the students prove themselves and properly build up to it as
the year goes on. True and authentic student voice can lead the way throughout the school year
if the teacher allows for it.

Pressure from Grades and Constraints of Rubrics

The second subtheme had six data points taken from interviews, a partnership
observation and classroom observations. This subtheme centered on the pressure the teachers
felt to give students grades, the constraints they felt from using rubrics, and how both of these
aspects impacted student voice in the classroom. As this subtheme related to the resultant first-
order positioning that Janie and Pheoby felt after they experienced the second-order positioning
put upon them by their school and district, it falls under this third larger theme. Both Janie and
Pheoby’s data points revealed they felt pulled in two directions: wanting to give and promote
authentic student voice yet feeling hypocritical when they had to still exert control and be in a
position of power in the classroom. As the teachers furthered their work with student voice, they
reflected on a new awareness of how assignments or classroom setups they thought promoted
student voice might not actually be doing so. Pheoby spoke to this in her second interview and
discussed rubrics in particular.

I think the hard part about student voice as a teacher is allowing for student voice.
Because there is still that control factor. And a lot of people, when they think ‘Oh I'm
allowing student choice or student voice because I am letting them choose things’, there’s
still parameters in that choice which then eliminates the true ability to have a voice.

When I was talking to my students about this last year, one of the aspects they said stifies them the most was rubrics. Because even when a teacher says ‘Okay, you can do whatever you want’ [on an assignment], you can only do that as long as you maintain the rubric requirements. (Pheoby, Interview # 2)

Pheoby reflected on the feeling of being pulled in two directions: wanting to promote authentic student voice yet being constrained by the rubric she needed to use to grade her students’ work. Her students felt this constraint as well. She felt frustrated as a teacher when she inadvertently exerted control in the form of rubric requirements and how that impeded authentic student voice.

Janie also felt this pressure as she discussed the downfall of limited student choice in her second interview. While she felt that increased student choices often equated to increased student voice, she discussed rubrics and assignment sheets specifically. She wondered if giving them two options on an assignment sheet, or making it within the constraints of a rubric and all these other expectations, is that really giving them a choice? I'm not quite sure. There's also the whole ‘well I'm going to give you free reign to talk about whatever you want as long as it's appropriate, and I agree with it, and if it's fulfilling the needs of my course…’ (Janie, Interview # 2)

While Janie used almost a sarcastic tone as she listed off the constraints she felt she sometimes put upon students, her point was made. She felt hypocritical as a teacher when she said she wanted to promote student voice, but as the person with the power in the room, she forced students to make their choices fit within specific parameters.

Janie also gave an example of a frustration she felt as a teacher when she discussed an instructional activity she used to do that she felt was ineffective in promoting student voice. Within the English 10 honors course, teachers would often assess speaking and listening standards in the form of a graded discussion. While discussion was typically a prime way for students to share their voices both literally and figuratively, Janie was frustrated by the idea of a
higher-stakes whole class discussion that was graded. She reflected on a specific way she used to do graded discussions that some teachers still did, using different colored “discussion cups” that students would move to indicate if they wanted to speak. The students each got three colored cups they placed in front of themselves as they sat in a circle and had their discussion, during which the teacher would sit off to the side and assess. A green cup meant the students wanted to make a comment, a yellow cup meant they were thinking, and a red cup placed in front of them on the desk meant they did not want to speak. However, Janie stated,

Okay I love less and less a whole class discussion. Like what we used to do with the discussion cups and making it kind of high stakes in terms of sharing and expressing their voice. I think we might say that ‘Hey we’re giving you the opportunity to discuss, but it has to be about these things and it has to be within these contexts.’ By the way [you must be] sharing and by the way you also have to navigate sharing at an appropriate time with 26 people who want to share at the exact same time as you and they might not acknowledge your discussion cup and... ugh!

I just love less and less things like that like it seems like it’s just so scripted and high stakes and whatever. (Janie, Interview # 1)

This data point revealed Janie’s frustration at the idea of wanting students to share their voice yet needing students to perform for the purpose of an evaluative grade. She was frustrated with this inauthentic experience she used to set up for her students.

These frustrations also came out in Janie’s classroom observations. In two of the classroom observations, Janie’s volume and tone had a noticeable change when talking about the rubric or requirements of the current assignment. When she discussed aspects of the slam poem assignment, Janie shifted from a soft, calm and happy volume and tone when she talked about ideas for poems in general to a firm, louder, and more authoritative tone when she instructed students about the requirements of the rubric and assignment (Janie, Classroom observations # 1 and # 2). It was interesting to note that she did not ask for any input or student voice when going
over the rubric or requirements. The rubric and the requirements were clearly elements that needed to be adhered to with no flexibility or opportunity for input from the students. With her nonverbal communication in the form of her tone, Janie sent the message to the students that they needed to pay attention and that the rubric and assignment was important. She used a firmer and louder tone when talking about the rubric and requirements, which possibly sent the message that these things were more important than ideas within the poems.

Janie and Pheoby also grappled with frustrations about student choice and the constraints of grades and rubrics in their first partnership observation. This observation happened early in the quarter when they were first discussing opportunities for increased student voice and choice. Janie questioned: “We want to give them all of this choice, like full choice, but what about students that can’t handle that?” Pheoby replied, “Yeah. Like, would that [full choice] stress the students out even more?” (Partnership observation #1). Later in the same partnership observation, Janie and Pheoby articulated that the concept of giving students “full choice” might overwhelm students who were used to having their choices defined for them, and therefore seeing a clearer pathway to getting a high grade on an assignment. Here the data revealed that the teachers were struggling with the balance of power and choice in the classroom. How could they give increased choice and voice, especially for students who might not be used to that and were instead used to doing assignments primarily to get a good grade?

Ultimately, Janie reflected on how the pressure students put upon themselves to get a good grade was something that stifled authentic voice but could be overcome with the right classroom environment and assignment. In the third interview, she discussed how the narrative assignment was going. She reflected that by shifting her overall focus in class and instruction away from the grade and rubric and more towards authentic choices writers make, she saw
improvement. She shared a specific time when students were in the drafting phase and had questions. She explained:

Typically, with honors kids, if they smell danger they’ll panic [if they don’t understand something right away] and be like, ‘Wait, Wait!’ and they’ll ask a lot of clarifying questions because they’re concerned about their grade.

It’s interesting, because I don’t think that the grade is the biggest thing here. I think that they’re just genuinely excited about having the chance to write their stories, and just have their peers hear their stories, which is kind of cool. (Janie, Interview # 3)

After purposefully shifting her instruction and mindset to promote authentic student voice, Janie found success in the form of her students not feeling pressure to get a high grade, but instead engaging with the writing process. This data point showed how although it was difficult at first, more of a balance between authentic student voice and grades/rubrics was something teachers could work towards, though it is difficult and takes time for students to redefine their own first-order positioning away from the outside pressures put upon them from their parents, classmates, and society that success equals getting a good grade.

**Surface-Level vs. Deep-level**

The third and final subtheme had six data points taken from interviews and a partnership observation. Continuing with the idea that the teachers in this study struggled with constraints that hindered authentic student voice, this subtheme revolved around the ways in which they saw surface-level student voice as opposed to deep-level authentic student voice in their classrooms. Surface-level voice might be an instance of a student agreeing or disagreeing with a classroom decision and voicing that feeling. However, deep-level student voice tied with deeper and more personal levels of student engagement and empowerment in the classroom. An example of this was seen in the first partnership observation. In their conversation, Janie and Pheoby were in the
planning stages for the upcoming narrative assignment. They discussed how the assignment had
gone the previous year and how they wanted to change it to facilitate deeper levels of student
voice.

   Janie: This assignment is essentially all about different choices they have as writers…

   Pheoby: Now, if I remember, let me pull up the assignment sheet… I think it was
   annoying. Part of it [the problem with the assignment] limited their length. I think we did
   a microfiction-y thing? A hybrid?

   Janie: We talked about making it grade-able. I know G___ my TA [teacher’s assistant]
talked about how restrictive that assignment was [when G___ had the assignment as an
   English 10 honors student]

   Pheoby: So, is it really student choice, for real? Or is it fake, just set up how our rubric is
   or for what the rubric needs? (Partnership observation # 1)

This data point revealed how the teachers struggled with “real” choice versus “fake” choice for
their students. Pheoby’s frustration with the assignment came from what she perceived to be a
fake, or surface-level attempt at student voice. While the old assignment did technically have
student choice involved, Pheoby was frustrated by it because it was a “fake” set of choices that
still limited the students as they were too constrained by those choices and especially by the
rubric. It was interesting to note that Pheoby personified the rubric by stating that the
assignment was just doing what the rubric needed, as if the rubric was a living breathing thing
that was demanding certain assignments. This language usage may reveal how Pheoby felt out
of control, which was ironic given that she and Janie created the rubric the year prior. This data
point also showed how Janie included another aspect of student voice, listening to G___, the
teaching assistant in her class. G___ was an English 11 student who had taken Janie’s course the
year before. By bringing up G___’s opinion and issue with the assignment, Janie was showing
how she further valued student voice, and how she and Pheoby could use it to promote a more authentic experience in their class for the current year.

In subsequent interviews, Janie reflected on how redesigning the assignments for the quarter to include deeper levels of student voice did occur. In her second interview she reflected on the narrative assignment. In her lesson design, Janie was the one who came up with some initial choices for work time, but the students were the ones who ultimately took charge and dictated their own pace and skill-development. Janie stated how she saw the students really using their choices “after they had the first draft done. They were leaving comments for each other [on their drafts], and still really getting at much of the same stuff, but you could tell they were more collaborative” (Janie, Interview # 2). In this instance, Janie saw increased student collaboration as evidence of increased student voice, which was also seen in her first and second classroom observations. When she stated that the students were “still really getting at much of the same stuff,” she meant that they were commenting on many of the same writing skills and ideas that she the teacher would have commented on. Therefore, as Janie saw it in her classroom, deeper-level student voice led to high levels of engagement from students and accurate self and peer assessments.

Janie further discussed this idea in her third interview. As she reflected on the choices she gave students for their narrative assignment, she stated that through this assignment

I think you’re definitely honoring their differences and preferences. First of all, this is a very open-ended assignment that they got to write about whatever they wanted in whatever format they wanted. They set the goals, they set the due dates, they did pretty much everything.

As a part of that, it wouldn’t make sense for me to step in and say ‘Now today class we are all going to do this.’ It wouldn’t honor that interest in preference for such an open ended assignment to make it boxed in, so I thought this went quite well with what the overall goal of the assignment is, and also was a good opportunity for them to kind of
own the experience. (Janie, Interview # 3)

Here Janie discussed how honoring deeper-level student voice allowed her students to choose what they felt they needed to work on and take charge of their learning by setting their own goals and due dates. This deeper-level voice, Janie felt, led to students becoming more engaged and empowered. She stated how from an instructional standpoint, it would not have made sense to go back to a whole-class lesson as that would not have honored the choices and voice the students had shown. Therefore, she saw this assignment and its structure as a way for students to authentically use their voice.

