Giving voice to the voiceless: a mixed-methods study exploring diverse fifth-grade student leadership opportunities through an elementary program

by

Jennifer Ray

B.S., Emporia State University, 1997
M.A., Baker University, 2009

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

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A mixed-methods case study was conducted to explore the actual experiences of fifth-grade students participating in a job contribution program during the 2022-2023 school year in a rural elementary school. Questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and field observations were completed to identify if a correlation existed between this lived experience and the students' perceived self-efficacy and their connectedness to school. Findings indicate some connection between student experiences and efficacy and suggest areas for continued research in student voice.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

A child's involvement and connection to school is critical to their success. When a student is not engaged in their learning environment and connected within their community, they become disengaged and disconnected. Most attend class in a traditional format, receive instruction delivered by certified educators, and evidence learning by their performance on a standardized assessment. Curriculum studies and concepts of focus are predetermined, often presented in the same fashion from year to year. Long-standing structures for education are seldom questioned and often serve as the framework for the entire function of a learning establishment. In this structure, the element of student voice and contribution is minimal. A student's traditional role is to be an obedient observer of rules and guidelines passed down from school administrators. Student participation in meaningful matters and contexts is often limited to traditional leadership clubs and adult-generated civic engagement opportunities.

Traditional approaches to education can sometimes contribute to the child who is unengaged, unmotivated, disconnected, and therefore underserved in our public education system. Students without meaningful connection and contribution in school are negatively impacted and often underrepresented within the school as a whole. Disconnection and disengagement are concerns noted in many schools, most of which serve students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Quinn and Owen (2016) share concern of elementary aged students becoming disengaged in school. Students without a meaningful connection and contribution to their school risk becoming disengaged and unmotivated.

Providing leadership opportunities and improving student voice has been the effort of schools' student council organizations in elementary through high schools. However, these opportunities are limiting. Only a fraction of a student body is elected to serve on a student

leadership council. The structure of student council is to provide voice to a limited number of students who represent the larger student body. By design, it excludes the majority of students. Extracurricular activities aimed to meaningfully engage students within the context of a school community can also exclude students based on interests and talents that may be required to participate. Involvement in activities is limited for students of lower socio-economic backgrounds and diverse backgrounds, as they appear under-represented in extracurricular activities (Darling, 2005).

Leadership in Schools

In an effort to build opportunities for students' voices and opinions to be expressed in a traditional school setting, leadership programs need to be readily available throughout the educational system. Understanding how leadership opportunities can be developed in schools will be critical in establishing programs to promote student voice. Research in this area notes that young children's leadership is a subject that is under-explored (Lee, Recchia, & Shin, 2005). Lee et al. (2005) note that parents and educators see natural traits emerge in social interactions between children. While studies have been completed that look at a variety of perspectives, one attempts to expand beyond the traditional research which has historically defined leadership in a limited capacity. One study attempts to span beyond traditional research which defines leadership in a limited capacity (Lee et al.,2005). Lee et al. (2005) posit that previous research lacks insight into how it is manifested and what relational and contextual elements impacted children's experiences. By examining leadership development in children, strategies emerge and can be utilized to determine successful implementation of adolescent leadership opportunities. A current definition of childhood leadership identifies four styles: the "director," the "free spirit," the "manager," and the "power man" (Mawson, 2010). There are also considerations about how

peer culture can influence childhood leadership and social literacies that may not be privy to all children in a classroom setting.

Perceptions of leadership are impacted by a myriad of factors. Leadership maintains a broad definition which has evolved through history (King, 1990; Day et al., 2013). This evolution of leadership theory progressed through eras defined by the concentration of leadership markers of the time. Although not necessarily chronological (King, 1990), notable defining attributes serve as markers for each area. Examples of early leadership theory have focused on personality traits, persuasion ability, and behavior (King, 1990). More recent focus on leadership is aligned with the assessment of skills in problem-solving, leader expertise, self-motivation, and creativity (Day et al., 2013). Research on how gender and culture can affect our understanding and belief about leadership also exposes important considerations.

Ayman and Korabik (2010) discuss how gender and culture can influence the perception of leadership. For this purpose, culture is defined as an "acquired and transmitted pattern of shared meaning, feeling, and behavior that constitutes a distinctive human group" (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). In other words, culture can be operationalized both visible and internal. Throughout their work, Ayman and Korabik explain the importance of examining how current leadership constructs are interpreted and related across gender, cultures and sources. Only in this exploration can we have a centralized understanding of leadership that will not be stuck in a primarily ethnocentric viewpoint. Throughout Ayman and Korabki's research, perceptions of leadership were explored with a variety of approaches to the way leadership opportunities have been implemented. The main models in this study included: trait approach, behavior approaches, and contingency approaches. The universal conclusion based on a

summary of each aforementioned approach is “the traits related to leadership are not culturally universal.” (Ayman and Korabik, 2010).

Leadership and gender studies reveal a variety of aspects in which gender can influence perception, comfort, and participation in leadership roles and experiences. One particular study examined this concept and cites “gender socialization messages” as a major obstacle in equal leadership opportunities. A specific example recognizes that boys compete in sports more often than girls and this exposes them to early and frequent opportunities to lead (Trumpy & Elliot, 2019). Adults, often unintentionally, perpetuate these divisions when socializing children in stereotypical ways. Repeated life experiences then begin to shape perceptions and beliefs about leadership. Perhaps the most illuminating consideration is rooted in cultural beliefs of masculinity and femininity. As Trumpy and Elliot (2019) state, “Many characteristics linked to poor leadership, such as passivity, low ambition, irrationality, a preoccupation with emotions, and lack of emotional control, are associate with femininity” (p.7). Culture is a massive element to consider when working toward incorporating a leadership focus across an entire elementary school.

Another cultural consideration is one rooted in ethnicity and race. Much of our studies in the history of American education show how profound this element can be on education. Tippeconnic (2006) looked specifically at leadership through the lens of the American Indian. Tippeconnic’s work is rooted in the notion that leadership is difficult to articulate unless the definition has a balance between broad and narrow views. Tippeconnic (2006) suggests looking at leadership in a distributive way. He explores various studies in defining distributed leadership, ethical leadership, collaborative leadership, culturally proficient leadership, and moral leadership (p. 1). When one considers the myriad of racial, cultural, and

socio-economic backgrounds of our families, it becomes alarmingly clear that at the root, defining leadership will continue to be challenged and conflicted as cultural perspectives are considered.

Student Voice

The concept of leadership can leave students uninterested or unwilling to employ their voices in a traditional way. In order to empower students from varying backgrounds, experiences, genders, and interests, other options are needed. This is how increasing student voice outside of a traditional context can impact students. A study by Quinn and Owen (2016) explains the history of student voice as a catch-all for practices ranging from consultation with adults to leadership and integrated learning experiences. Other researchers explain the concept with varying levels of complexity. At the simplest level, student voice would take form in students sharing their opinions with adults about school problems. A more complex level is defined by engaging students in the school community to the extent it stimulates change efforts (Mitra, Serriere, Stoicovy, 2012).

The term "student voice" is typically shaped by a researcher or educator's purpose for their research. In general, there are five different types of pedagogical connections which define student voice. Rachel Bolstad (2011) explains these five differences as constructivist learning theories, inquiry learning approaches, goals to develop student leadership, psychological theories of personal development, and goals related to responding to diversity in schools. Though this is a very broad snapshot of the roots in which most definitions are found, it does help identify common attributes noted throughout research. Most would agree that student voice has been a part of our educational history and typically includes student consultation, participation, collaboration, leadership, and intergenerational learning. School practices allow some

opportunities for students to make decisions about issues and learning within the school community (Quinn & Owen, 2016). This definition of student voice sets the goal to move away from traditional teacher-run pathways like student council and other organizations in which students are selected to represent the whole. Instead, it defines a structure in which 'choice and voice' are evident in the curriculum and attitudes of teachers even going as far as to describe a "rupture of the ordinary" as it relates to power between students and teachers (Quinn & Owen, 2016), this giving rise to a more authentic and realistic student voice.

