



Exploring Student Voice on Quality Reviews: A Guide for Reviewers

May, 2013

INTRODUCTION

Student Voice Is

- ❖ the contribution of students, “not as passive objects, but as active players in the education system” (Hodgkin, 1998)
- ❖ including “student perspectives in the larger policy- and practice-shaping conversations from which students are generally excluded but which determine their lives in school” (Cook-Sather, 2002)
- ❖ “a range of activities that encourage reflection, discussion, dialogue and action on matters that primarily concern students, but also, by implication, school staff and the communities they serve” (Fielding & McGregor, 2005)
- ❖ re-evaluating “who gets to define the problems of a school and who gets to try to improve them” (Mitra, 2006)

Why Student Voice Matters

Research tells us, when schools promote student voice:

- Classroom teaching improves
- Students learn better
- Students are more invested
- Policies are more effective
- Trust and support increase
- Democracy strengthens

Reason for This Guide

Reviewers have shared they find it challenging:

- To define “student voice”
- To ask students good questions that yield important information

The purpose of this guide is to serve as a tool for school reviewers – helping them better identify elements of student voice and ask students meaningful questions.

What This Guide Offers

After conducting extensive research, the Student Voice Collaborative (SVC) has developed a student voice rubric – a framework made of 6 areas and 17 elements. As part of this ongoing research, SVC members have served as “Student Shadows” on Quality Reviews (QR). In this role they have taken the opportunity to closely examine and document what the elements of student voice look like in practice. This guide is a product of their observations over time.

It includes:

- ❖ **Examples of 6 Key Student Voice Elements** (as observed on QRs)
- ❖ **Questions Probing 6 Key Student Voice Elements** (generated by students)

As well as:

- ❖ **A Process for Asking Students Questions** (using student voice elements to understand causes/solutions)

6 Key Elements of Student Voice: Examples and Questions for Students

1.) RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Fostering bonds and understanding between students and adults through varied opportunities for sharing and exchange.

EXAMPLES	QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize and appreciate students who achieve, improve, demonstrate core values (in class, bulletin board, ceremonies) ▪ Offer students respectful, honest, and constructive criticism ▪ Teachers put students in small groups and give them opportunities to share their thoughts and experiences ▪ Small groups change allowing students to get to know a variety of classmates ▪ Opportunities to discuss sensitive topics in groups with students who share experiences (i.e. gender, LGBT, etc.) ▪ Asking students questions that show interest in them ▪ Teachers have personal conversations with students about their educational experiences ▪ Students get chances to discuss their lives (and address needs, challenges, and concerns) through advisement/ advisory. Advisors check in regularly with students? ▪ Student have opportunities to help one another out in class ▪ Student-Led Conferences allow students, teachers, and family to get to know each other better ▪ Trips throughout year through which students can learn AND get to know one another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (How) does the school appreciate/recognize students who achieve, improve, or demonstrate core values? - When your teachers critique you, are they honest, respectful, and constructive? - When/how often do students get time to share their thoughts and experiences in small groups? - Do the small groups you are placed in change often – allowing you to get to know a variety of classmates? - Does your school offer opportunities to discuss sensitive topics with students who share experiences? (gender, LGBT, etc.) - (How) do your teachers show interest in students? - (How often) do teachers have personal conversations with students about their educational experiences? - How often/in what ways do students get a chance to discuss their lives with peers and adults through advisement/advisory? How often do advisors check in with students? - How often/in what ways do students get the opportunity to work collaboratively in class? - Does your school hold student-led conferences? (How) do they help students/teachers/family know each other better? - How often do students get to go on trips that offer opportunities to learn and to get to know classmates better? <p><i>Additional Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (How) does the school provide opportunities for students to get to know teachers and principals better? - Do ALL students have the same opportunities to share and get to know one another?

2.) COMMUNICATION

Establishing a “culture of listening” in which students are heard and information flows freely between staff and students.