Pheoby also saw success with the narrative assignment in her class through the use of deeper-level student voice. In her fourth interview, she reflected on how she saw an increase in both student engagement and skill performance as compared to where students were in these areas earlier in the year. She stated, “They worked harder on this last assignment than they even realized! I saw more engagement and skills with this last piece and unit than I saw all year” (Pheoby, Interview # 4). This data point demonstrated Pheoby’s impression that when deeper-level student voice is allowed to lead the way in the classroom, the students can achieve levels of engagement and skill-development surprising not only their teacher but themselves.

Janie spoke to the success both she and Pheoby saw as a testament to truly listening to student voice, especially with the setup of the fourth quarter curriculum in particular. She reflected, “Students love our fourth module because their voices are heard, and they get to shape their experience in the class. I also think this is because they know their voices have been heard and acted upon” (Janie, Interview # 4). Janie stated a crucial aspect of including deeper-level student voice in the classroom; it is not enough to simply provide opportunities for student voice,
but the teacher must act upon it as well, because when that happens, students feel more empowered as their voice has resulted in actions by their teacher.

Ultimately, Janie summed up the difference between surface-level and deeper level student voice in her fourth interview. She reflected on the need to shift away from a teacher-centered environment and instruction to a student-centered one.

Most of the time, teacher-set goals and standards shape the form student voices can take, and I think that the focus is then on the teacher and the performance rather than the student voices themselves. When students themselves choose the form and/or the topic, and are able to explain the choices they made as thinkers, the focus shifts in a powerful way to allow student voices to take center stage. (Janie, Interview # 4)

As Janie reflected on what she had learned overall from this study, she spoke to letting students truly lead the way in their learning and ultimately truly utilize their voice.

**Summary of Theme: Perceived Obstacles to Student Voice**

The third and final major theme had 20 data points within the findings. The subthemes included locus of control in the classroom (8 data points), pressure from grades and constraints of rubrics (6 data points) and surface-level student voice vs. deep-level student voice (6 data points).

All of these subthemes dealt in some way with teachers trying to find the balance between the amount of control they exerted in the classroom and the ways in which they used their voices to make space for student ownership and voice in the classroom. The pressure of the teacher as the person in the room who ultimately needed to make a judgment in the form of a grade for each student also came in to play. Furthermore, the data showed how even when a teacher was in support of increased student voice in the classroom, the complex power structures involved in teaching and learning, pre-learned roles students felt they needed to play and previous attempts
to include student voice that may have failed were all a challenge. However, the data also indicated that when teachers were committed to the idea of increased student voice and designed their assignments and classrooms accordingly, the students rose to the challenge. Ultimately, students in both Janie and Pheoby’s classes utilized their voices for powerful and engaging learning they achieved on their own terms.

Answers to the Research Questions

Research Question 1

The first research question in the study was ‘How do high school English teachers invite student voice into the classroom?’ The answer to this question is multi-faceted. The data showed that these two high school English 10 honors teachers had a mindset and belief system that valued student voice. This seemed necessary before voice could truly be invited into the classroom. From there, the teachers made efforts to foster student voice by inviting it into the classroom in multiple ways: 1) their mindset and beliefs 2) purposeful instructional activities, 3) assessment design, and 4) classroom environment.

The teacher’s mindset and beliefs about student voice were crucial when it came to student voice implementation. Janie and Pheoby both went in with the mindset that they were going to purposefully invite student voice into the classroom. Looking through the lens of positioning theory, they were aware of their first-order positioning in the classroom, and purposeful steps they needed to take in order to ensure students felt their voices were invited in by being cognizant of the second-order positioning put upon them by their students, and the first-order positioning their students had. They both valued student voice on not only a personal, but
also a professional level. These first-order positions and beliefs were shown in a variety of ways. For instance, Janie strongly valued creativity and independence, first as a designer of instructional activities that promoted student voice, and then as an implementer of them. Pheoby strongly valued student choice as a way to promote social justice and to show her students she believed in them. Each woman had individual examples of powerful ways that they had invited student voice into their classroom in the past. Furthermore, they both valued working with each other and collaborating on this topic; while both women saw Janie as the initial designer of creative options, they clearly valued each other’s opinions on the topic and both gave and received ideas about inviting student voice in as they compared strategies and designed activities and assessments. This collaboration enhanced the quality and ability to provide opportunities for student voice.

Janie and Pheoby both invited student voice in by first purposefully designing instructional activities and assessments to accomplish this. As they collaborated on these, they took into account both past and current students’ voices and input as they made changes. For instance, they utilized the expertise of students who had taken the course previously as English 10 honors students, the school’s student consultants from the Writing Center and their own current students in their English 10 honors classes. The results were changed assessments and activities designed to invite not only student voice but a more authentic level of student voice into the classroom. In these activities and assessments, the teachers planned for flexible grouping and work options as well as multiple pathways through an assignment, all based on what the students thought was best for their learning needs and styles. Both teachers spoke to increased student choice to invite in increased student voice. While they both spoke to the frustration and limitations at times of mandated elements of the curriculum such as certain
standards to be covered and rubrics to be used, they worked together to design ways to still authentically invite voice in. This raised issues, however, of times where they as teachers were still largely in control of the classroom. Together, Janie and Pheoby struggled with the duality of needing to ultimately be in control to cover certain skills and standards yet wanting to shift this locus of control to the students. They felt the pressure from second-order positioning of the district, rubrics they needed to use, and skills they needed to cover. At times they struggled with how to re-adjust their first-order positioning accordingly. They wanted to position themselves as caring educators who were responsive to student voice, yet they were also begrudgingly aware of the second-order positioning and pressures from the district. They struggled with authenticity regarding student voice, and continually asked the following question: Were the activities and assessments they designed inviting real or fake student voice?

There were times they purposefully did not invite student voice in or curbed it when it did come about based on past experiences. Janie and Pheoby both believed that increased student voice was something that needed to be purposefully built up to and lamented how especially honors students at times really struggled with the freedom increased voice could give them, mainly because some of the students tended to be extremely focused on their grade instead of their learning and creativity. This could have been because these English 10 honors classes may have been the first courses in the students’ secondary schooling that allowed for increased voice. This is interesting to examine through the lens of positioning theory, as it speaks to the reality that even if one classroom is a space conducive to student voice, roles that students have learned in other classrooms, those roles of having lesser power than the teacher, can be initially difficult to overcome, as students have assumed the first-order position that a “good” student is one who is compliant and does what their teacher tells them to do.
Janie and Pheoby also both invited student voice in via their purposeful classroom environments, although this was the area in which they differed the most. While the two teachers used virtually identical instructional activities, assignments, and rubrics, Janie’s classroom environment was overall more of a quiet and controlled space. The physical environment was set up with table groups and even another separate classroom space to use if the students want to go there with their writing group. Often students were free to move about the spaces as they saw fit after Janie had given the initial instruction for the day. Janie’s quiet and calm demeanor rubbed off on her students as well, and they often spoke or worked with whispered voices. Janie’s nonverbal cues such as putting herself on the same or lower space, physically, when working with students showed that she was inviting their voices in, yet it was also clear that she was ultimately in charge and the students needed to work within the constraints Janie provided. This was an intriguing, and possibly mixed, message to the students when viewed through the lens of positioning theory.

Pheoby’s classroom, on the other hand, was a louder and more boisterous space. Students were giggly and silly yet still accomplished daily goals. Pheoby routinely used her power in the room to directly make space for the students’ voices and ideas, such as when she scribed word for word ideas her students were generating during a whole-class brainstorming session. Pheoby ultimately took more risks herself as a learner and a leader in the classroom and shared her own writing with the students, modeling vulnerability. She also verbalized to them when she was taking a risk, such as trying a new instructional strategy, and talked to her students about how if that strategy did not work, that was okay. Pheoby routinely modeled metacognition and reflective thinking by talking to the students about what was going through her mind. All of these moves were purposeful on Pheoby’s part. As a result, students took the lead more
frequently and there was an air of risk-taking and fun in the classroom. Pheoby repeatedly used her voice to praise her students’ accomplishments and celebrate the risks they took, leading to an environment that further invited student voice.

Research Question 2

The second research question was “How do high school English teachers make meaning of student voice?” Again, the answer was multi-faceted. Both teachers utilized past experiences as well as their own belief systems to initially make meaning of the concept of student voice. They considered researcher Cook-Sather’s (2006, 2010) definition of student voice, which honors the idea that young people have insightful and unique ways of thinking about their education and schooling and adults involved at all levels of the students’ education should listen to students’ voices and act upon them when possible. In honoring students’ interests and preferences, a teacher should give young people opportunities to shape their experiences within the educational setting. Both teachers agreed to utilize that as they moved forward in the study, as both Janie and Pheoby agreed that it articulated a definition very close to their own. There were multiple examples of how collaborating with one another shaped the individual’s outlook on student voice, as they built on one another’s thinking and examples. As they progressed in the implementation of strategies and design of assessments and collaborated further on this topic, their meaning also morphed to include examples they currently tried in their classrooms.

As Janie and Pheoby worked together to make meaning of student voice, all four elements of the Danielson framework were found in the data. They implemented activities, lessons and assessments designed to promote authentic student voice, mainly via increased student choice and engagement, which aligned with Danielson Domain 3 (Instruction). They
worked to create a positive and welcoming classroom environment, both in the physical design of the room as well as a place where risk-taking and voice was celebrated and encouraged, which aligned with Danielson Domain 2 (Classroom Environment). They thought deeply about their students’ mindsets and needs and then co-designed and purposefully planned out multiple elements that showcased and increased student voice, which aligned with Danielson Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation). Finally, they collaborated and reflected with one another in an ongoing way, discussing what elements were working, and which elements might not be the best ideas and bringing multiple examples of student input to the forefront of their planning, which aligned with Danielson Domain 4 (Professional Responsibilities). Ultimately, all four domains were seen as Janie and Pheoby made meaning of student voice in their classrooms.

However, the meaning did vary between the two participants, specifically in the aspects of their views of the role of the teacher in this process as well as their personal values. While both teachers discussed how they valued student voice, as they individually made meaning of it, Janie’s value system of the teacher ultimately being the designer and the “gatekeeper” of student voice came through in her individual interviews and classroom observations. While she purposefully included multiple pathways and opportunities for students to share their voices in the classroom, they were focused on ways for students to advocate for their learning needs as they progressed through the assignment. While there were a multitude of available choices, they were all ultimately choices that Janie initially made. Ultimately, Janie did not ask the students directly for their input or for their interpretation of an assignment. While she strongly valued creativity and showed her students that she cared by setting high expectations and valuing them as individuals, she stated that the creative process was one that initially came from her as she
worked to conceptualize the unit and assessments, although she took student voice and perceived needs into account. These were ways Janie made meaning of student voice.

Pheoby, however, saw her role as the teacher differently. Through her individual interviews and classroom observations, she viewed herself as more of a facilitator, utilizing her power in the classroom to help the students make meaning of their own ideas and voices. She valued social justice and thought it was her job as a teacher to teach her students to utilize their own voices. She would often ask students for their direct input into the class activities or assignments and immediately showcased that input for the entire class to see in the form of survey results and brainstorming sessions for possibilities for assignments. She made changes in her instruction directly based on her students’ input. She stated multiple times in the individual interviews that she believed increased voice was a skill that could and should be taught to students, and she clearly valued a democratic and dialogic classroom. Her excitement for what her students were doing and the risks they were taking was palpable, both in and out of the classroom. The way Pheoby made meaning of student voice more directly involved the students and an environment in which she as the teacher gave up more control to the students. She was highly aware of her first-order positioning, as well as her students’ first-order positioning. Because she knew about the second-order positioning put upon her students by outside pressures from their parents, society, or their peers to get good grades and be compliant to their teacher, she carefully and thoughtfully adjusted her first-order positioning to encourage their voices. This was a clear example of positioning theory at work, and Pheoby’s cognizance of her positioning in relation to her students.