When authentic student voice is present it creates a student-centered learning environment that enables students to participate actively in their schooling (Baroutsis, McGregor, & Mills, 2016). I will demonstrate with Mitra, Serriere, & Stoicovy (2012) that school communities benefit when student choice and voice is an expectation and reality because it allows students to re-engage with their communities and increases attachment to them.

The idea of student voice is not a new concept for Dewey (1916) spoke of "active and engaged citizens" decades ago (Dewey as cited in Baroutsis, McGregor and Mills, 2016, p. 3). Those, whose educational philosophies align with progressive ideals, often recognize the tremendous lack of student voice within the educational system as a whole. Quinn and Owen (2016) there is extensive literature investigating the area of student voice with older students. However, examination of whole school student voice approaches in elementary aged children is not as prominent. This research will highlight the personal and social benefits of student voice for students.

Students have been neglected in many reorganization efforts and have a need and basic undeniable right to feel connected to their learning experiences (Damiani, 2013). This suggests that student voice be a part of, not simply a result from reform efforts. Without authentic

experiences to make informed decisions and suggestions, students often leave schools ill-prepared to develop and lead in democratic activities, including roles in community and civic service (Mitra, Serriere, & Stoicovy, 2012). Additional research highlights the consequences when students do not feel connected with their education. It often manifests itself into beliefs of 'not being heard' and a dislike for school, which can lead to leaving school without graduating (Baroutsis, McGregor, & Mills, 2016). The current social emotional needs of students and the need to improve soft skills and character development all support a focus on engaging student voice and choice in schools.

Self-Efficacy and Development Framework

A theoretical framework of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 2018) and developmental theories (Issawi & Dauphin, 2017) will cement this study as a natural lens and framework to understand the causal relationship between student voice opportunities and a child's development.

The framework of perceived self-efficacy explains the benefits and simultaneously directs the process of crafting leadership opportunities for students. A student's perceived self-efficacy contributes to a myriad of experiences throughout their lives. In this framework, we understand perceived self-efficacy to be situated within the conceptual framework of human agency (Bandura, 1993). Bandura posits there is no more prevalent an anchor to personal agency than how a person believes themselves capable to demonstrate control of their own functioning and over events that affect their lives. These ideas and thoughts directly influence how we feel and think about ourselves, therefore molding our motivation in various situations (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999).

To understand the cognitive processes involved in building self-efficacy, this study creates the framework for why educators must provide students with choice and voice in their education and as frequently as possible. It is a cyclical process where the perceived beliefs about oneself are consistently connected. Personal goal setting is directly influenced by how a person appraises their abilities. There is more likelihood of visualizing successful experiences as opposed to failure when self-efficacy is high (Bandura, 1993). When creating leadership experiences in which students have meaningful and purposeful contributions to their learning environment, we are helping create environments for self-efficacy to grow.

Furthermore, self-efficacy research note that trends are showing the process to be malleable. This is true through both social and academic lenses. But the impact of this efficacy transcends beyond the classroom, leading to experiences that shape students' futures, anxieties, motivations, and contributions to their own communities. This research posits that Bandura's research not only helps to explain why self-efficacy is so impactful on our lives, but essentially provides reason that there must be opportunities for students to have choice, contributions, and social connection to the world around them. (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 1999; Bandura, 2018).

There is extensive research about building leadership and leadership theories (King, 1990, Day et al., 2014; Covey & Covey, 2014; Lee et al., 2005; Mawson, 2010; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Tippeconnic, 2006; Trumpy & Elliot, 2019; Ullestad, 2009; Ayman & Korabik, 2010). But the research is minimal when specifically examining how leadership is best understood and fostered in children, especially those in elementary and middle school (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Understanding concepts of self-efficacy serve as the first step in enhancing student voice opportunities. There are also developmental processes to consider as the study is

focused on elementary aged students. Therefore, exploring developmental theories and conceptualizing leadership through that lens of students in the age range will be key. This researcher blends concepts of self-efficacy theory and psychosocial development theory to best explore their potential influence on developing student voice. Each theory provides an understanding of child development in connection with social components.

Erikson explains development through eight different states. The first stage in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is *Trust versus Mistrust* which pertains to children aged birth to 18 months. The second stage is *Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt* which explains the development of children aged 18 months to three years. Erikson's next stage is defined as *Initiative versus Guilt* which explores the development of children aged three to five years. Stage four is *Industry versus Inferiority* and is the stage associated with children between the ages of five and twelve. During this stage children navigate experiences which mark the entrance into society and their role within it (Issawi & Dauphin, 2017). Stage four is explored in this research as the study participants are aged ten and eleven. Erikson's theory of this fourth stage of development highlights the importance of children participating in society within the context of others. They begin to distinguish between their own traits and skills in comparison with others and must learn to accept they cannot be the best at everything to be competent. When children make contributions and take charge of tasks, they can see how they are personally capable of impacting society. Essentially, children learn their role in the world and develop belief in themselves (Issawi & Dauphin, 2017).

During elementary school, children are being prepared for "entrance to life" (Erikson, 1950). They are beginning to see the world beyond the context of their own family and friends. When educators can help facilitate experiences in which their talents are explored and their

contributions matter, they are providing a critical foundation on which later feels of self-esteem and value will grow.

The frameworks discussed above set the stage for further exploration of leadership opportunities for elementary students--leadership opportunities which are anchored in student choice and voice and about their school. This study seeks to explore exactly that. This researcher posits that perceived self-efficacy is both a justification for and benefit of authentic student voice and choice. The context in which this voice is fostered will be essential in creating environments and experiences which build on the perceived self-efficacy constructs Bandura outlined in his work. These constructs will be identified as "Conception of Ability" components and include social comparison and perceived controllability. Each component will be examined, based on its connection to students' contributions within a school setting. Youth Development Theory (Mitra & Serriere, 2012) will also explain how these experiences come to form "agency, belonging and competence," which are critical to success in school.

Fifth-Grade Contribution Program

I serve as the administrator of this program and the researcher of the project. For the purpose of program description, I will be referring to my role as administrator of the program to offer clarity in this section of the paper.

The fifth-grade contribution program is designed to provide students with a voice in their school community and to contribute to the environment in which they spend a large majority of their time. There are no limitations or stipulations to who can participate an any phase of the program. However, only students holding a job will continue through the cycle of phases. For example, all fifth graders brainstormed ideas for jobs, although not all of these students were

interested in obtaining a fifth-grade job. These phases of the program include: Brainstorming, Selecting, Interviewing, Orientation, Monitoring, and Evaluation.

Brainstorming

The fifth-grade contribution program invites all fifth-grade students to meet as a class to brainstorm a list of job contributions they feel they could perform at school to "help make the school a better place" and/or "help improve or continue to make our school a good place for students." Clarification of the job ideas is derived through class discussion. As an example, if a child suggests a job "Kindergarten Role Model" the group will discuss different ways in which fifth graders could serve asl models for younger students and these are recorded on the job description list. Through the session, a complete job list is generated. No idea is discarded during the brainstorming session.

Selecting

The selection process occurs in three stages.

Stage 1: The administrator collects the list of job ideas generated from the student brainstorm. The list must be reviewed and vetted to ensure they fit within the structure of the school day, district guidelines of confidentiality, safety requirements, and program requirements. Program requirements will be defined further in the selection process.

Stage 2: The job list is finalized to include all options that fit into the framework of the school day. They are loosely defined based on the brainstorming session and the administrator assigns the time requirements for the jobs. The details of these jobs are explained in chapter 3. The completed job list is presented in a Google Form (Application). All fifth-grade students have

an opportunity to fill out the form. The form asks them to select any job they are interested in doing and asks them to explain why they would like to do the job(s).