EXAMPLES	QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular Town Hall meetings ▪ Teachers make sure “one mic” rule is followed ▪ Teacher calls on/includes as many students as possible ▪ Teachers collect exit slips, which ask for student feedback. Teachers modify lessons based on student feedback ▪ Student-led discussion in class ▪ Students get to “share out” (individually and in groups) during class ▪ Teachers share clear and helpful feedback on next steps for improving work/skills ▪ Teachers share clear and consistent expectations, learning targets, and criteria for success ▪ Computer lab open hours offer access to internet/email ▪ Students prepare for whole class discussions by generating “talking points” and/or questions – alone or w/ a partner (“turn and talk”) – beforehand so they’re ready to participate. ▪ In Socratic Seminar, student facilitator encourages students who have not yet spoken to step up and share thoughts ▪ Teachers present information in different ways and using different materials and technology (i.e. Smart Boards) ▪ Student-led conferences ensure that important information is exchanged and teacher/student/family are on the same page. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How often/in what ways does the school bring the community together to discuss important issues and developments? - How well do teachers make sure that when one person is talking, everyone else is listening? - Do your teachers call on the same students or a variety? - How often/in what ways do teachers collect student feedback and modify lessons based on student feedback? - How (often) do student facilitate classroom discussions? - How (often) do students get to share out during lessons? - How clear/helpful is the feedback your teachers provide on your work? How often do they provide feedback? - How clear/consistent are teachers’ expectations for students? - How often do you have access to internet/email? - (How often) do you get a chance to prepare for class discussions by generating ideas in advance – either alone or through “turn and talk?” - (How) do students and teachers encourage students to speak up who haven’t yet spoken during class? - (How) do teachers present information in different ways so that students who learn differently understand? - (How) often/effective are family conferences? Do conferences help teacher/student/families get on the same page? <p><i>Additional Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When issues arise, are students asked to give their sides of the story? - Does the school leadership inform students of the latest news, conversations, and policy proposals on the table? - Does the school leadership ask students to inform them about the latest news, conversations, and policy proposals? - Does the school leadership regularly survey students to collect their experiences and opinions? - Do you feel that your questions and concerns are truly heard?

3.) SUPPORTIVE STAFF

Teachers and administrators make themselves available, address student concerns, and promote student voice.

EXAMPLES	QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Open Door Policy”/“Office hours”; Easy to set up 1-on-1 extra help with teachers ▪ Principal regularly interacts with students ▪ Principal meets with student council and puts student concerns/ideas on the school agenda ▪ Extra support available during PM and Saturday school ▪ Guidance counselor/social workers help students pursue college/career interests ▪ Teachers reach out to students who are struggling ▪ Teachers circulate and check in with students during class, making sure they know what they are doing. ▪ When students share problems with teachers, teachers genuinely try to help students find solutions. ▪ Teachers group students purposefully – sometimes based on skill level – so students are comfortable and at the right level ▪ Teachers encourage ALL students to persist and not give up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (How often) do you have opportunities to meet with your teachers/principals individually (questions/concerns/work)? - How involved is your principal in student life? - (How often) does your principal meet with student council? - (How often) does your principal put student concerns/ideas on the school agenda? - What additional support and instruction does your school offer outside of regular school hours (after school, weekends)? - How (well) do your school counselors listen to your college/career interests and help you pursue them? - How (often) do teachers reach out to students who need help? - How (often) do teachers circulate and check in with students during class to make sure they understand? - How dedicated are your teachers to helping students solve problems when they arise? - Do you feel comfortable voicing your concerns and opinions freely? Why/why not? - Do your teachers put you in groups in which you feel comfortable and at the right level? - (How) do your teachers encourage you to not give up? - Are ALL students equally encouraged to do well in school?
<p><i>Additional Examples: Teacher Collaboration and Supporting Students By Supporting Teachers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principal encourages teachers to get further education/training so they’re better able to support students ▪ Principal provides teachers with mentoring (who are new/in need) so they are prepared to help students ▪ Principal strategically pairs co-teachers that are a good fit ▪ Teachers collaborate: discuss student progress/plan together ▪ Special education teachers work closely with other teachers (not in isolation) to fully support students ▪ Instructional specialists, co-teachers, ELL teachers offer students personal “first line of support” 	

4.) TRUE LEADERSHIP ROLES

Students hold positions of influence and partner with adults at various levels.

EXAMPLES	QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student Success Center: students counsel and help other students achieve and prepare for college ▪ Youth Court: run by students ▪ Students as teachers: Students help plan and conduct lessons ▪ Students as discussion facilitators ▪ Students as activity starters: help start/facilitate clubs, sports, and programs ▪ Students as evaluators: give feedback to students and teacher ▪ Students as action researchers ▪ Students as committee members ▪ Students as alumni support: students follow up with grads to make sure they make it to college and persist ▪ Students as translators for English Language Learners ▪ Students as spirit organizers (fundraising, shows, trips, festivals, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (In what ways) do students have opportunities to counsel and support one another? - (In what ways) do students have opportunities to help solve problems and make decisions related to discipline? - (Where/how often) do students have opportunities to plan and implement lessons in class - (Where/how often) do students have opportunities to facilitate discussions in class? - Have students started and help run student activities? Which ones? - (In what ways/how often) do students help evaluate one another? (In what ways/how often) do students give teachers feedback? - (In what ways/how often) do students and teachers work together to identify and address school-wide challenges? - Are students members of important school committees? Which ones? What role do they play? - (In what ways) do students check in with graduates and help support their transition to college/work? - (In what ways/how often) do graduates return to speak with and support current students? - (In what ways) do students who speak a second language help translate for classmates who are English Language Learners? - (In what ways/how often) do students help organize spirit-building activities?