Janie and Pheoby did have elements in common as they worked to make meaning of student voice—that of tension between academic standards and authentic voice opportunities.
This was another instance of positioning theory coming into play, but this time, it was Janie and Pheoby’s positioning as related to the school and district’s expectations of them as teachers. As they wrestled together though assessment and lesson design, they often asked questions like “But is this actual student voice? For real? Or just our interpretation of how they can showcase their voices?” They were both aware of their positioning of power and authority within the classroom. They also struggled to encourage students who were typically not asked for their voice or input in other classes and then were intimidated or just unsure of how to share their voice in their English 10 honors class, which speaks to the positioning the students felt as a result of messages the larger school system had given them. Both teachers discussed at length the struggle with wanting to provide truly authentic student voice experiences yet having students that were overly concerned with their grade or their score on the rubric. They both believed that student voice was something that had to be integrated slowly over the course of an academic year, and both articulated to some degree that they were unsure if additional opportunities for increased student voice would work in a standard-level class. Therefore, all of these struggles weighed in as Janie and Pheoby made meaning of student voice in their classrooms.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question was “How do high school English teachers instructionally respond to student voice?” Again, the answer to this question had multiple components. Overall, both teachers utilized either formal or informal data from students, both past and current, to shape their instructional responses. This may have been formalized data, such as the Google form Pheoby gave her students to gather their voice. Or this could have been informal data, such
as which choice for work time Janie’s students picked and which resources she provided based on those choices.

The instructional design structure was interesting to note in that both teachers were purposeful in being initially highly structured in order to achieve an unstructured feeling to their classrooms. They carefully thought through multiple pathways for each assignment that would allow students to utilize their voice and choice yet still meet the requirements of the rubric or curriculum mandates to be taught. It was obvious that both teachers had multiple instructional strategies in their toolbox and a deep familiarity with the content that helped them to instructionally respond to student voice in a flexible and timely manner. Having a skills-based curriculum was incredibly helpful with this, as both Janie and Pheoby shared examples of how they shifted the content they chose to meet the interests and needs of the students, as this allowed them to more fully and instructionally respond to student voice.

Other key components of the instructional response by the two teachers were the elements of respect and risk-taking, both among each other as seen in the partnership observations and within the classroom spaces. Both teachers showed high levels of vulnerability and trust with one another, asking each other challenging questions and being willing to try out ideas that neither had tried before. This is yet another intriguing example of positioning theory, in this case, the positioning needed between two colleagues to establish levels of trust. In the classroom, Janie showed respect toward her students by holding them to high standards as well as honoring their choices and preferences for work time, accessing resources, or seeking out her feedback. Not once did she impose a decision or judgment upon a student, but instead she truly let them lead the way. In Pheoby’s classroom, she showed respect for her students by her
excitement about them reaching their goals and by modeling vulnerability and risk-taking herself, both as their teacher and as a fellow writer.

Finally, both teachers responded to students with their classroom environment. Providing a warm, supporting and respectful environment helped to provide the foundation needed for Janie and Pheoby to try out different instructional strategies and for the students to have the confidence needed to take risks as well. These two classroom environments were different as they reflected the value systems and personalities of each teacher, yet they both worked to respond to and encourage student voice. Some of this environment was purposeful and intentional, such as Pheoby using her voice to scribe students’ suggestions or begin facilitating a class pizza party. Other times it was an unconscious move, as seen when Janie checked over the notes from the classroom observation and had not even realized that she was physically always at or below the level of students she was working with, a nonverbal communication that showed respect towards them and the removal of herself as the authority figure. Finally, both Janie and Pheoby instructionally responded to student voice by realizing that there were multiple pathways in the students’ learning. By allowing the students to lead the way, many if not all eventually reached the same destination: that of success in their assignment and pride in their work.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 presented the research findings for this study regarding how two teachers conceive of student voice, value it, and foster it. Research was guided by the three research questions. The two participants in this study were both teachers of English 10 honors courses, and each responded to four individual interviews, were observed four times as they worked together in a partnership, and each had their classrooms observed three times. A discussion of
the findings from Chapter 4 as well as implications and recommendations for the field are presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes a discussion of the five major findings that emerged from the study. I give particular attention to how the findings relate to past research and the theoretical frameworks chosen for the study (i.e., positioning theory and discourse theory). I also describe limitations of the study as well as recommendations for classroom practice and future research.

Discussion of Major Findings

This study focused on two English 10 honors teachers’ definition of student voice and implementation of strategies designed to increase student voice. The methodology utilized multiple points of data from individual interviews, observations of the two teachers working together in a partnership structure, and observations within the two teachers’ classrooms. Findings from this study include the following observations:

1. Teacher values and belief systems influence student voice in the classroom.

2. Teachers must be aware of their own positioning in the classroom to make space for student voice.

3. The use of student voice in the classroom includes elements from all four Danielson Domains.
4. Opportunities for student voice can be a struggle due to mandated district assessments.

5. Teachers benefit from utilizing various instructional and classroom management strategies, including familiarity of their content as well as their students, to purposefully increase student voice in the classroom.

These findings indicate that the incorporation of student voice into classroom practice is much more than simply asking the students for their ideas. Just as the craft of teaching is both an art and a science that is honed over time, incorporating authentic, purposeful and lasting student voice is as well. In the following section, each of the five major findings are discussed, including how the finding relates to past research on this topic and the theoretical frameworks.

**Finding # 1: Influence of Teacher Values and Belief Systems on Student Voice.**

The most important finding that emerged from the study was how a teacher’s values and belief systems influence strategies and practices in the classroom that the teacher utilizes to foster student voice. Although their specific methods and classroom practices differed, both Janie and Pheoby believed in student voice, specifically that students should have a sense of agency in their own learning. In addition, teachers have a responsibility to design ways for students to have authentic input into the class (Cook-Sather, 2006; Quaglia & Corso, 2014). Even though Janie valued creativity and high standards and Pheoby felt student voice supported a social justice perspective, both believed their students had legitimate perspectives to share (Holdsworth, 2000). Seeking out student voice is only one aspect of student voice inclusion; educators must also actively respond to the students themselves (Fielding, 2001; Rudduck, 2007), which the teachers in the study did in a variety of ways. These included showing students
the results of a class feedback survey and then changing their practices accordingly or letting students lead the way in advocating for their own choices during drafting time when working on an assignment. These responses came from the teachers’ fundamental belief systems, which largely align with the progressive education movement of the 1930s and 1940s led by John Dewey (Bravmann, 2011; Kahne, 1995). The teachers fundamentally believed in a more democratic and dialogic classroom set up, where their students had input and the teacher was not the sole decision-maker.

When examining this first major finding through the lens of discourse theory, the teachers were actively aware of their own voice within the classroom and realized that both they and their students were largely products of a system where the teacher was the keeper of knowledge and, often, the voice and language of the classroom (Gee, 1996; Hall, 2001). This was seen early in the study when both teachers struggled with students who were largely silent when asked for their ideas, or when students became anxious when initially given freedom and less restrictions on an assignment. Both Janie and Pheoby collaborated on instructional strategies for what to do with the student who had the mindset of “Just tell me what I need to do to get the A.” Due to their fundamental belief that the students should have a larger voice and presence in the classroom, the teachers made purposeful efforts to shift their practices, aligning with the NCTE Resolution on Contemporary Discourse (2017) that English teachers have a moral obligation to invite students into various discourse practices and communities. This shift was seen when Janie structured her class to allow students choice in how they wanted to progress through their narrative assignment, or how Pheoby facilitated whole class brainstorming for the narrative assignment topics, or when both teachers leaned heavily on the ideas and voice of a former English 10 honors student when redesigning aspects of their instruction.
Stern (1995) suggested a “co-creative” model of discourse, discussion and learning within the classroom. While Pheoby was initially more comfortable with this, Janie still structured her classroom to enable this to happen. Ultimately, both teachers’ beliefs subscribed to the idea that some of the best teachers for students in the classroom are fellow students themselves (Quaglia & Corso, 2014; Stern 1995). Janie and Pheoby’s values and collaboration led them to seek out other students as active teachers. Pheoby’s belief system was rooted in social justice. She saw it as her moral obligation to teach her students to value their own voices, and that this was in fact a form of social justice as it shifted the power structure from her to them (Gee, 1996).

An aspect that is largely missing from the current body of research is the idea of educating teachers on the importance of student voice in the classroom to support that value and belief system. Researchers such as Cook-Sather (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2009; 2010) and her contemporaries of Friend and Caruthers (2015), Mitra (2006), and Mitra and Serriere (2012) assume that teachers are already sold on the idea of increased student voice. However, many teachers themselves have been educated in a system where their own voices have not been valued. From a classroom management perspective, it can be easier to have the teacher’s voice and authority be the loudest and most important (Cook-Sather 2002b, 2006; Quaglia & Corso, 2014).

This is especially true given how, many times, teachers new to the profession are often not explicitly taught how to incorporate student voice. In my work as an instructional coach mentoring dozens of new teachers, as well as hosting several student teachers over the past 15 years, I have never found a beginning teacher who had been specifically instructed in student voice incorporation as part of their previous learning. This study involved veteran tenured
teachers who were able and willing to take on this topic. However, incorporating authentic student voice can be complex; this might not be a topic a brand new teacher would easily be able to incorporate unless clearly taught how to do so.

Another aspect to consider is that there are many veteran teachers who do not hold the belief that student voice is important, even though many evaluation systems such as the Danielson framework both implicitly and explicitly state it as such. It should not just be the luck of the draw as to if a student gets a teacher who is supportive of student voice inclusion. Further professional learning regarding student voice needs to be done to help all teachers establish a value system that honors student voice, not just those who already have a depth of experience or a willingness to do so.

Finding # 2: Teachers Must Be Aware of Their Own Positioning in the Classroom to Make Space for Student Voice

The second most important finding from the study dealt with the concept of positioning theory, which was also one of the theoretical frameworks. For student voice to be realized in the classroom, it is first necessary for teachers to be aware of how they as the adults and authority figures in the room utilize their voices. Ironically, for student voice to be realized, adults must first be aware of their own voice and adjust the power structures accordingly. As Rudduck and Fielding (2006) remind us, students cannot obtain their voices alone; they need the adult stakeholders in the process to realize their part.

In this study, those gate-keepers of student voice were the classroom teachers. Janie and Pheoby were aware of their positioning in multiple ways; the topic came up during their partnership observations as they collaborated on ways to help students take risks and utilize their
voices, including thinking through their first-order positioning as teachers and how that would impact the resultant second-order positioning of their students; in essence, how they needed to act as teachers so that the students felt safe to utilize their own voices. Both Janie and Pheoby made changes to their nonverbal communication and behaviors with students to decrease their power and set up a more neutral environment, or even an environment in which the students had the greater position of power. They did this because they were cognizant of how their students were positioning themselves with relation to their teachers, the curriculum, the pressure to get good grades, and the like. For instance, Janie typically had the student speak first and initiate the question; when she sat near a student, she was physically at or even below their level. These actions sent the implicit message that the student was valued and could share his/her voice freely. Pheoby used her voice to scribe student ideas during a whole-class brainstorming session. She also used humor within the class regularly to make it an open and friendly environment and would often purposefully stop speaking and listen attentively when a student wanted to speak. During one classroom observation, Pheoby stopped speaking entirely for several minutes as several students took an idea and ran with it.