Stage 3: The administrator reviews all forms. The answers, preferences, student schedules and programs, and building master schedule are reviewed. During this stage, the administrator must consider student programs, defined as services provided as mandated by individual education plans. If a job is only available at a certain time of day that conflicts with the delivery of special services, these services supersede the fifth-grade contribution program. In all cases, however, students are offered a job.

Interviewing

The administrator meets individually with fifth graders to discuss their application and some of the jobs each student had expressed an interest in. Having preselected a job that fits with the student schedule and interest, the administrator presents questions such as "How can you be a good role model for younger students?" or "Why is raising the flag each morning important to our school?" After this brief discussion, a job is offered to the student. If the child accepts the job then they are assigned and an orientation will later follow.

Orientation

Students of similar jobs meet with the administrator to obtain their job badges (a lanyard with their photograph, job title, job day/time) and to discuss the details of their job. If their job requires special items, resources, staff introductions, or routines, those are provided at that time. Schedules are reviewed, as are expectations for job performance. The job expectations are decided collaboratively with administrator guidance.

Monitoring

The administrator monitors students throughout the program during their contribution time. This is done formally and informally. The monitoring process also includes conversations with adults who observe students in their contribution roles. In some cases, student contributions occur during instructional time (MTSS & independent work time). Student progress and district assessments are monitored to ensure there is no negative impact on academics. Should any need for improvement arise, the administrator meets with the student and an improvement plan is created. If a child expresses the desire to withdraw from a particular job or take on an additional job, the administrator meets with them individually. Options for changes are discussed and these changes are made as are most appropriate for the student's success. Monitoring details for the purpose of research are further described in Chapter 3.

Evaluation

The program is designed to last the majority of a school year. By design, the evaluation occurs near the conclusion of the school year as students have been participating in their job contributions over several months. The evaluation is informally conducted through unstructured interviews with student participants. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine if students found value in the experience. Although no formal measures are used for evaluation, adjustments to the structure are made as needed based on student feedback. Evaluation details for the purpose of the research are further described in Chapter 3.

Research Problem

Students can have authentic, personalized leadership experiences in elementary school. These experiences can be organized in a fashion that does not under-represent any culture, socio-economic status, gender, or ethnicity. This study will explore the impact of these experiences on the self-efficacy and development of children.

There is a need for improved leadership opportunities to include all students without the limitations of traditional structures. Student voice is a way to include a child's values, perceptions, and beliefs. By offering a student voice in how to improve and help a school community, and then offering the structure to contribute to these improvements, a school can foster meaningful connections between a child and school.

This study will examine ten- and eleven-year-old students in an exploratory program designed for the purpose of making meaningful contribution and incorporating student voice for the benefit and improvement of a school community. The program takes place in one Midwest elementary school and involves 30 fifth-grade students. It will examine the impact of student contribution within a school building and their perceived self-efficacy and connectedness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to contribute to research in student voice by exploring a structure to promote meaningful involvement. In connection with theories on development and efficacy, this study also seeks to identify any relationship between these experiences and a child's perception of self. There is limited research on efficacy outside of an academic environment. This study is intended to contribute to this limited area of research and highlight connections between student experiences and their perceptions.

Research Questions

This dissertation will explore the concept of student autonomy in an elementary setting as it relates to a program structured for student input and school contribution. Understanding the importance of student voice and the influence a child's experiences can have on their self-perception, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

How can schools design opportunities for the development of student autonomy and agency?

1. How does student voice/autonomy impact a child's perceived self-efficacy?
2. How does student agency change through a program experience?
3. Is motivation and connectedness impacted by social contributions?

Methodology

A mixed-methods case study will explore the research questions within the context of a rural elementary school in the Midwest. Based on Robert K. Yin's methodology (2014), a case study will allow exploration of a phenomenon "by addressing the "how" or "why" questions..." (Yazan, 2015). Since the exploratory research does address a school program, the case study is most appropriate as Yin considers it an instrumental method for program evaluation (Yazan, 2015). Students aged ten and eleven will participate in a school program designed to solicit their input about ways to improve the school community. Interested students, approximately 30, will select ways they can contribute to the school. Students will participate in building-wide jobs based on their interest and skills. Some examples of building-wide jobs include: delivering afternoon notes, leading school-wide Pledge of Allegiance, serving as kindergarten role model/helper, organizing student recognition efforts, providing gestures of teacher appreciation, and more as determined by the students.

Quantitative data will be collected at the beginning and near the end of the program in the form of a student questionnaire measuring self-efficacy and connectedness. The results will be examined to determine statistically significant changes over the course of the program. Qualitative data will be collected throughout the program via one-on-one interviews

with the student participants. Coding the data from the one-on-one interviews and exploring the emerging themes with the intended study area. The qualitative data will offer additional insight into the student experience. A focus group will also be conducted to further explore the topics that emerge in a format intended to solicit discussion. Finally, observations will be conducted at designated times throughout the program using a scale to measure actions associated with self-efficacy and connectedness. Thus, using the multiple data types offers triangulation, which is critical to a case study (Yin, 2002 as cited in Yazan, 2015).

As the researcher, I will also serve as the program coordinator, overseeing the structure and implementation of the program and the study. In addition to the student participants, select staff will serve an important role if jobs are positioned within their classrooms. Only students who wish to contribute to the school community and do so from the onset of the program will be included in the study.

Definition of Terms

For clarity and understanding of the program and research areas, the following terms are defined. If credited to a theory or method, this will be noted in the definition. Otherwise, the definitions are specific to this dissertation study and are not intended to mirror any other leadership program opportunity.

agency – the power to originate action (Bandura, 2001). The human capacity to choose and act on choices.

connectedness – a student's sense of belonging and positive association within a community.

contribution – the job or role taken on by a student in context of the school community.

self-efficacy – a person's particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute a plan of action in prospective situations (Bandura, 1977).

student autonomy – used interchangeably with student voice (see below)

student voice – "[A]t the simplest level, student voice can consist of young people sharing their opinions of school problems with administrators and faculty. Student voice initiatives can also be more extensive, for instance, when young people collaborate with adults to address the problems in their schools, and in rare cases, when youth assume leadership roles in change efforts" (Mitra, 2005, as cited by Mitra, Serriere, & Stoicovy, 2012).

Delimitations and Limitations

There are several delimitations with this study as it is constructed within the confines of one building and with a select number of students. The program exists in an exploratory format within a rural elementary school. Only the students with expressed interest and permission for the study will be included. With approximately 30 students participating, this offers a small sample size. Another delimitation is the concept of student voice, which is defined differently in various contexts. Attempting to limit the definition and explore it within the construct of a program could produce potential flaws in design and implementation. A final delimitation is the researcher functioning as the program facilitator. All aspects of the program will need to be clearly defined with no modifications unless warranted by district protocols at the conclusion of a pandemic.

Limitations to the study can be observed in the new Kansas guidelines for distribution of non-academic questionnaires to students in school. This includes the permission forms; parents will also be provided a copy of any questionnaire or questions presented to students since it is evaluating non-academic areas. This could impact validity and reliability if parents discuss the questions with students and provide input to students that might not reflect the student's true beliefs. Another limitation to the study is the timing of data collection near the end of the

program. Ideally, data would be collected at the conclusion of the school year. The timeline of this study, however, will require data to be collected after six months which is not reflective of an entire school year. The six-month timeframe was established to include the majority of a school year, while allocation was made for data collection, analysis and synthesis before the conclusion of the school year.

Significance of the Study

Research in student leadership and student voice is not an extensive field of study. Nor is there study on the direct correlation between student empowerment attempts and the student's perception of self (efficacy and connectedness). Studies exist in isolation, and most within the context of academic efficacy and autonomy within the standard elementary curriculum. This study expands on the concept of student autonomy in a non-academic setting to determine if there might be a correlation between the autonomous experience and perceptions of self. Results from the study can aid school leaders in developing programs or opportunities that allow student autonomy with a better understanding of how experiences may impact students. Additionally, educators can gain insight into student belief about what is seen as problematic in a typical elementary school as well as solutions that are meaningful to children aged ten and eleven.