5.) STUDENT COUNCIL WITH REAL POWER

Student council is representative, meets regularly with staff leadership, and authentically takes part in collaborative school improvement.

EXAMPLES	QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students receive leadership training ▪ Student council takes on important issues ▪ Student council has opportunities to present ideas to the administration ▪ The decision-making process is clear and well defined and the student council knows when and where it fits in. ▪ Student council regularly takes part in the decision-/policy-making process. ▪ School leadership supports the student council their ideas. ▪ Student council is representative of the whole student body (grade level, gender, race, prior leadership experience, school performance, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What sort of leadership training does the school provide to student council members? - What is the student council working on? - Does student council only plan events or take on serious issues and help to improve the school too? - Does the student council present concerns/proposals to the school leadership? How often? What sorts? - What is the school’s decision-/policy-making process? Is the process clear to students? (How) is the student council expected to take part in the process? - (How often/in what ways) does student council actually take part in the decision-making process? - (How often) do principals attend student council meetings? - (How often/in what ways) does student council meet/communicate with the staff leadership team? - (How) does school leadership help student council implement its ideas? - How do students become student council members? - (How) does student council advertise and recruit a variety of students? - (How/how often) does student council go about collecting feedback from students? - (How) does student council ensure that all voices are heard? - (How) do students who are not members of student council influence decision-/policy-making? <i>Other Questions:</i> - Are students encouraged to rally and organize around causes they care about? - How often does your student council make a meaningful impact on your school community?

6.) CONSTRUCTIVIST LEARNING

Classrooms offer students authentic tasks, exposure to multiple perspectives, control over the direction of learning, and regular opportunities to pursue questions, generate and test hypotheses, and reflect.

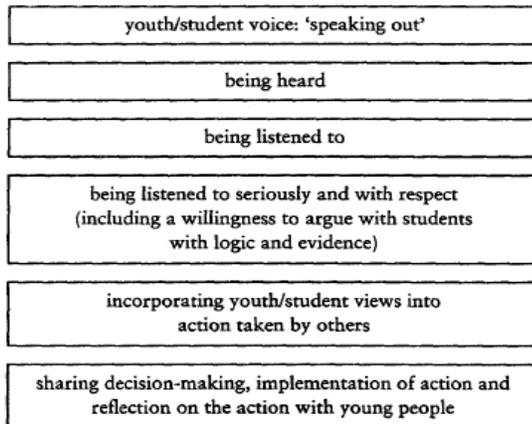
EXAMPLES	QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers ask open-ended questions that require students think through multiple steps (and classes are guided by engaging essential questions) ▪ Teachers give students time to work through problems – students do the work (not teachers) and they arrive at their own answers and collect evidence ▪ Students share multiple ways of solving problems in class ▪ Teacher asks student to empathize – imagine him/herself in others’ shoes/in a particular scenario ▪ Students ask questions to the class and call on other students ▪ Teachers ask students about their interests and give them opportunities to explore them ▪ Students choose articles/readings that interest them on particular topics ▪ Teacher asks students to defend and expand on answers ▪ Teacher asks students gradually deeper probing questions based on their thoughts and responses ▪ Students participate in meaningful classroom debate ▪ Students have opportunities to participate in active online learning ▪ Lessons address and explore real world problems ▪ Teachers have students collect and reflect on portfolio work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (How often/in what classes) do teachers ask engaging open-ended questions that push students to think through multiple steps? - Do teachers give students enough time to work through problems and come up with their own answers? - (How) do teachers teach students, not just the answers, but how to really think for themselves (and collect evidence)? - (How often/in what ways) do students have opportunities to share different conclusions/answers they’ve arrived at? - (How often/in what ways) do your teachers ask you to imagine yourself in someone else’s shoes? - (How often) do students have the opportunity to ask each other (not just the teacher) questions during class discussion? - (How often/in what classes) do teachers give students opportunities to incorporate their interests into learning? - (How) do teachers connect learning to students’ prior knowledge/background? - Do student know how to conduct research on a topic? - (How often/in what classes) are students given the chance to choose their own readings on a particular topic in class? - (How often/in what situations) do teachers ask students to defend and expand upon their answers? - Do teachers challenge students’ thinking by asking gradually deeper questions, based on their thoughts/responses? - (How often) do students have the opportunity to challenge each others’ opinions and take part in debate? - Do teachers make sure that students are respectful during debates (whether or not they agree with others)? - (How often/in what ways) do students participate in active online learning? - (How often/in what ways) do students have opportunities to explore real world problems? - (How often/in what ways) do students have opportunities to meaningfully reflect on their work in class? <p><i>Other Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who leads learning in classroom? Teachers, students, shared? - Do lessons require student initiative? - How often do you get to take part in hands-on activities? - How often do students contribute to the direction of learning?