During their planning conversations, Janie and Pheoby also consistently brought up issues of positioning and how to address this while promoting authentic student voice. They knew that their group of English 10 honors students were dealing with two specific hurdles when it came to using their voices: that of not typically being asked to do so in other classes and being preoccupied with getting a good grade and doing the right thing for their assessments. However, Janie and Pheoby were aware of one of the dangers brought up by Fielding (2001)—that of well-meaning adults speaking for students instead of allowing them to have their own voice directly represented. Therefore, the two teachers constantly questioned if the activities and assessments
they were planning incorporated student voice ‘for real’ or if they were just activities the adults wanted the students to do. Janie and Pheoby struggled with the balance of needing to achieve certain outcomes in the class but wanting to achieve as much student voice as possible. By being aware of their first-order positioning at work, they were able to achieve more authentic student voice experiences.

By doing this, the teachers were modeling another one of their goals, that of teaching and living a form of social justice. Often throughout the year the content of the class touched on social justice topics of power structures and inequity regarding issues such as race, socioeconomic class, and gender disparity. However, by shifting the power from the teacher toward the students, Janie and Pheoby modeled a form of social justice at the classroom level as well. Janie and Pheoby’s actions also relate to research surrounding positioning theory and how it relates to the classroom in general (Anderson, 2009; Davies & Harré, 1990; du Bois, 2007; Gordon, 2015). If secondary English educators want to prepare students to take on issues of social justice as NCTE’s Resolution on Contemporary Discourse (2017) suggests they do, then it is crucial that teachers not only talk the talk but also walk the walk.

One area that was of particular interest in this study were Janie’s and Pheoby’s different approaches to student voice as seen through the lens of positioning theory. Even though these two teachers were striving for the same goals, their results in the classroom were different. There were instances where they differed in their first-order positioning as teacher in the room, and then their response to second-order positioning from their students, the pressure put upon them by the curriculum and district, and even push back from their own belief systems about who should ultimately be in control in the classroom. The second-order positioning felt by Janie in particular seemed to impact her resultant first-order positioning away from the students more
so, as while she certainly tried to incorporate student voice into her classroom and ultimately did so in a number of ways, there were times she did not align with Cook-Sather’s definition as much as Pheoby. Considering the stance triangle (du Bois, 2007) and how it applies to the classroom, the contrast between the two teacher’s positioning is seen in an updated version of the stance triangle in Figure 5.

![Figure 5: Comparison of Janie and Pheoby’s positioning in the classroom.](image)

In this study, we saw how Janie more so positioned herself as a teacher who was still in control of the classroom, was the original source of creativity, and as someone who needed to ultimately be in control of how the students received the curriculum. This first-order positioning could have resulted from the second-order positioning caused by pressure from the district, (such as pressure to cover specific skills or standards, or the need to use certain rubrics), seen in Figure 5, which she interpreted as the need to be a teacher in control. This resulted in a stance triangle that was not a ‘neutral’ or equal triangle. In this instance, the second-order positioning in the
form of pressure from the district (the arrows and line) was pushing Janie to a stance further away from her students and their voices. Pheoby, however, had a different stance triangle. Pheoby’s first-order positioning included defining herself as a teacher who was willing to give up control and power in the room to her students, and as a teacher who was an advocate for social justice. As a result of this willingness to give up control, we see Pheoby’s stance triangle as more equilateral in nature, and as someone who was closer to her students, their voice in the classroom, and Cook-Sather’s definition of student voice, which includes the idea of the teacher being willing to not only listen to, but act upon students’ voices and give students opportunities to shape their own educational experiences (2006; 2010).

There were also instances of students being unsure of what to do when given opportunity to share their voice, which also relates to positioning theory. Janie and Pheoby both brought up examples in their interviews and partnership observations of students who were hesitant when offered opportunities in the classroom to share their voice, or who were concerned that doing so would impact their grade in the course. This brings up another idea: that of how teachers’ intention to include student voice can be stymied by second-order positioning. Due to beliefs about school, about what being a “good” student entails, or pressure put upon them to get good grades by society, their parents, or their peers, some students did not want to take up the position being offered to them by teachers who wanted to include their voice. How should teachers respond, then, in this type of classroom situation?

Finally, the two teachers themselves were also conflicted by the second-order positioning of the curriculum in the form of the standards they needed to cover, the rubrics they had to use, and overall pressure they felt from their administrators and district to be a “proficient” or “distinguished” (Danielson, 2014) teacher. Therefore, in a sense the curriculum and evaluation
system was exerting positioning on these teachers, and by extension, on their students. While Janie and Pheoby worked together to do their best to negate this pressure, it was never fully gone or resolved.

This leads to an interesting concept: how is teacher voice also impacted by positioning theory? This study revealed that while classroom teachers were and certainly are an integral piece to student voice in the classroom, a powerful player in all of this was not the teacher, but the curriculum and all that it represented. While teachers like Janie and Pheoby had some say in ‘The Curriculum’ and how they delivered it to students, The Curriculum was also an example of district and state-level power structures at work. When Janie and Pheoby expressed frustration at having to cover certain skills, use rubrics, or abide by other mandates, they were also expressing frustration at the second-order positioning put upon them by these structures, and the impact it had on their voice as teachers.

Positioning theory is an interactive process that occurs through micro-level interactions. However, positioning theory and how it relates to student voice at the secondary classroom level specifically has rarely, if ever, been studied. While past research has focused on the larger system-wide level of the student-voice movement and on students themselves (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2009; Friend & Caruthers, 2015; Kane & Maw, 2005; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Quaglia & Corso, 2014; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006), studies have not been conducted about student voice influencing high school classroom teachers’ practice directly. Considering positioning theory, teachers are a group integral to student voice in classroom instruction. Furthermore, no research has been done at the suburban high school classroom level about how direct student voice impacts the classroom teacher. Therefore, there is a need for further research examining student voice as seen through the lens of positioning theory in the high school classroom.
Finding # 3: Use of Student Voice in the Classroom Includes Elements from All Four Danielson Domains

The third finding from the study related to the Danielson framework and how student voice incorporation includes elements from all four of the domains. As Janie and Pheoby worked together to make meaning of student voice, all four of the Danielson Domains were present. They implemented activities, lessons, and assessments designed to promote authentic student voice, mainly via increased student choice and engagement, which aligned with Danielson Domain 3. They worked to create a positive and welcoming classroom environment, both in the physical design of the room as well as a place where risk-taking and voice was celebrated and encouraged, which aligned with Danielson Domain 2. They thought deeply about their students’ mindsets and needs and then co-designed and purposefully planned out multiple elements that showcased and increased student voice, which aligned with Danielson Domain 1. Finally, they collaborated and reflected with one another in an ongoing way, discussing what elements were working, which elements might not be the best ideas, and bringing multiple examples of student input to the forefront of their planning, which aligned with Danielson Domain Four. Ultimately, all four domains were represented as Janie and Pheoby made meaning of student voice in their classrooms.

There are multiple examples in the Danielson framework where student voice comes up, either directly or indirectly. For instance, student voice falls under the umbrella of students taking ownership of their learning, which places a teacher in the distinguished column in the framework (Danielson, 2011). Building a climate of respect and rapport where the students lead the way, including taking responsibility for not only themselves but also others falls into the distinguished column in Domain 2 (Danielson, 2011). There are multiple times in Domain 3 in
which student voice implementation is also crucial, with everything from students initiating their own choice as a way to express their voice to true and genuine engagement with their learning (Danielson, 2011).

However, there are also examples of student voice that appear in the distinguished columns in both Domains One and Four. Domain 1, which focuses on planning and preparation, places a teacher as distinguished if they help students set their own instructional goals and outcomes (Danielson, 2011), which Janie did when she had students choose their own work time goals based on their needs. Pheoby did this via the brainstorming sessions she facilitated in which the students were the ones who came up with various genres and ideas for their narrative assignments. Distinguished teachers also understand their students developmentally, understand relationships between topics and purposefully design pathways for their students to acquire knowledge and skills, and select resources accordingly (Danielson, 2011); in this instance, many of the resources Janie and Pheoby selected were other students and their experiences or voices.

For Domain Four, distinguished teachers consistently reflect on what worked for their students and what did not and adjust accordingly (Danielson, 2011). Janie and Pheoby’s planning sessions together did just this, and they continually evaluated their lessons and assessments for how much authentic student voice was promoted and utilized. Distinguished teachers also can draw on a wide repertoire of instructional strategies and can offer thoughtful alternatives (Danielson, 2011). Janie showed an example of this specifically when she brought up the question of “Is this student voice… for real?” to Pheoby when they were thinking through the upcoming narrative assignment. She also brought in the voice of her 11th grade teacher’s assistant who had ideas on how to make the assignment better based on her experience taking the English 10 honors class last year. Finally, Janie and Pheoby’s partnership, where they
continually exhibited an environment of trust and respect for one another, listening to and acting upon one another’s ideas for the benefit of their students, was a prime example of distinguished professionalism and collaboration (Danielson, 2011).

These are exciting findings, as there are no other studies that have sought to examine how increased student voice implementation by classroom teachers can also relate to the Danielson framework. As Cook-Sather (2006, 2010) points out, educators need to move away from the “sage on the stage” modality of teaching in which the teacher is the keeper of all knowledge (2010). By looking at increased student voice in the classroom as a pathway to greater success in the Danielson framework, teachers can incorporate this modality of teaching into their practice.

**Finding # 4: Opportunities for Student Voice Can Be a Struggle Due to Mandated District Assessments**

A fourth finding was how even teachers who are in favor of increased student voice in the classroom still struggle with its implementation. This was largely due to mandated district assessments with a set of specific skills to cover and rubrics to use. Often Janie and Pheoby planned out a lesson or assignment designed to promote student voice but then asked each other about the authenticity of that lesson or assignment. Variations on questions about the authentic expression of student voice were heard multiple times during their partnership observations as well as within their individual interviews. They were speaking of the struggle to facilitate authentic voice, while the pressure they still felt as the teacher in the room to make sure mandated assessments and skills were covered. Looking again through the lens of positioning theory, this finding shows how Janie and Pheoby struggled at times with their first-order position of lesser power in their roles as classroom teachers, as they felt the second-order positioning of
pressure to be a compliant teacher, as they knew they had to carry out the overall skills and standards of the curriculum that the district mandated.