Researcher Perspective

The researcher assumes there will be a causal relationship between the student voice initiative and student perceptions of self. This is based on the understanding of research in self-efficacy and child development (Issawi & Dauphin, 2017; Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 2018). The program, though informal and orchestrated within the context of one building, has existed for two years. Modifications on design and organization have occurred to

situate the program more fluidly in the school's master schedule. The program represents the researcher's belief that student autonomy is critical and that contributing to a school community will bring students closer to other students, the staff, and their community as a whole.

As the building principal, I also recognize the perception of authority associated with my position. Due to my understanding of the participants on a personal level, I will also have additional information about their school experiences outside of the study. To attend to the research in a contributing fashion, I will position myself outside of an administrator role during interviews, discussions, observations, and analysis of data. If subjective observations are made, they will be explicitly stated and accompanied by data as appropriate.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this dissertation will include a literature review exploring concepts of student voice, autonomy, theories on development and efficacy, current leadership programs in elementary schools, analysis of efficacy measures, and historical connections to studies in student leadership. The methodology and design will outline the contribution of the program and explain the data collection process. Additionally, it will frame the study within the framework of student efficacy and development with a connection to John Dewey's theory on education (1897).

The study will conclude with an analysis of the mixed-methods data presented in tables and triangulated to provide reliable insight into the findings to those who participated in the program at its inception. Finally, the findings and conclusions will be explained with recommendations and reflection on the exploratory case study.

Chapter 2 – Review of Literature

The following review of literature looks at building leadership opportunities for students in elementary schools. In the beginning stages of research, it quickly became apparent that schools have provided student leadership opportunities for decades. Most of these experiences have been within the context of organizations which stand to take children who demonstrate leadership skills and enhance those within a structured, adult-facilitated organization. This was not the level of leadership this study will explore. This study will look at how leadership opportunities can be beneficial for all students in school—not just those who actively seek out leadership roles through Student Council, Boy Scouts, etc.—but the students who have talents, ideas, and aspirations which are often untapped and underappreciated in a traditional school structure.

Therefore, this study in student leadership in elementary schools took a narrower path and became specifically focused on the personalized approach to leadership. Leadership opportunities and ideas will then span beyond our traditional view of leaders and morph into enhancing a child's connection to the world around them. This connection will enable students to consider society, their school, their communities and become the voice of change. This image, too, paints children as outspoken, bold leaders who stand on the front lines of causes and rally troops to make change in a complicated society. However, is it not the only way leaders are cultivated. Every child has traits and talents that can benefit and support others. What they often are not provided is the opportunity to explore and build on these talents. An approach to leadership in which students contributed in ways unique to their strengths would give every child a chance to flourish.

For the purpose of this study, leadership will be defined in the sense that students are meaningful, contributing members of a school society. Roles of leadership are not intended to be static, nor traditional by definition. One correlation to be explored will be the element of "student voice" within the structure of a school whose culture encourages and supports this engagement. This literature review will not be focused on leadership development in the traditional sense as described above, instead, it will look at the intricate components, benefits, considerations, and limits contained within the idea of individualized leadership for students in elementary school. Most of the previous research in this area reveals common themes which will be examined in depth to shed light on the relevance and importance of the information gathered and this new way of thinking about leadership.

Leadership

Youth Leadership Development

Leadership is a common topic of research and study. Much of the published work focuses on attributes of leaders and the impact of various experiences on their lives. In cultivating leaders, researchers quote extensive definitions which highlight traits of some of our most influential leaders in history. Educational researchers Murphy and Johnson (2011) dive into the process of uncovering contributing childhood experiences that helped shape leaders. They note that many leaders have had experiences which have created a foundation for leadership development. In their work, however, they note no models of leader development which integrate childhood in the cycle of development. Although they note a model presented by Avolio and Gibbons (2011), there was not adequate follow-up to the 'lifespan' idea they wished to explore. But from any angle, the nature of leadership and how it is developed over time is a largely neglected area. It should not be surprising to learn there is a very limited amount of

research about leadership and elementary aged children. This is a troubling issue because in essence, we learn about who we are and what we value when we examine ourselves as leaders. Warren Bennis (1989) states, "Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It is precisely that simple, and it is also that difficult." (Bennis (1989), as quoted in Reese, 2008). If this is true and uncovering our inner-leader is a path to uncovering ourselves, then it stands to reason this is an area in need of extensive exploration.

Murphy and Johnson (2011) explain that leadership is not a stagnant thing. As we look at children, we identify their concepts of leadership and notable leadership traits change over time. At one stage in life, it might be determined by popularity and appearance. Older children note traits such as integrity and knowledge. As children mature and progress through developmental stages, so too does their understanding of leadership. The attributes of perceived leadership changes as children age (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). So, in defining leadership for children in elementary school, there must be consideration for development. One common theme, though presented differently based on age, is the social connection and competence of people. This is a theme we will examine in more detail to come.

Need for Leadership Opportunities

Damiani (2013) spent time researching how elementary students perceived leadership, specifically in how it related to their building principals. He posits that the role of building principals has changed over the years, requiring principals to be more collaborative and focus their capacity to lead instructionally. This has increased the amount of collaborative decision-making between administrators and teachers, but Damiani notes one neglected area. He explains that despite changes in the function and structure of schools, most have "neglected to include students in more responsive modes of leadership." (p.230) It is important to note that research

with a focus on benefits of including students in "responsive models of leadership" (p. 230) is significantly smaller than other research in the field.

Extracurricular activities, including those with a focus on leadership, do not exist as opportunities for all students. Darling (2005) concludes that adolescents who participate in extracurricular activities are representative of higher social classes from European-American backgrounds. Additionally, they are more positively connected to school.

Growing point of concern from a societal perspective is the workability skills our students bring with them when entering the job force. Bandara (1993) points out that effective intellectual functioning is more than understanding a process or possessing a litany of skills and facts. A student might graduate with glowing marks, honor, and recognition, but if they are not not able to use these skills in stressful circumstances, to solve complex and frustrating problems, or utilize in real-world applications, then we have missed the mark in helping students devel If we are cultivating leadership opportunities which require students to problem-solve and think collaboratively with others, we help make meaning of the skills they have learned.

Leadership Programs

The traditional way to help students build leadership skills has existed in the form of elected processes and organizations that are geared toward and further support students who currently show an aptitude for leadership. Student councils have existed to provide student voice around topics and events affecting their schools. Griebler and Nowak (2012) explain a variety of arguments which serve as reasons why elementary students should be involved in making decisions in their schools. These arguments include children's rights to have their opinion taken into account, provide a format to educate students about citizenship and processes of democracy, help improve school and student performance and engagement, improve student decision-

making, and using student voice to help meet their own needs. In their qualitative analysis of the effects of student councils, Gribler and Nowak (2012) determined the effects of student council on the student participants. However, the more telling discussion followed when these researchers look specifically at who benefits from student councils in schools.

Gribler and Nowak's 2012 study noted that the affected populations was the student participants. Gribler and Nowak's work showed that the student participants were the most affected. Those who served on student council in a variety of roles. Though the roles and effects were not addressed in a causal manner, the general effects can be summarized as follows: improved self-esteem, better understanding of the democratic process, increased awareness of responsibility, and improved citizenship. In addition to these impacts on students, the 2012 analysis also examined how student councils affected interactions in the school. Peer relationships and improved communication with other children were noted in some cases. But the most commonly occurring effect was the improved relationship and communication between student council members and adults on staff (teachers and administrators).