Looking at Student Voice Holistically

While it is helpful to break student voice into its elements, it is equally important to look at student voice holistically. Below are 3 research-based representations of the levels of student voice.

A.)

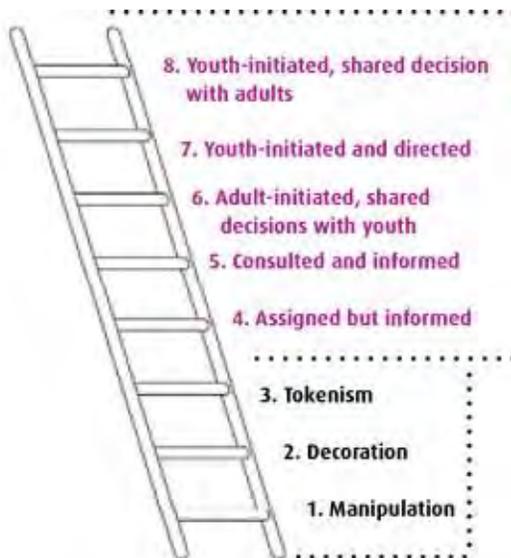
FIGURE 1. Student participation ladder



According to research, the highest level of student voice is...

- A.) "Shared decision-making, implementation of action, and reflection on the action with young people" (Holdsworth, 2000)
- B.) "Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults" (Hart, 1992)
- C.) "Building capacity for leadership" (Mitra, 2006)

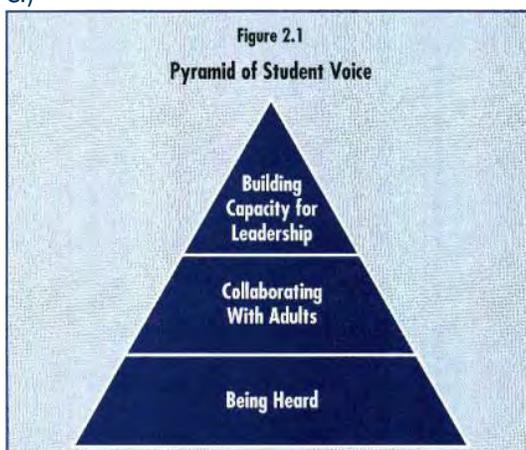
B.)



In order to determine where a school stands on the spectrum of student voice, it's important to ask a few key over-arching questions (in addition to questions, which target elements):

- ❖ What does the school improvement process look like?
- ❖ Is the process cyclical and clear to all?
- ❖ What roles do students play throughout the process? (initiating, planning, implementing, reflecting)
- ❖ How does the principal/leadership regularly support meaningful student participation in the school improvement process?
- ❖ Where are the most important places decisions are made?
- ❖ Do students have a "seat at the table" in each of these places?
- ❖ What role do students play in decision-making?
- ❖ What routines exist to ensure that student and staff leadership regularly communicate and collaborate?

C.)



A 4-Step Process for Asking Students Questions

IDENTIFY A STRENGTH OR CHALLENGE

Ex 1: 45% of students agree that students just look out for themselves. (School Survey)
Ex 2: Students report that their class work is relevant and engaging. (QR student meeting)



EXPLORE THE NATURE OF A STRENGTH OR CHALLENGE

Ex 1: WHAT do you see that leads you to believe students only look out for themselves? WHY do you think this is happening?
Ex 2: WHAT about your work makes it feel relevant and engaging to you?



MAKE A CONNECTION BETWEEN A STRENGTH/CHALLENGE & A KEY ELEMENT OF STUDENT VOICE

Ex 1: {This strength connects to RELATIONSHIPS}
Ex 2: {This challenge connects to CONSTRUCTIVIST LEARNING}



EXAMINE THE ROLE OF STUDENT VOICE AS A CAUSE AND/OR SOLUTION

*Ex 1: Do you have opportunities to **exchange opinions and experiences with classmates in small groups**?*
*Ex 2: (How) do your teachers allow you to **connect classroom learning to your interests**?*

If addressing a strength: What does {the element of SV} look like? (How) is it benefiting students and their growth/learning?
If addressing a challenge: What is the consequence of {the element of SV} missing? How can the school address the challenge?

NOTES

* We suggest beginning with open-ended questions that allow students to think freely and broadly and reviewers to identify general strengths and challenges. Follow up with questions that target identified strengths and challenges, keeping student voice in mind.

Step 1: Strengths and challenges can be identified through research in advance or during conversation with students.

Step 2: For challenges, ask WHAT and WHY to understand nature and root cause.

Step 3: We have identified 17 elements of student voice. We believe the 6 elements in this guide are the highest priority.

Step 4: Reviewers can substitute any relevant quality of a student voice element into these questions. See examples in this guide for ideas.