This is not a new struggle for teachers. Even in the 1930s, John Dewey and the Progressive Education Association worried that teachers were too limited in their instructional choices by college admission requirements that “emphasized particular academic courses and unit requirements” (Kahne, 1995, p. 5). This pressure turned to fear in the 1950s. According to Joseph (2011), fear of falling behind in math and science and losing the space race led to the idea that school was a place for the teacher to transmit crucial information to the students rather than a place where student voice should be present. The educational report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 made Americans even more fearful that their public school students were falling behind much of the world, which left little room for educational philosophy that included democratic ideals (Joseph, 2011). Yet another potential blow to student voice came in the form of the standards-based *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Again, the purpose of learning and school was to prepare students for standardized test scores. Sadly, Dewey’s ideal of a democratic and dialogic classroom, one in which students were respected members of the discourse community and had equal positioning in their education, was once again discouraged (Joseph, 2011). Janie and Pheoby’s struggles as classroom teachers who feel tied to mandated assessments and skills have been well represented through American educational history.

Finally, the adoption of the *Common Core State Standards* (CCSS) by many states led to a standards-based movement in 2010 (Porter et al., 2011). This was the reality for Janie and Pheoby in their English 10 honors classroom. However, their district largely gave their secondary English teachers control in terms of the content they wanted to use to cover those standards and skills. This was a massive benefit as Janie and Pheoby worked together to achieve
a balance between authentic student voice and mandated district assessments. While they could not (and stated they would not want to) allow students to have complete say in all aspects of the curriculum, having flexibility in the content used in the classroom was crucial in Janie’s and Pheoby’s eyes, which speaks to the importance of the teacher’s autonomy. It also allowed them to attempt to align what they were doing in school to their students’ values. Kane and Maw (2005) discuss how many schools are problematic in that often the values of the school do not match those of the students. By having flexibility in the content to be used, Janie and Pheoby could better tailor the curriculum and assignments to match what students wanted. This was seen when Pheoby led her class in a brainstorming session to generate ideas as to what types of writing could be included in the narrative assignment. Similarly, Janie incorporated multiple types of examples of narratives for the students to consider as they were drafting their own pieces, including some writing from former students. So while it can be a struggle and 100% student-led voice and choice in a curriculum may be impossible, teachers can achieve a balance between what they need to teach and what the students want to learn.

Finding # 5: Teachers Benefit from Utilizing Various Instructional and Classroom Management Strategies to Purposefully Increase Student Voice in the Classroom

The final finding of the study was how Janie and Pheoby benefitted from using a variety of instructional and classroom management strategies in their efforts to purposefully increase student voice in their English 10 honors classrooms. A subset of this finding was how much Janie and Pheoby benefitted from collaborating with one another as they considered and tried various strategies. Janie and Pheoby’s attempts at, and successes with, purposefully increasing student voice in their classrooms were also backed up by research.
Many instances of student voice implementation in the classroom show democracy in action as they allow students to express ideas and become change agents in their own lives and in their own schools (Bravmann, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2002a, 2010; Cremin, 1964; Quaglia & Corso, 2014). Janie and Pheoby both showcased strategies they utilized to help their students express themselves. Janie had her students choose various aspects of slam poetry to work on before they performed for their peers; Pheoby built on this idea and helped organize a student-led poetry slam open to every English 10 student in the school. Students chose powerful and deeply meaningful topics for their poems, and the performance drew around 100 audience members. In both Janie and Pheoby’s English 10 honors classes, students gave each other feedback at multiple points in the writing process, again sending the message that students’ own voices and opinions were meaningful and important. This ties in with the NCTE Resolution on Contemporary Discourse (2017) which notes how English teachers have both an educational and moral obligation to invite students into various discourse practices and communities. At times, the students did not agree with the feedback from either their peers and/or their teacher and had to either accept or reject that feedback. At times the students revised their poetry or engaged in conversations with their peers about the overall messages and impact of their poems; this aligns with Nystrand’s (1997) idea that classrooms need to foster a more dialogic form of classroom discourse that includes “tension, even conflict, between the conversants, between self and other, as one voice ‘refracts’ another” (p. 8). Overall, the students had to have a classroom space in which these types of conversations were encouraged and modeled. By utilizing a repertoire of instructional and classroom management strategies designed to promote authentic student voice, Janie and Pheoby achieved this dialogic space.
During both the slam poetry and the narrative writing units, Janie and Pheoby asked their students about what would be meaningful to them and then acted on those suggestions. This aligns with the “co-creative” model of classroom curriculum that Stern (1995, p. 24) advocates. In this student-centered curricular approach, teachers seek out students’ perspectives and then derive the curriculum from students’ realities, interests, and what is meaningful to them (Stern, 1995). In doing this, Janie and Pheoby were able to teach with their students instead of just to them.

Examples of using various instructional and classroom management strategies to promote student voice are found in the research. DeFur and Korinek’s (2010) study utilized focus groups to examine rural and suburban students’ perspectives about school. A team of teachers then met to examine the transcripts and search for themes. However, DeFur and Korinek’s study did not state whether the teachers actually utilized any of the students’ suggestions. Kane and Maw (2005) conducted a case study at a secondary school in New Zealand in which they asked about the school’s culture and values. Six teachers then volunteered to take up the students’ suggestions and work to incorporate more of their ideas into practice. However, these students were from anonymous focus groups and not necessarily in the classes of the teachers who agreed to try out new strategies. Therefore, the current study adds to the research in that it is explored a pair of American secondary English teachers who were purposefully trying out strategies with their own students.

Something interesting to note from the study was that Janie and Pheoby both spoke at length about how they could not create a classroom conducive to student voice alone. In the individual interviews as well as the partnership observations, both teachers stated how much they benefited from a trusting partnership in which they could share ideas, successes, and failures and
then try out these ideas together. Both teachers stated how, without a doubt, they would not have been as successful at their attempts to purposefully incorporate student voice had they been working in isolation. This is an exciting finding of this study. While there are rare accounts of individual teachers attempting to include more student voice into their practice (Mitsoni, 2006), there are no studies currently in the research that discuss how two teachers have successfully collaborated on this topic.

Limitations of the Study

As with any study, there were several limitations present. Perhaps the largest limitation was that this study did not include teachers who did not already affirm the importance of the incorporation of student voice into teacher practice. While neither teacher had previously promoted student voice in a formal and purposeful manner, both teachers had informally done so in various smaller ways. Both teachers were excited to try out new strategies and collaborate. The study would have been different if teachers who were neutral or even opposed to the topic were included. Another limitation was that the teachers were only studied for one academic quarter, or 10 weeks of instruction. This was due to the curriculum lending itself well to student voice. The study could have been very different if the teachers had been studied for an entire semester or even an entire academic year as they tried out various strategies.

Another area of limitation was the curricular area and how it functioned in this particular school district and building. This study was conducted only with English teachers in a district that allowed the teachers to have a say in the design of the curriculum and at a school at which the principal was already supportive of student voice. At Midwest High School, English was a curricular area that could work well with student voice incorporation, as it tended to be very
skills-based. Both teachers noted that focusing on the CCSS ELA skills allowed them to create space for student voice in areas of the curriculum, such as the content. What would this type of study have looked like in a content area or district that was more proscribed or in a content-heavy class such as an Advanced Placement class? This study was limited in that it was done with a curriculum that already had clear outcomes and goals and in which the teachers had freedom to adjust assignments and assessments. It was also limited in that the administration supported the teachers in taking on this topic, and the principal herself worked to promote a school-wide environment that was friendly toward student voice when possible.

A further limitation was that this study was only conducted in an honors level class, which Holdsworth (2000) warns against. While the honors students certainly presented their own challenges, both teachers wondered what student voice implementation would look like in their standard level classes. Would it still work? For that matter, what about student voice in a “remedial” class, or a class in which multiple levels, ages, or skill levels of students were present? These were all limitations of this study.

Another limitation of the study was in the methodology. As with any qualitative study, limits were put on the data gathering due to the limitation of both my and the teachers’ time. The two teachers were only interviewed four times each, and their classrooms were only observed three times each. Teachers could have been doing other practices, but the researcher only saw what presented itself in each of the classroom observations. As the classroom observation times were suggested by the teachers so that I could see an example of student voice work in action, they were not random in nature.

The two teachers themselves were a limitation. While they differed in personality, Janie and Pheoby were both white females with about the same number of years of experience. They
were both extremely knowledgeable in their content area and both had taught the English 10 honors course multiple times. What would student voice implementation look like for a novice teacher, or a teacher that who had never taught the course before? Furthermore, Janie and Pheoby were teachers who collaborated well and already trusted one another.

Finally, the topic of student voice implementation was itself a limitation. Like many terms in education, there is no one agreed upon definition of student voice (Cook-Sather, 2006). For the sake of the study, I asked the two teachers if they could agree to both use a common definition that came from Cook-Sather (2006) as they moved forward. They agreed, but did that commonality limit potential creativity from the teachers?

Recommendations for Classroom Practice

The results of this study point to four educational groups in terms of recommendations for classroom practice: recommendations for current classroom teachers, for students, for districts and administrators, and for teacher preparation programs. Each of these four groups contributes to student voice implementation in the classroom in a unique way.

Recommendations for Classroom Teachers

This was the most prominent area for recommendations for classroom practice. Classroom teachers are essentially the gatekeepers of student voice: they can choose to authorize their students’ perspectives and voices. They can purposefully take on a “co-creative” (Stern, 1995) model of teaching and learning, or they can stay in a traditional mindset; and Rudduck and Fielding (2006) remind us how crucial the role of this gatekeeper is in the student voice movement. One clear finding that emerged from the study was how important collaboration and
support are for a classroom teacher looking to implement student voice strategies into their practice. Danielson (2011) states that collaboration with colleagues is key to becoming a distinguished educator; this is also true for a teacher who wants to implement student voice into their practice. By having even one other colleague to collaborate with, the classroom teachers in this study felt supported and were able to take ideas and put them into practice in the classroom, reflect on their success, and readjust and continue to try additional strategies. Having another colleague to collaborate with also increased the amount of student voice that was heard. There were several times in the study where Janie adjusted her classroom practice based on what Pheoby’s students said and experienced and vice versa.

Having a colleague to collaborate and reflect with was also key while addressing issues of positioning and concepts from discourse theory in classroom practice. For instance, many times the two teachers in the study had honest conversations in which they reflected on “is this student voice… for real?” as they questioned their own and one another’s practices or ideas. This type of reflection is difficult to do by oneself. As Janie and Pheoby continually questioned if the student voice they were promoting was “real” or “fake”, positioning theory again comes into play. Perhaps the answer to this question lies in how teachers are positioning themselves, their students, and the curriculum. On another level, the answer also lies with how the students second-order position themselves to their English class, their teacher, the curriculum, and school in general. In this study, some configurations of these various positionings led to real or authentic forms of student voice, whereas others led to fake or inauthentic uses of student voice. This would be a fascinating concept to investigate further.

Another recommendation for classroom practice is that classroom teachers need to have knowledge of and be able to utilize multiple strategies to promote student voice. These strategies
include designing both assessments and daily classroom activities that incorporate student voice. However, just as important in the toolbox for teachers are strategies that promote a safe classroom environment in which both the teacher and the student feel comfortable taking risks in their thinking and learning. By having a variety of strategies at their fingertips, teachers will have a better chance at setting up a co-creative model (Stern, 1995) with student voice at the forefront of both the curriculum and the daily classroom practice.

Unfortunately, modern day public secondary schools that operate under democratic ideals that promote student voice by using full participation of all involved are difficult to find (Mikel, 2011). Therefore, another recommendation for teachers from this study is that they as individuals in the classroom need to be aware of their own positioning and values system when it comes to student voice. Students are trained from a young age that participating in school means that the teacher is the source of the power and voice in the room. To purposefully make space for student voices, teachers need to educate themselves and be highly aware of their own positioning in the classroom. This also includes making sure at the secondary level that grades are not seen by students as an offshoot of the teacher’s power but instead something that they see themselves having a say in.