It is difficult to argue against the presence of student councils with the evident benefits that develop as a result from serving on them. However, the students most positively affected by the student council in terms of leadership and citizenship are those who serve on the council. It is undoubtedly a needed organization which can help students develop leadership skills in an organized sense. But what about the students who were not deemed worthy of being a member? Where are their opportunities to enrich other qualities that make up a good leader?

Many schools are often set up to recognize students who already exhibit natural leadership ability. “The Leader in Me” (2014) is a whole-school approach to developing students as leaders. It is based on Stephen Covey’s 7 habits of highly effective people. The habits, as

Covey (2014) explains, are principles any person can adopt to be effective in attaining goals in any facet of life. The habits present a progression through maturity that begins with dependence, moves to independence, and finally progresses to interdependence. Although his original work was written toward an adult audience, educators quickly saw the value in developing these habits in children. It leads to a whole-school structure that, according to Covey (2014) draws upon the talents of the whole-school – all members and all students –and optimizes the support of parents and community. It does not seek to isolate development of a select group of students, nor does it approach leadership in the traditional context. The 7 habits are intended to drive individuals, and therefore an entire school community, toward the development of one's 'whole-self. (230)

These seven habits, according to Covey, were adult-focused but have since been crucial in helping all members in a school building regardless of age. The habits are defined in kid-friendly language and taught explicitly in all grade levels. The first habit is "Be Proactive". This focuses on a person who can be responsible and take initiative. There is not an allowance for placing blame on others. People recognize they are in control of their actions, attitudes, and moods. Therefore, they can only be offended by others' actions if they choose to be. The second habit is "Begin with the End in Mind." The focus of this habit is planning and goal setting. Actions and activities are chosen because they have meaning and make a difference. People are valued as contributors to the school's mission and look for opportunities to be good citizens. The third habit, "Put First Things First," focuses on setting priorities. Time is spent on things that are most important, which means saying no to things sometimes. This supports a disciplined and organized mindset. The fourth habit is "Think Win-Win." Balance is important in that people cannot only be self-serving. There should be a balance between personal wants and the needs of the whole. Habit five is "Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood." Habit five is the

basic rule of listening to others. Being aware and thoughtful of others' viewpoints enables people to understand those around them and helps build self-confidence when voicing their own personal opinions. The sixth habit "Synergize" encourages getting along with others, even if they are different from you. A person should focus on people's strengths and learn from them. Other people are sought out to help solve problems when someone cannot do it alone. The final habit is "Sharpen the Saw." This habit concentrates on taking care of the body and mind by being healthy and spending time with family and friends. When schools adopt "The Leader in Me," they incorporate explicit lessons on each of the habits and have a school culture created to support and encourage them. A repeated theme throughout Covey's work is that everyone, regardless of cognitive ability, gender, age or role, has the capacity to lead.

Other schools have adopted an overhaul of their school culture without placing a label or program title to the work they are doing. Mitra and Serriere (2012) examine a school in which student voice and contribution come from all students in the building. In the school they studied, there were notable practices rooted in an assortment of democratic pedagogy. Specifically, they explain multiple case studies conducted at 'Dewey' Elementary School (a pseudonym) where common themes surfaced. The authors state: "Service learning efforts embedded in curricular practice, small school advising groups with cross-age groupings, weekly school-wide assemblies run by fifth graders, and student participation in school-wide decision-making processes to modify school rules" were foundational in the success of incorporating school-wide student voice at the school. Although most of what Mitra and Serriere (2012) explore looks specifically at one opportunity for civic engagement, the theme of a democratic culture is addressed throughout their work. It stands to reason that in order for a school-wide implementation of

leadership to be effective, there are essential cultural elements that must be in place. The following section addresses some of those elements.

Culture of Leadership

Providing a forum and foundation on which children can build their leadership skills begins before they even enter school. In their leadership work, Murphy and Johnson (2011) examined parenting styles and the impact these styles have on children. They posit that parents have just as much impact on their children's thoughts about leadership (p.463). Four types of parenting styles are addressed in their research. These are authoritarian, neglectful, indulgent, and authoritative. In their research, there are negative relationships between authoritarian, neglectful and indulgent parents and the impact on children as adolescents with regard to building and reinforcing leadership tendencies. The authoritative parent, however, is believed to produce teens with the highest likelihood for becoming effective leaders. Explaining the reasoning, the researchers note some key characteristics of the environment these parents provide. Authoritative parents have established limits and encourage independence within them. They are known to monitor their children and present clear standards for behavior and morals. While they are assertive, they are not restrictive and allow children to be socially responsible, cooperative, and to regulate their own choices. Why would it matter to know what research says about parenting styles if parents do not take a regular role in instruction or the function of schools? It matters because there are actions and a foundation of expectation and freedom which schools can borrow from to help shape the culture of their buildings.

Imagine a school where students have explicit parameters and boundaries, and similarly have the independence to shape and impact the world around them without restrictions to stifle their talents and visions. Mitra et al. (2012) describes just that when they explore the role of

leaders in enabling student voice. The first point of focus they make is on the democratic processes that are evident in all facets of Dewey Elementary School, which is noted for exceptional work and practice in enabling and sustaining student voice. Vibret et al. (2002) researched three different schools and examined practices that lead to authentic student voice that had a noticeable impact on the culture of buildings.

Vibret et al. (2002) examined three schools and their approaches to curriculum. They identified curriculum as fixed, curriculum as experience, and curriculum as critical practice. The first school used a fixed curriculum. This marked the school with a traditional deficit view and allowed for no real integration between curriculum and life skills students. The second, curriculum as experience, did integrate curriculum into real-world situations and even demonstrated the value of individual choice, responsibility, and independence; however, there was no evidence; however, there was no evidence to suggest these students were encouraged to tackle political or social justice issues. The third school, whose curriculum approach was "critical practice," saw school and learning as "work-in-progress" and demonstrated "insight into how a democratic transformative curriculum might look" (p. 102). Throughout this school, curriculum was integrated into "life." The administrator in this building, identified as Emily Carr Elementary in the research, posed a central concern that rooted their curriculum. It referenced Aristotle's question, "Since I cannot be entirely selfish and live a good life, what does it mean to live a good life with other people?" (p. 103). With this as a central focus and question, the work done at Emily Carr sat upon a foundation of "social, political and ethical lives of the children and community to whom the school belonged" (p. 103). This is a culture of leadership in which every child is expected to consistently work toward efforts of betterment and living well. It was

not something done to celebrate a holiday or movement; it was simply how school functioned. This provided an environment committed to the people who learned and lived there.

At this point in examining a culture of leadership, there is already a recurring theme: The presence of student voice. Not the voices of students elected to serve on a council, but of all students who are a part of the school community. Quinn and Owen (2016) dive deeply into this concept and make pointed observations of the culture necessary to develop and sustain student contribution to schools. One point they delve into is that of what is required of relationships between teachers and students when an environment seeks to enable and sustain student voice and contribution. They note that approaches to student voice often challenge power relations between teachers and students. It is necessary to shift from what was traditionally teacher-lead to student-run initiatives (p. 62). The view of students and their 'role' in school must change if a culture of student leadership is to thrive. Rudduck and Fielding (2006) explain that in order for authentic student participation to be established, teachers must be prepared "to 'see' young people differently" (p. 225). There is exploration of how teachers view students as receivers of information and teachers as those who deliver content. The traditional notion that students lack the maturity to make meaningful contributions cannot exist in a culture where student leadership is being built. Often, the researchers suggest, students have a great deal to contribute but have little guidance on how to do so. Therefore, a school must be prepared to help facilitate student learning and work them through these changes.