Another recommendation for teachers is to make sure the type of student voice they are promoting is authentic and not just “tokenistic” (Tisdall, 2006, p. 104). This means that teachers need to allow students to have authentic say and input into aspects that matter to them, and not just surface-level decision making in the classroom such as when to do the worksheet: at the start of the class period or the end of the end of the class period? These opportunities for authentic input might be how content should be covered, how assignments will be paced and even
assessed, or how students might have choice in how they work and with whom. Student voice cannot just be ideas predetermined ahead of time by the teachers. (Holdsworth, 2000).

Finally, a recommendation for teachers is to have patience. Secondary students might not be used to being asked for this voice; as such, a classroom that promotes and utilizes student voice takes time. While teachers may be the gatekeepers of student voice, the students themselves are obviously crucial participants. Unfortunately, by the time they get to the secondary level, many students have firm beliefs about school that often do not include them sharing their voices (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). They may see school as a place that does not mirror their interests nor include them in the educational process (Cook-Sather, 2006; 2010). They may feel pressure to get a certain grade in a course, which can impede their voice, or they have been trained to see the teacher as the keeper of the knowledge and power in the classroom. Student voice implementation, especially at the secondary level, is therefore a process that takes time and patience to implement. However, when given the chance and a safe classroom environment, students are often excited to speak for themselves (Fielding, 2001).

Recommendations for Districts and Administrators

Another key group involved with increasing student voice in classroom practice are administrators, both at a district and school level. When doing classroom observations and evaluations of teachers, administrators need to understand that a classroom environment that promotes student voice will often look very different than a traditional classroom model in which the teacher is the main person in charge (Stern, 1995). Just as teachers need to make taking risks safe for their students, administrators need to help teachers feel safe taking risks with a student-voice-rich classroom environment and curriculum.
Administrators also need to be aware of their own positioning in the overall power structure of the school and district, and work to challenge the very real pressure and second-order positioning teachers feel to cover specific skills and standards, and to carry out certain mandates. When it comes to the implementation of student voice, administrators can help teachers to not only reconsider their first-order positioning of beliefs when it comes to student voice, but to make it clear to teachers that they will not be reprimanded if they reorganize the curriculum to more authentically promote student voice.

Administrators can also help teachers to reflect deeply on this topic by bringing it up in pre- and post-observation conferences. Building-level administrators should also encourage teachers to work collaboratively on this topic and set up time in the school day in which they can do so. Finally, building-level administrators also need to teach and address values and beliefs of teachers regarding student voice in their professional learning communities, and encourage and model instructional strategies teacher could use in their classrooms. This will help to ensure that student voice implementation is not simply the luck of the draw with regard to which teacher a student gets but instead is a systemic building-wide initiative.

Administrators in the building can model practices that support student voice themselves by partnering with students on a variety of topics important to the school. Mitra (2006) argues that partnering with students to discuss and identify problems and solutions within schools “reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate” (p. 315). However, she notes that to gain legitimacy, student voice must be valued among powerful stakeholders in the school. Just like teachers in the classroom, administrators can use their voices and power to make space for
Finally, administrators at the district level should include ways to teach and address values and beliefs of teachers at the beginning of change processes such as curriculum development teams or the implementation of new courses. This might include specific and direct instruction for teachers and facilitators at the start of a change process regarding different philosophies of education, and how student voice and student voice-friendly instructional strategies can fit with those different philosophies. It might also include facilitated discussions of what student voice is and how to best incorporate it into various courses. District administrators also need to seek out and act upon student voice whenever possible, such as when implementing new courses or district-wide policy changes. For example, this could entail including student representatives from various ages and backgrounds on committees when selecting a new school calendar or a new course to be offered.

Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs

Finally, while this study focused on current classroom teachers, there are also recommendations for the education of preservice teachers in teacher preparation programs. Student voice implementation is complex and, like many teaching strategies, takes years to refine. However, the concept of it can certainly be introduced early on in a teacher’s educational journey. In her Teaching and Learning Together program at Bryn Mawr College, Cook-Sather (2002a; 2002b; 2009) facilitates conversations in which pre-service teachers consult with groups of high school students about pedagogy, instructional approaches, and empathy and
understanding while the pre-service teachers are doing their student teaching. Teacher preparation programs around the country would be well-served by mirroring this practice.

Furthermore, a curriculum that includes teaching and addresses the values and beliefs systems of teachers at the beginning of their teaching career is key. As students themselves, many preservice teachers have been educated in a system in which they were taught that the teacher or professor at the front of the room is the one in the position of power. Therefore, education for preservice teachers about their own positioning in the classroom is crucial, as that can be the first step toward creating the next generation of classroom teachers who will implement student voice in the classroom. Preservice teachers have experienced positioning their entire lives as students; professors need to facilitate experiences where preservice teachers reflect on that positioning, the impact it had on their learning, and then set goals for their own classrooms. During student teaching, professors could design an assignment in which the student teachers film themselves in the classroom and then reflect on the first and second-order positioning both they and their students played with regard to power in the classroom.

There is also a need to educate preservice teachers about discourse theory as they learn about how knowledge is created within societal power structures (Hall, 2001). This theory could be taught as part of a course on various theories (such as constructivism) and how it relates to education. By addressing discourse theory, it again brings the conversation and learning back to power structures and reflecting deeply on how they as future educators can address issues of social justice by increasing student voice in the classroom. This education in turn can help to create a foundation for preservice teachers in which they can learn how to facilitate a co-creative curricular model (Stern, 1995) where students have a voice.
Suggestions for Future Research

While the findings and recommendations from this study are of benefit to the field, there are a number of areas that need further research regarding student voice implementation into teachers’ practice. The limitations of this study necessitate similar research with varied samples from the teaching population. While different in personality and implementation of strategies, the two teachers in this study were very similar in a number of other demographics. They also both taught at the same high school. Other geographic areas could be explored to compare student voice implementation in classroom practice with the results of this study.

Furthermore, given the limited scope of this qualitative study, research is needed at the classroom level in other secondary subjects and other levels, including primary, intermediate, and middle grades. Past research points to students who were eager, even at the primary level, to share their voices (Peacock, 2001; Raymond, 2001), but this was a study in which outside researchers interviewed students. This was not an instance of the classroom teacher taking on this topic and reflecting along the way. Therefore, the topic of student voice and how it impacts the classroom teacher needs to be further studied from an action research perspective. Also, given that the findings indicated this can be a nuanced and complex topic, further research involving classroom teachers collaborating together on this topic is crucial.

This study was also limited by the element of time. It was only conducted during one academic quarter of a school year. Research or studies that included an entire semester or an entire school year would be interesting. For instance, what if student voice was used as the driver to begin a semester or year-long course? Furthermore, a multi-year longitudinal study would be of benefit to the field. It would be fascinating to see how individual students performed
academically or what their feelings were towards school if they were enrolled in the classrooms of teachers who were committed to student voice, Kindergarten through 12th grade.

As the findings from this study indicate that student voice implementation is much more difficult and complex than simply asking the students for their ideas, further research needs to be conducted with regard to inviting the students themselves to participate and even facilitate classroom-level research, partnering with their teachers to do so. While past research has focused on the larger system-wide level of the student-voice movement and on students themselves (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2009; Friend & Caruthers, 2015; Kane & Maw, 2005; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Quaglia & Corso, 2014; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006), studies have not been conducted about student voice influencing high school classroom teachers’ practice directly or with students partnering with their teachers in efforts to increase student voice in the classroom.

This study was also limited in that it was conducted in a school in which the principal was in support of student voice implementation and gave her teachers relative freedom to try out strategies related to student voice. Further research is needed in this field regarding educating administrators and other stakeholders such as school board members and even state and national policy makers about the importance of student voice. Additional study in how to best provide training and support to administrators who may not be used to evaluating a non-teacher-centered classroom would be beneficial as well. Finally, a potential extension of this work would be an exploration of teacher voice as it relates to administrator style or administrator decision making. It would be interesting to explore if there was any relationship between teachers feeling empowered to facilitate student voice if they had administrators that supported and empowered them as teachers to have an increased voice or say in decision-making. Finally, further research regarding the connections that student voice implementation can have to other areas of education
would be of benefit to the field. As traditional schooling changes and morphs with the times, student voice cannot be overlooked. Online learning or blended classrooms could directly benefit from further study of how student voice can positively influence these spaces. Also, the concept of personalized learning goes hand in hand with student voice and choice. Study into how student voice can benefit non-traditional educational spaces would be extremely beneficial.

Conclusion

As Michael Fullan (1991) asks, “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?” (p. 170). *How Two High School Teachers Conceive of Student Voice, Value It, and Foster It* explored how two teachers of English 10 honors courses did just that. It examined how they defined student voice and worked together to purposefully implement strategies designed to foster and increase student voice within their classrooms. These findings and recommendations contribute to the larger educational discussion regarding student voice. The importance of continued discussion and implementation of strategies promoting student voice within the high school classroom is key. As teachers continue to prepare their students for life after high school as well as work to design engaging units of study as well as democratic and dialogic classroom environments, the voices of the students themselves must play an integral part.

Given current power structures in traditional schooling systems, teachers must be acutely aware of their own positions of power within the classroom. Considering how typical assessment structures such as grades, the use of rubrics, and even who gets to speak and who must remain silent in the classroom contribute to power structures in school, teachers must be the ones to lead the way when it comes to increased use of student voice within the classroom.
When it comes to concepts like pacing, choice of content, and structure of lessons and assessments, teachers must be aware of not only their positioning but also how to use their own voices and power to make space for student voices. Given that this shift of power in the classroom from teacher to student is quite a leap in many school systems, teachers would also be wise to consider utilizing the support of a peer or group as they design their classroom to become a space where increased student voice is realized, acted on, and celebrated.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

LETTER OF CONSENT
I agree to participate in the research study titled, *Incorporation of Student Voice into Teacher Practice*, being conducted by Katherine McCleary, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to examine how two high school English teachers think about and work together to incorporate student voice into their instructional practice.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following: participate in three to four individual interviews with the researcher (approximately 20-25 minutes each time for a total of 1-2 hours), participate in three to four videotaped observations as I work with a partner to think about, plan for, and reflect upon student voice implementation in my instruction (approximately 15 minutes each time for a total of roughly 1 hour), and allow the researcher to come and observe my classroom at least three times when I am implementing an instructional strategy related to student voice (approximately 40 minutes each observation for a total of at least 2 hours).

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Katherine McCleary at 630-220-4174 or Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins at 815-753-8458. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at 815) 753-8588.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include the chance for me as a teacher to deepen my understanding of and implementation of student voice at the classroom practice level. I will also gain the chance to learn from a fellow colleague as I reflect with him / her about the topic of student voice. Finally, I will get the chance to contribute to the growing body of research regarding increased implementation of student voice at the classroom level.

I have been informed that potential risks and / or discomforts I could experience during this study include experiencing feelings of frustration, anger, or confusion based on the results of the findings or data.
I understand that all information gathered during this study will be kept confidential. This will be done through the use of pseudonyms for all individuals involved in the study, as well as the school where the study will take place. All data related to the study will be kept in either a password-protected computer file or a locked file cabinet.

I also understand that for transcription purposes and for increased accuracy in the data gathering process, the researcher will use a video camera to record both the audio and the video of the individual teacher interviews and the observations of the partnership. There will be NO video recording in the participants’ classrooms. The video files will also be kept on an external hard drive not affiliated with the school district and kept in a locked file cabinet. The only person who will have access to the external hard drive will be the researcher. I understand that there will be identifiable features such as the teachers’ faces on the video. Three years after the dissertation publication date, the video files will be destroyed.

___ I consent to the interviews and partnership observations being audio recorded for data collection purposes.
___ I do not consent to the interviews and partnership observations being audio recorded for data collection purposes.

___ I consent to the interviews and partnership observations being video recorded for data collection purposes.
___ I do not consent to the interviews and partnership observations being video recorded for data collection purposes.

I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

___________________________________________                                 ___________
Participant Signature:                                                        Date:
APPENDIX B

CROSSWALK OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Research Question #1: How do high school English teachers invite student voice into the classroom? | * Which class are you focusing on for this work regarding student voice? Describe the students and their learner characteristics. What have you learned about them having worked with them for this past school year? For instance, how is this class similar or different with regards to sharing their student voice than other tenth grade English ‘honors’ classes you have taught?  

* Think about times you have gathered and / or used student voice -- what were some of those instances? Let’s brainstorm for a minute here. | *Now that you have been investigating this topic more deeply, do you ever see or hear teachers talking about student voice but it’s not really inviting student voice in?  

* In say, this past week or so, can you share about an instance in which you tried to ask students about their interest/preference and use that in some way? Was this planned ahead of time or was it more spur of the moment? How do you think it went? | * Thinking back to this moment as best you can, what were your reasons for including (or not including) student voice in this instance? Was this something you planned ahead of time or decided in the moment? How do you think it went? |
**Research Question # 2:** How do high school English teachers make meaning of student voice?

* As you think about your own philosophy of teaching, what would you say are three of your main beliefs?

* Given that some teachers speak of attending to “student voice,” what does the term *student voice* mean to you in the context of your teaching? How have you heard about or seen others attending to student voice in their instruction?

* For the purposes of our work together, I will rely on researcher Alison Cook-Sather’s (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2010) concept of *student voice*, which honors the idea that young people have insightful and unique ways of thinking about their education and schooling and adults involved at all levels of the students’ education should listen to students’ voices and

* How successful do you think this was? Why do you think it was successful or not?

* Thinking about inviting student voice into a classroom… what role does the teacher play in this? Can you think of three specific actions you’ve taken or might take as a teacher with regards to this topic? What role does the student play? Again, what are three specific characteristics that students will need, or actions they will need to take with regards to this topic?

* How has collaborating with _____ shaped your thinking, if at

* As you think through the various strategies you have tried, what (if any) do you think you will continue to do? Why? What strategies do you think you will stop doing? Why?

* As you reflect on your work with attending to student voice this past quarter, what were some of your overall biggest takeaways?

* How (if at all) do you see your students differently now than you did before working on this project?

* How (if at all) do you imagine your students see you differently now than they did before working on this project?

* How (if at all) do you want your students to see you differently now than you wanted them to see you before this project?

* For all of these questions, would
act upon them when possible. In honoring students’ interests and preferences, a teacher should give young people opportunities to shape their experiences within the educational setting. To what extent does this definition match up with your own? Are there any similarities or differences?

* As you think through your daily lesson plan / design, how much does your awareness of student voice impact your thinking? On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being “not at all” and 10 being “very much so,” where would you rate yourself in regards to attention to student voice? How do you think this number would compare with most other teachers at Midwest HS? Why did you choose that answer? If it was not a 10, what would need to change to get it closer to a 10, or all, regarding student voice? Can you share a story with me about this? How has collaborating with ___ affected implementation of student voice strategies in your classroom? Again, can you think of an example?

you link these changes (if any) to your attempt to focus more on student voice, or to other factors?
would you even want it closer to a 10?

* Tell me about a time when you used an instructional strategy to implement student voice that you felt was effective. How did you know it was effective? Walk me through the steps. Tell me about a time where you felt a strategy was ineffective. Why?

| Research Question #3: How do high school English teachers instructionally respond to student voice? | * Thinking about the specific class in which you are focusing on for this work regarding student voice, could you share some instances in which you attempted to listen to students’ interests and preferences and/or incorporate these into the classroom in some way at some point this school year? | * In say, this last week or so, were there instances in which you considered getting students opinions/preferences, but then decided against it? What was your reason for this decision? | * We will start our time together today by focusing in on this example from when I was in your classroom room during the last observation. [Share story / example with teacher] Do you remember this example, and is this [the written notes from the example] how your remember it? Are there any details that are important from your perspective that have been left out? Do you |
consider this an example of incorporating student voice (i.e. gauging and implementing student interests/preferences)?

* Why do you consider (or not consider) this to be an example of using student voice?

* If you were able to re-teach this moment, is there anything you might do differently (this could be particularly related to student voice or not)? What changes would you make (if any) and why?
Interview # 1: Baseline; pre any ‘official’ work

1. As you think about your own philosophy of teaching, what would you say are three of your main beliefs?

2. Given that some teachers speak of attending to “student voice,” what does the term *student voice* mean to you in the context of your teaching? How have you heard about or seen others attending to student voice in their instruction?

3. For the purposes of our work together, I will rely on researcher Alison Cook-Sather’s (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2010) concept of *student voice*, which honors the idea that young people have insightful and unique ways of thinking about their education and schooling and adults involved at all levels of the students’ education should listen to students’ voices and act upon them when possible. In honoring students’ interests and preferences, a teacher should give young people opportunities to shape their experiences within the educational setting. To what extent does this definition match up with your own? Are there any similarities or differences?

4. Which class are you focusing on for this work regarding student voice? Describe the students and their learner characteristics. What have you learned about them having worked with them for this past school year? For instance, how is this class similar or different with regards to sharing their student voice than other English 10 honors classes you have taught?

5. Thinking about the specific class in which you are focusing on for this work regarding student voice, could you share some instances in which you attempted to listen to students’ interests and preferences and/or incorporate these into the classroom in some way at some point this school year?

6. Tell me about a time when you used an instructional strategy to implement student voice that you felt was effective. How did you know it was effective? Walk me through the steps. Tell me about a time where you felt a strategy was ineffective. Why?

7. As you think through your daily lesson plan / design, how much does your awareness of student voice impact your thinking? On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being “not at all” and 10 being “very much so,” where would you rate yourself in regard to attention to student voice? How do you think this number would compare with most other teachers at Midwest HS? Why did you choose that answer? If it was not a 10, what would need to change to get it closer to a 10, or would you even want it closer to a 10?

2nd interview:
**As a reminder, we are using researcher Alison Cook-Sather’s (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2010) concept of *student voice*, which honors the idea that young people have insightful and unique
ways of thinking about their education and schooling and adults involved at all levels of the students’ education should listen to students’ voices and act upon them when possible. In honoring students’ interests and preferences, a teacher should give young people opportunities to shape their experiences within the educational setting.

1. Now that you have been investigating this topic more deeply, do you ever see or hear teachers talking about student voice but it’s not really inviting student voice in?

2. In say, this past week or so, can you share about an instance in which you tried to ask students about their interest/preference and use that in some way? Was this planned ahead of time or was it more spur of the moment? How did it go?

3. How successful do you think this was? Why do you think it was successful or not?

4. In say, this last week or so, were there instances in which you considered getting students opinions/preferences, but then decided against it? What was your reason for this decision?

5. Thinking about inviting student voice into a classroom… what role does the teacher play in this? Can you think of three specific actions you’ve taken or might take as a teacher with regards to this topic? What role does the student play? Again, what are three specific characteristics that students will need, or actions they will need to take with regards to this topic?

6. How has collaborating with ____ shaped your thinking, if at all, regarding student voice? Can you share a story with me about this? How has collaborating with ____ affected implementation of student voice strategies in your classroom? Again, can you think of an example?

3rd interview:

**As a reminder, we are using researcher Alison Cook-Sather’s (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2010) concept of student voice, which honors the idea that young people have insightful and unique ways of thinking about their education and schooling and adults involved at all levels of the students’ education should listen to students’ voices and act upon them when possible. In honoring students’ interests and preferences, a teacher should give young people opportunities to shape their experiences within the educational setting.

1. We will start our time together today by focusing in on this example from when I was in your classroom room during the last observation. [Share story / example with teacher] Do you remember this example, and is this [the written notes from the example] how your remember it? Are there any details that are important from your perspective that have been left out? Do you consider this an example of incorporating student voice (i.e. gauging and implementing student interests/preferences)?
2. Why do you consider (or not consider) this to be an example of using student voice?

3. Thinking back to this moment as best you can, what were your reasons for including (or not including) student voice in this instance? Was this something you planned ahead of time or decided in the moment? How do you think it went?

4. If you were able to re-teach this moment, is there anything you might do differently (this could be particularly related to student voice or not)? What changes would you make (if any) and why?

5. As you think through the various strategies you have tried, what (if any) do you think you will continue to do? Why? What strategies do you think you will stop doing? Why?

4th interview:
**As a reminder, we are using researcher Alison Cook-Sather’s (2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2010) concept of student voice, which honors the idea that young people have insightful and unique ways of thinking about their education and schooling and adults involved at all levels of the students’ education should listen to students’ voices and act upon them when possible. In honoring students’ interests and preferences, a teacher should give young people opportunities to shape their experiences within the educational setting.

1. As you reflect on your work with attending to student voice this past quarter, what were some of your overall biggest take aways?

2. How (if at all) do you see your students differently now than you did before working on this project?

3. How (if at all) do you imagine your students see you differently now than they did before working on this project?

4. How (if at all) do you want your students to see you differently now than you wanted them to see you before this project?

5. For all of these questions, would you link these changes (if any) to your attempt to focus more on student voice, or to other factors?
APPENDIX D

PARTNERSHIP OBSERVATION PROTOCOL
Partnership’s goal related to student voice for today’s discussion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher A’s thoughts about student voice / the student voice goal:</th>
<th>Teacher B’s thoughts about student voice / the student voice goal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>

How was the thinking in this meeting impacted due to the collaboration of the partnership? (Examples could include one teacher’s thinking being shaped by the other’s, the teachers problem-solving or brainstorming together, new thinking or strategies to try as a result of the conversation, etc.)

|                                                               |                                                               |
|                                                               |                                                               |
Example of a completed Partnership Observation:
Date: 4/17/18

Partnership’s goal related to student voice for today’s discussion: Today’s discussion centered around ways to incorporate more student voice and choice into the upcoming Narrative writing assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher A’s thoughts about student voice / the student voice goal:</th>
<th>Teacher B’s thoughts about student voice / the student voice goal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J: Yeah, this year I might make it into a Hyperdoc?</td>
<td>P: So I think… obviously we have the idea about more choices in slam poetry… but in terms of coming up with tips and strategies…. I think you do it the same way and you show them a bunch of tips…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J: Honors, before they have a rough draft due…</td>
<td>P: For standard kids, or honors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J: I was thinking a simple way to build in voice / choice is… well, I’m noticing they’re always in a different stage of the [writing] process… They don’t fit in a cookie-cutter mold. I was thinking about coming up with a simple ticket in the door that gives them 2-3 options or 2-3 strategies. Then having them circle what they want to work on. That would give them reflection and focus and help me group them.</td>
<td>P: Ok, so how do we build in more voice for the Honors kiddos?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J: Ooh – that could be very cool. I found something the other day…</td>
<td>P: I gave them a challenge today… when they draft a little bit, they have to pick out their favorite line… then they shared that out on Classroom where everyone can see it. Then that can celebrate their voices and choices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
J: Yes, I found a hyperdoc…

J: This assignment is essentially all about different choices they have as writers… that assignment coupled was just annoying coupled with the restrictions from last year.