A culture of student-enabling-student leadership requires a commitment and value toward student voice. It must also establish a foundation of teachers acting on student opinion, a term Quinn and Owen quote as "teacher authenticity" (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006 as cited by Quinn & Owen, 2016). They consider it vital if a school is to support and sustain student voice in a

manner that allows this student voice to lead and enable change (Mitra, 2009 as cited by Quinn & Owen, 2016). Mitra et al. (2012) conducted a study in an elementary school where student voice was thriving. Through interviews and observations of administrator Stoicovy, researchers noted critical implementation expectations that contributed to the school's success. Establishing student voice efforts was not something administrator Stoicovy moved educators into quickly. Stoicovy had to remain flexible as initiatives were introduced. She was cognizant of where her staff was in the process of embracing the school's vision. Initial reform efforts began with staff members who were the most willing to adapt their practices to align with the school's vision. Although administrator Stoicovy demonstrated flexibility in implementing the initiative, one thing was consistent: the vision was the school's foundation. It was evident in every task tackled and all areas of reform and innovation. Power relations, a term coined by Mitra (2006), are defined as "The personalised learning environment invited students to participate in learning opportunities which were traditionally thought of as the teacher space" (Mitra, 2006 as cited in Quinn & Owen, 2016 p. 65). In order for the school environment to support the increase of student autonomy, power relations had to be considered.

Student Voice as Leadership

So far in the examination of literature focused on building leadership in children, there has been a repetitive term student voice (Bolstad, 2011; Damiani, 2010; Mays et al., 2016; Mitra, 2006; Mitra, 2007; Mitra, 2018; Mitra et al., 2012; McKibben, 2004; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; Vibert et al., 2002). The term student voice has grown in meaning and is defined with varying degrees of student impact. This literature review will examine common definitions as they pertain to their respective studies. Vibert et al. (2002) used their research on critical practice analysis of voice and curriculum as an opportunity to define voice from three conceptions. The

first conception was a literalist view where voice is defined as the right to express oneself and their personal views. In this construction, there is not an expectation that anything will come of the shared voice nor will views be taken into consideration. The second conception referred to voice as an authentic expression of an individual's self. If one considers the 6+1 trait writing model (Culhum, 2003) and compares 'voice' in that context, there will be a more refined definition. Voice essentially denotes that a person is represented in their tone, beliefs, personality, and stance on issues. The final conception of voice closely aligns with early examples of democratic pedagogy (Burgh, 2014). In this conception, voice is defined as influence and representation of one's concerns, experience, and view on the world. In contrast to early constructs, this voice is taken seriously and used within the context of applicable situations. It is a voice respected by adults, even to the extent that it might be argued against (Vibert et al., 2002).

Mitra and Serriere (2012) have a similar definition of voice. Although at the simplest level, student voice consists of a young person's sharing of their opinions and identification of problems with school faculty; in continued elaboration, the researchers come to settle on student voice as a collaborative process in which students and school adults address problems together. Students assume leadership roles where their voices are meaningful. Mitra and Serriere (2012) cite research which suggests an added increase in attachment to peers, teachers, schools and communities when student voices are prevalent. There is an increased sense of belonging which will be later examined in a section on the social impact and benefits of student voice.

Youth development is a key outcome when student voice is a critical component within a school setting (Mitra, 2006; Mitra, 2018). It can impact a student's desire to participate and become the stepping stone to improved motivation and connection. Mitra (2006) developed a

pyramid of student voice which looked at the increased value and high impact contributions brought about by student voice. The first level, "being heard" (p.7), involves adults actively listening and learning about students. "Collaborating with adults" (p.7)) is the second level and suggests situations in which students work with adults to make changes within the school setting. The final level is "building capacity for leadership" (p. 7) which invites students to share leadership with an explicit focus on enabling youth to tackle new, problem-solving experiences (Mitra, 2006).

Quinn and Owen (2016) explore the power of student voice in their single case study of an Australian school. The school was selected because it set out to integrate student voices and contribution into efforts of reform and improvement. Quinn and Owen (2016) explain that current literature is minimal when looking at whole school student voice approaches. In this study, Quinn and Owen noted explicit voice and contribution from students in the primary school. The student voice was evident in determining the focus of individual learning plans and selection of activities to drive student discovery learning. In a learning context, students worked in collaboration with adults to take responsibility for their learning by having "pedagogical dialogue" (p, 64) with teachers. In this example, we see an integration of voice in the academic learning setting which is equally impacting as voice for social change. It is important to consider a variety of successful implementations in order to get an accurate picture of how reform can succeed.

Impact of Student Voice/Leadership

Current Concerns

Reasoning for why leadership opportunities are important is not difficult to come by. Varying perspectives of how leadership should be offered could challenge the notion that not all

people are wired to be leaders. This perspective adopts a view of leadership in a traditional sense. However, in an article about the power of student voice, McKibben (2004) offers a more modern perspective (McKibben, as cited in Ullestad, 2009)

> Leadership defined by inclusivity and collaboration clearly represents a new way of thinking. . . a linear definition of leadership is anachronistic at best and alienating at worst. The new democratic model of leading that these students are practicing is less about power of the individual than it is about the power of the people. (p.3)

Using this perspective of leadership helps conceptualize student voice as leadership. When students have voice and leadership in their building, there is impact beyond benefits of the school and community. I propose a connection between this leadership and the impact it has on our disengaged students. Disconnection and disengagement are concerns noted in many schools, most of whom serve students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Quinn and Owen (2016) share concern of elementary aged students becoming more disengaged in school. Belfanz et al. (2007) considers disengagement in middle grades and explains that most students who eventually drop out of high school have been disengaged long before they entered high school. This disengagement is marked by disconnecting from what is expected and celebrated at school, not being involved in activities and events, and reducing effort for schoolwork and connections. Poor behavior and refusal to put forth effort into learning and schoolwork are critical indicators of students who will disengage from school.

Considering how prevalent disengagement is, it is difficult to not seek ways to connect young people before they have reached the brink of finally giving up on school. So, a shift to engaging students in meaningful ways becomes the focus of most student voice proponents.

Rudduck and Fielding (2006) take a critical look at student voice, warning about how a school might approach implementation of student voice practices in order to avoid pitfalls of rapid implementation. One aspect they illuminate is how student voice contributes to individual identity. Rudduck and Fielding (2006) explain that when young people are able to find their voice about things that matter to them, the implications surpass simply providing an opinion on things. When students find their voice they begin engaging with issues of personal identity. Once students have established their voice and can see how it contributes to a bigger, collaborative cause, the engagement begins to flourish.

Over 25 years of literature on student voice in educational research shone light to the importance of how a student is positioned in the process and participation of their voice, specifically highlighting the degree to which voice was 'taken seriously and acted upon' (Gillett-Swan & Baroutsis, 2024). Their extensive review of literature in student voice revealed increasing interest in student voice and how students can serve as active agents in change. However, the important point to note was the participation of children in voice research. Gillett-Swan & Baroutsis (2024) delve into the concept of participatory voice as a foundation of their inquiry. In their review they explore varying roles of participation as it relates to the student's direct involvement. These roles included: participant-led, active involvement, consultive, and tokenistic. They theorize that for voice to have meaningful impact on students, it must be seen to hold value and influence.

Bolstad (2011) explores student voice and how it compares, or transforms, into youth-adult partnership. In unraveling this complex topic, several pedagogical applications within varying definitions of student voice are revealed (Hipkins, 2010 as cited in Bolstad, 2011). Each of these note benefits to students, regardless of the tendency toward improvement or

transformation. Despite professional opinions about which theories hold the most truth or are most supported by evidence, there are notable impacts on students. Constructivist theories mark students as being actively building their own meaning from experiences and the collaboration needed between adult and child. Inquiry theories highlight voice as an option for students to identify and pursue questions of interest and meaning to them. Personal development theories mark student opportunities to express their voice to increase self-awareness and regulate their own thinking and behavior (Bolstad, 2011). Finally, goals are related to student voices as forums and a response to diversity where the rights of all students are enhanced because each child has a voice. Regardless of the theory or goal, each example of student voice shows benefit to students. Each example highlights students as the leader and creator, therefore affecting how they will engage in school.

A final look at current concerns leads Finnan and Kombe (2011), who write to explore attributes of an Accelerated Program for struggling students, to highlight traits of the students who are most disengaged. The authors explain schools' most struggling students often do not trust their ability to accomplish important tasks. These struggling students believe themselves unworthy of even belonging to class community and feel they are unable to participate in a curriculum they deem too challenging (Finn, 1989, as cited in Finnan & Kombe, 2011). Our most disengaged, struggling students simply do not show a connection with school. They are not attached and not a meaningful member in their own eyes. But, Mitra et al. (2012) posit, by fostering student voice in schools, kids can reengage in the classroom and school communities and grow in their attachment to schools.

Self-Efficacy and Connectedness

Efficacy and Agency

Albert Bandura explains self-efficacy within the framework of human agency (Bandura, 1993, Bandura et al. 1999). His work shows humans make connections to our own level of functioning through personal agency, and there is no more powerful factor than belief in our own capabilities to have control over events that affect our lives. These beliefs impact how people feel, behave, and motivate themselves through life (Bandura 1993). Self-efficacy is impacted by "motivation, worldview, demographics, social support, task difficulty, racial identity, performance expectancies, and learning style" (O'Sullivan & Strauser, 2009 p.251).

Self-efficacy is based on four sources. These are performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and psychological states (Bandura, 1977; O'Sullivan & Strauser, 2009; Maatta et al., 2016). Performance accomplishment is based on personal mastery and can be affected by achievement and/or failure on a given task. Vicarious experiences rely on social comparisons and are derived from watching others perform. The outcomes of the observed experiences can impact a student's expectations of accomplishing or failing at a similar task, especially if there is a relationship with the model. Gebauer et al. (2020) posit that these experiences not only impact self-efficacy beliefs but can create a positive classroom environment. Verbal persuasion exists when suggestions of success are provided by others. The impact of the persuasion rests on the value of the appraisal. When students are still working on a developing skill, they seek feedback from parents, teachers, and peers. It is this feedback that affects their confidence in ability (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Margolis & McCabe, 2006 as cited in Maatta et al., 2016). The final source, psychological states, expresses the influence of a body's reaction to a given situation or experience. If negative feelings occur during an experience, it can

impact perceived self-efficacy, even if a situation was not entirely negative. The recollection of fear or anxiety will mark the experience.

Self-efficacy beliefs can be easily identified in the development of personalized goals. Those with high efficacy are more likely to set challenging goals. They can visualize success in situations they have not yet encountered because they have an anchored belief in their ability to impact the world around them. This is not specific only to having knowledge of skills and processes. Instead, it marks the importance of being able to use what is known in difficult situations. Bandura (1993) explains a major task of thought is to enable people to predict unknown events and develop ways they can effectively control them. People must draw on knowledge and process it through a construction of options, integration of factors, tests and revisions and then remember what was successful and why. This is the core function of efficacy. An ability and belief we have control and impact over things in our world.

Another influence is the social comparisons people make between themselves and those around them (Bandura, 1993; Bandura et al. 1999; Issawi & Dauphin, 2017). These social comparisons are thought to have a significant impact on how individuals judge their own ability. These comparisons provide a frame for making connections, impacting self-esteem, and helping determine how much satisfaction can be obtained from accomplishments. As an example, Bandura (1993) explains that seeing oneself bettered by others has a negative effect on efficacy and leads to erratic thinking and worsening performance over time. However, he also notes that seeing oneself reach mastery could improve efficacy and promote positive thinking. Progress toward a goal is impacted by social comparison. Social cognitive theory explains that behavior is socially situated (Bandura, 2018). It is in the social system that adaptation and change take root. A person's agency does not simply react to social systems but operates generatively and

proactively. Social systems provide opportunity structures for development and functioning which are foundational in the development of agency, for which the central contributor is self-efficacy. (Bandura, 1999). The way a person's progress or performance is socially evaluated can have a strong impact on future courses of action because it determines their self-efficacy appraisal and the likelihood of attempting similar subsequent experiences (Bandura, 1993).

Efficacy is impacted by other systems of belief as well. One important system is perceived controllability. This is the view about how controllable an environment appears. A person who is efficacious has less challenge in envisioning a situation as malleable, despite difficulty or obstacles. In contrast, people riddled with self-doubt do not see a possible outcome in which their efforts or attempts made any impact. Bandura (1993) notes an important implication with anxiety as an example (p.134). Findings show anxiety is reduced when a strong sense of efficacy is evident. Environment plays an important role in shaping beliefs of personal efficacy and the paths our lives take by directly influencing our choices. Simply put, people will avoid situations they do not believe they are capable of handling. Without personal efficacy in situations that might be challenging (and positive), the likelihood of participating and thriving is minimal. People make decisions about what they are capable of achieving, and this cultivates activities, social networks, and environments, which can determine the course of our lives (Bandura, 1993).

A final consideration when connecting self-efficacy, and the relationships we can construct between it and leadership, is simply stated in Bandura et al. (1999) research on self-efficacy and pathways to childhood depression. Bandura et al. note "Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have ill incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties" (p.258). Consider the disengaged student who contributes little work, is not

connected in school, and finds repetitive cycles of problematic behavior. It is possible their positive leadership, school contribution, and actionable voice have not been developed. There is no reason to believe they can affect the world in positive ways because they have never had the chance. A person's belief in their effectiveness can determine if future attempts at similar situations will occur. It also determines the path one takes and the behavior settings they will choose in the future (Bandura, 1977).

The impact of self-efficacy is a marker for future actions and belief in self. With strong perceived self-efficacy, a person is less likely to avoid difficult situations and more willing to confront challenges as they arise (Bandura, 1977). When children are given opportunity to build efficacy in meaningful experiences, they become more likely to accept obstacles as less problematic. People who are preoccupied with self-doubt will be less inclined to adjust their actions to produce change in unwanted situations. It becomes more difficult to overcome disturbing thought patterns and can generate anxiety in taxing situations (Bandura, 1993). This can directly impact future goals, including a child's goals for their occupational future. According to Bandura (1999), students as young as middle school already begin to form their "occupational efficacy" as it is rooted in their beliefs of personal efficacy. Students without master experiences may become limited in their future goals and be unwilling to reach for an inspirational future.

Self-efficacy serves as a fundamental factor in human agency (Bandura, 2001). Humans demonstrate agency when they act with intentionality, self-confidence, forethought, and self-reflection to influence events around them. Choices and actions make a difference through human agency. Many factors contribute to how agency is developed, including social structures. The school environment and experiences within that setting serve as a foundation for many

agentic opportunities for children. Another major factor is one's "judgment of one's efficacy" (Bandura, 2018). Without a belief that one can have an impact, perform a task, or make a difference in a given situation, they are not like to act or to persevere when difficult situations arise. The relationship between self-efficacy and agency is bound in theory and action. "Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their abilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives." (Bandura, 1993)

Efficacy Measures

Albert Bandura (Pajares & Urdan, 2006) outlined a guide to creating assessment measures of self-efficacy and noted a few critical features of effective scales. The first feature of an effective scale was to ensure self-efficacy was distinguished between self-esteem, outcome expectancies, and locus of control. Bandura also recommended a scale of 0 to 100 as opposed to a traditional 5-interval scale (Pajares & Urdan, 2006). Measures of self-efficacy should pose questions using the frame "I can" in order to establish a framework for judging one's ability to accomplish a given task.

Other researchers approach measuring agency through the analysis of previous studies. Zimmerman et al. (2019) explored agency as empowerment when seeking to measure these constructs in adolescents. These authors examined multiple tools and studies of empowerment, noting a lack of applicability to early adolescence. There are also notable differences between cultures and how empowerment is assessed. Self-efficacy, voice, and agency are viewed as relevant concepts to explore in children. However, interpretations of self-efficacy, voice, and agency result in several measurements of these concepts. Zimmerman et al. (2019) note these differences in their review of agentic measures. Researchers identified similarities in various

measures with constructs assessed in the Youth Social Self-Efficacy and Youth Academic Self-Efficacy Scales (Muris, 2001 as cited in Zimmerman et al., 2019). It was this analysis and correlation that led to the authors creating a questionnaire during their study of agency.