J: We talked about [as teachers] making it grade-able. I know G__ my TA talked about how restrictive that assignment was…

J: I feel like that is our caveat -- you have options, but… I just worry it’s fake.

J: Yeah.

P: So what is this document you’ve shared? Do you want to talk about the ‘choose your own adventure’ story?

P: I think that would be easier to do a slideshow with the links than the thing we used to do. That became too overwhelming for them. So most of my kids wrote it on paper anyhow.

P: Now, if I remember, let me pull up the assignment sheet… Yeah, I think it was annoying. Part of [the reason was that] it limited their length. I think we did a microfiction-y thing? A hybrid?

P: So, is it really student choice, for real? Or is it fake, just set up how our rubric is set up what the rubric needs?

[Discussion of rubric]

So they we gave them some prompt ideas… if you have other ideas, that’s OK.

P: Most kids don’t choose the “other”. So, should we have them brainstorm some ideas first, and then go from there?

P: The lady who was the keynote speaker at Lit Fest -- Simone Eckles -- it’s teen romance but I guess a lot of guys like them too. But anyhow, she came up with a workshop that gave these 7 things of a perfect movie or book: Hero in danger, goal, timeframe, conflicts that make the goal almost impossible, character needs to change somehow, etc…
| J: That’s a fun name. | So, what I did with this with my standard kids which might work with my honors kids is that I gave them this list and then we talked through some movies (Hunger Games, Star Wars), and how they fit. And there’s this thing called… Writer Igniter. |
| J: I like the idea of having them explore / test out the characteristics for themselves. | P: So what it does is… it allows you to search for a story… but it shuffles the stuff -- it looks like you’re playing the slots… so like “A serial killer… gets surprising news… in a library… with…” So I put them in partners -- what would happen? What would be their time bomb? They brainstormed a bunch of different scenarios. So, some of these shufflers might be a good idea? For some story ideas? And then for the kids that come up with nothing -- this might be something good. A way to test out their voice and ideas. |
| J: Cause they didn’t like the amount of branches… | P: I know that’s what a lot of kids said in their reflections [from last year]… that they didn’t like. That they ultimately felt like they weren’t sure where to go next based on what they felt the rubric needed. |
| J: Could we simplify it so that the choose your own adventure is just one option what they want to write and how they want to write it? J: That would open it up a lot. | P: So they had to have enough options, but… some kids didn’t know where to go after they got their initial ideas out there, you know? |
| J: And we could tell them that if they wanted to something different, they could. I think we thought that by virtue of the ‘choose your own adventure’, it would hook all students, and it did for some, but not all. | P: So not a Choose your own adventure at all… |
J: And I don’t want to be stuck giving them one thing. Any time we define it for them, I feel like it limits their choices and just results in crappier stories.

J: Could we just give them the first choice? Like, have them brainstorm options for what they want to write? Like, I have kids that might be interested in writing a screenplay?

J: I don’t know…

J: Is that too much choice?

J: Ack! There’s the bell – let’s keep thinking about this and talk more next week.

P: So you could write it like before, but if you don’t want to, we have prompts… And it has to be a narrative, so it has to be fiction.

P: So the rubric says that… And we can have the students reflect on how they engaged the reader & the whole metacognitive strand.

P: Would we say no more poetry?

P: Sometimes I wonder… do we lose kids because they just feel overwhelmed by choice?

P: Okay! Cool!

How was the thinking in this meeting impacted due to the collaboration of the partnership? (Examples could include one teacher’s thinking being shaped by the other’s, the teachers problem-solving or brainstorming together, new thinking or strategies to try as a result of the conversation, etc.)

In this partnership conversation, the thinking was shaped in multiple ways due to the teachers’ collaboration. They started by reflecting on ideas that promoted student voice in the previous unit, the one about slam poetry. They also discussed what students had success with last year with regards to the Narrative unit. Pheoby brought up the idea of celebrating student voice in
a small and informal way when she shared how she had students draft for a bit and then share out a favorite line or idea for their classmates to see. Janie brought in the voice of her TA (teacher’s assistant), G__, who took the English 10 honors class last year. Pheoby also brought in an outside speaker’s idea, which led to a new brainstorming and writing strategy both teachers in the partnership agreed to try in their classrooms, the goal of which was to boost student confidence and voice.

They discussed the idea of ‘fake’ choice, such as when they as teachers gave students options but ultimately, the experience didn’t feel authentic because they were still largely teacher-generated options. Finally, they agreed on how to change up the assignment to make it more inclusive of any narrative writing choice that students might want with the exception of poetry. However, the teachers also discussed what to do if students were stumped by the array of choices presented to them, which was where the conversation ended for this observation.
APPENDIX E

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL
Teacher being observed:

Class period:

Teacher’s long-term goal related to student voice:

Teacher’s short-term instructional goal for this lesson related to student voice:

** Code for messages and responses:
+ = positive in nature
# = neutral in nature
- = negative in nature
F = Facial Expressions
T = Tone of voice
B = Body language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Teacher’s instructional moves / talk towards students -- VERBAL messages:</th>
<th>Teacher’s instructional moves / talk towards students -- NONVERBAL messages:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Example of a completed classroom observation:
Teacher being observed: Janie

Class period: 5th hour

Teacher’s long-term goal related to student voice: For students to feel as if their individual perspective is valued, and to be able to show their creativity as writers via increased choice.

Teacher’s short-term instructional goal for this lesson related to student voice: For students to choose an option for drafting their slam poetry today in class.

** Code for messages and responses:
+ = positive in nature
# = neutral in nature
- = negative in nature
F = Facial Expressions
T = Tone of voice
B = Body language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time: 10:55-11:05</th>
<th>Teacher’s instructional moves / talk towards students -- VERBAL messages:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Discussion of Highs and Lows from the weekend (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sharing her own “high” (husband planted the garden) (+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time: 10:55-11:05</th>
<th>Teacher’s instructional moves / talk towards students -- NONVERBAL messages:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Smiling (F+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Nodding (F+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Listening (F+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sitting with legs crossed on top of free group of desks (B+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:05</td>
<td>Discussion of slam poem expectations / going to the LRC (♯)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Discussion of Flipgrid (♯)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Response to question on Classroom re: where will they work today? (♯)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Telling them she popped into their drafts and has seen people are in different parts of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>drafting process. (♯)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Response options include an “SOS” if you really need help (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:10</td>
<td>- Sitting on other desk, nearer to the front of the room (B ♯)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Using hands while talking (i.e. print it out and then put it on sturdy paper) (B ♯)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Slightly sterner tone of voice hen going over expectations. (T-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Raised / higher tone when saying “if you need help!” to mimic a cry for help. (T+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:11-</td>
<td>- Janie re-enters the classroom after working with people in the hall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:16</td>
<td>- J looks around inquisitively at Ss in table groups. (B+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J makes pointed hand gesture at students; marks distance with hands for the ‘scale’ of how they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>are feeling. (B+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Janie looks at her screen with a serious face as S explains where she is at with the poem. (B ♯)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:17-</td>
<td>- J is talking quietly with S while other table groups work. (T ♯)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:24</td>
<td>- J asks other S “can you wait 5 minutes while I finish with ___?” (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J coaches S through authorial choices “So, I don’t know if you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J looks up as another S comes in (B+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J looks up as she leans toward S perched on stool. (B+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J has legs crossed under her desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J nods head as S talks with her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- J has serious face as she looks at S’s poem and they discuss it. (B#)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:25-</td>
<td><strong>- J is talking quietly with S who had hand raised. (+)</strong> - J talks quietly and makes a quick suggestion to S who came in from the hall. (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:27-</td>
<td><strong>- J and S quietly discuss S’s poem and questions S has. (T+)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:37-</td>
<td><strong>- J listens, then says “Ok, so…” and points at S’s screen (T+)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:42</td>
<td><strong>Bell rings; Ss leave</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

want to… do you think it’s better to do ___, and do we get a strong sense of ___ then?” (+)

- “Well that would be me vs. A__ … or ___ vs. A__, so…” (#)

- “So, to help me understand here…” (T+)

-J looks up at S as S walks her through the poem. (B+)

-J narrows eyes at computer screen as she and S discuss an aspect of the poem. (F#)

-J Janie uses extended hand shake as she motions towards S, mimicking an emotion S is trying to get across in her poem. (B+)

-J J clasps hands together over her heart as she nods at what S is saying to her. (B+)

-J J makes circling motion on her screen (B#)

-J J crouches down, almost kneeling on the ground as she talks to S. S is physically above Janie as they talk. (B+)

-J J makes pinched finger motion at other S who came in for help (B #)

-J J goes out into the hall to check on other Ss. - J J comes in from hall and sits next to S; J scrunches over with shoulders and is physically lower than S (B+)

-J S shares computer with J -- J carefully and delicately moves her finger on the screen. (B+)

-J J again uses small hand motions with the hand going up up up as she touches S’s screen. (B+)

-J J moves to other S at table; S is clearly more agitated with her hand motions and tone of voice. J is again crouched on ground, below S. (B+)

-J J gets up but still leans in as S uses excited, flappy motions with hands. (B+)
Dr. Dugas’ clarification of positioning theory – language structure “Pheoby is positioning herself as ___ “ But, she’s positioning herself as ___ with respect to ___ (her students, or the curriculum) So, P is positing herself as an advocate for social justice, as an advocate for her students. She is positioning herself as ______

J positioned herself as someone who was still more so in control – she’s positioning herself as more so controlling how they receive the curriculum. What that does is that it is NOT just a neutral triangle – Pheoby is someone who has more of an equal triangle, whereas Janie’s triangle is more smushed – it creates a language system then. By bringing in positioning theory, it brings the language. ADD VISUAL IN CHAPTER 5!

“Fidelity” to Cook-Sather’s definition; one more so honors Cook Sather’s def.

All of that is FIRST ORDER POSITIONING. That language and how they are positioning themesleves. “OK, this is how I am positioning myself”

SO, now 2nd order is how others are positioning me – a teacher’s 1st order positioning of themselves is 2nd order of positioning of their students. How Janie is positioning herself is always 1st order. How she then positions herself

Teachers are feeling pressure from the SECOND ORDER POSITIONS – i.e. student attitudes, the curriculum, the pressure the students are putting on themselves to get good grades and have the teacher to be more of a traditional teacher! Ironically using their voice to say they don’t want a voice! They just want a traditional teacher.

USE THIS LANGUAGE

I am the 3rd order position as I am saying this is the purpose of the research

First theme – 1st order positioning!
Second theme – 2nd order positioning!
Third theme – now, back to 1st order in reaction!