A literature review conducted by Cavazzoni et al. (2021) explored a collection of agentic measures. Notable findings in this review articulated the same observations as previous research as it pertained to varied definitions and interpretations of agentic components. In 34 studies that met the eligibility criteria Cavazzoni et al. (2012) found previously established measures like Adolescent Autonomy Questionnaire, Pearlin Mastery Scale, and Children's Hope Scale. Other researchers created their own measures. Herein lies the problem--without a shared definition of agency, the measurements are inconsistent. This review of literature provided optional measures to take into consideration as this study gets underway.

Connectedness

Student connectedness is generally defined by a sense of belonging, attachment, bonding, and engagement at school. It is a newer concept of study as the rise for social emotional supports becomes more prevalent among today's youth. Students who are connected at school are more likely to succeed (Blum, 2005). Children with feelings of connectedness in elementary school are also less likely to become involved in dangerous behaviors like drug use, alcohol use, and sexual behavior in later stages of their lives (Hodges, et al., 2018). Additionally, student performance in academics is also impacted by a child's connectedness. Students with a strong sense of belonging to their school community demonstrate higher resilience and overall improved social emotional health (Hodges et al., 2018).

Analysis of two longitudinal studies conducted by Catalono, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, and Hawkins (2004) provide a deeper insight into connectedness and bonding, by situating the definition within two interdependent elements. These two elements are attachment by relationships within the school and commitment through investment at school (Catalono et al., 2004). Their study also posits three developmental theories that provide a foundation for connectedness. Attachment theory, control theory, and the social development model are presented as fundamental to understanding student bonding within the context of a school.

Attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1973; Bowlby, 1979; Bowlby, 1982, as cited in Catalano et al., 2004) explores the bonding benefits of children to parents and other adults. It explains that meaningful attachment with adults can improve a child's resilience in the face of difficult circumstances. School offers a foundation for adult-child relationships to flourish, and these bonds impact a child's developmental experience and decrease negative experiences. Control theory (Hirschi, 1969, as cited in Catalano et al., 2004) looks at bonding within the social construct of a school as directly reducing problematic behavior. The elements critical to creating school bonds should include involvement, attachment, investment, and belief in school values. The final theory, Social Development Model (Catalono et al., 2004), was developed by the researchers. It posits that children learn patterns of behavior from their social environment. When students are socialized through perceived involvement/interactions with others, actual involvement, and perceived rewards, then a social bond of attachment develops (Catalano et al., 2004).

In his report on school connectedness, Robert Blum (2005) posits that research has taught us that school is the most "stabilizing force in the lives of children," second only to their family.

Blum identified themes that suggest a set of qualities that positively impact a child's connectedness with school.

These seven qualities seem to influence students' positive attachment to school:

- Having a sense of belonging and being part of a school
- Liking school
- Perceiving that teachers are supportive and caring
- Having good friends within a school
- Being engaged in their own current and future academic progress
- Believing that discipline is fair and effective
- Participating in extracurricular activities (p. 1)

Blum (2005) also posits that research in connectedness also concludes that non-academic activities can also produce successful students and school connections. Extracurricular activities offer children a structured environment where they can express their uniqueness and have control in activities of their choosing. School-based activities can also influence a child's social relationships and developmental process because they are provided through a structured environment (Darling, 2005). Extracurricular activities and interacting with peers in a non-academic setting help students focus on developing skills. Due to the platform of shared interest and interactions, extracurricular activities also offer reprieve from other daily concerns and can positively impact a child's emotional health (Darling, 2005).

School connectedness not only benefits students. There is also a correlation between the sense of school connectedness and a positive school environment (Blum, 2005). Reform efforts promote increased student choice and engagement in meaningful opportunities based on

children's interests (Blum, 2005). In order for schools to be engaging for students, Blum (2005) quotes four important principles, identified by The National Academy of Sciences. These principles are: high-quality academic standards, personalized learning, relevance, and flexibility (p.8). Spires et al. (2008) analyzed data collected during research with middle school students. Although the focus of their study was specific to technology, two key themes emerged as they pertain to student engagement. The first of these is that students want to be engaged and excited at school. The second is a desire for meaningful experiences. Students want school to be more relatable, especially as it pertains to careers and their future.

Considering the implications of school connectedness, schools should consider how they are offering bonding opportunities for students. Not all students have access to extracurricular activities within the context of a school. Most elementary schools do not offer non-academic opportunities throughout the school day. However, these experiences prove to be beneficial to students. Therefore, it is imperative for a school community to create opportunities for children to be involved in meaningful ways. It is this bond between school and child that can improve future experiences and a sense of success for the students.

This researcher posits that student motivation is a contributing factor when examining success in and out of the classroom. Without a belief that a child can produce the desired effect of a given activity or opportunity, there is little incentive to act. It is the judgment of one's efficacy that is "the foundation of human aspiration, motivation, and accomplishments" (Bandura, 1997). Motivation is rooted in self-belief and plays a critical role in future actions (Bandura, 1993).

Catalano et al. (2004) examined interventions to improve school connectedness by conducting two longitudinal studies. This research analyzed interventions for improvement at the end of second grade, the beginning of fifth grade, and the end of sixth grade. The outcomes of the fifth-grade cohort demonstrated a positive impact on school bonding. There were also reports of lower delinquency and alcohol use.

The concept of connectedness as presented in this literature review addresses the sense of belonging and bonding between children and their school community. Although multiple assessments exist to gauge social emotional wellness, not all are specific to this area. Hodges et al. (2018) evaluated multiple measures of school connectedness. One critical feature of the most effective measures is that the students be self-reporting. This allows for personal perceptions and authentic student voice. Often, adult measures of student connectedness can be misleading. The truest measure is one taken directly from student experience. Some critical elements of connectedness measures will assess if a child's needs of "autonomy, competence and relatedness are met within the school environment" (Hodges et al., 2018). Zulling et al. (2014) also explore connectedness measures, but most of the measures were specific to school climate and safety. Defined as "Elementary Student Engagement Instrument," Appleton & Christensen (2004) present a 5-interval scale that measures connection to school through self-measures of student perception. These perceptions examine beliefs about performance, relationships, rules, future goals, safety, and emotions.

A longitudinal study conducted in 2007 in Philadelphia sought to analyze identifiable trends among students with low school engagement (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). Four signs of predictive, negative behavior and markers of disengagement were noted throughout their data. These included: attendance 80% or less, failing math, failing English, and receiving out of

school suspensions. In this study, all of these flags were specific to incidents occurring in the 6th grade. Recommendations for improved engagement were connected to a program promoting improved engagement. The same study also focused on increasing a shared community within a school setting.

Motivation is closely connected with self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 1997) and school connectedness (Blum, 2005). It is also noted as a critical component to a child's success at school. Wigfield et al. (2015) expressed that theories and research focus on goals, beliefs, and values as the primary influencers of motivation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, Wigfield, Eccles et al., 2006 as cited in Wigfield et al., 2015). It is the child's school experience and the relationship to their values and interests that will most directly impact their motivation. Wigfield et al. (2015) posit that a child's motivation in school is directly related to their choice about tasks and activities, how intensely they are engaged in these activities, their performance in selected activities, and their persistence in pursuit of the activity. Patterns of motivation decline as students get older, but children's beliefs, goals and values will consistently influence social and academic motivation (Wigfield, et al., 2015).

Connecting Theories and Perspectives

Although some researchers posit vast differences between constructivist views on education and social cognitive theory, this literature review presents similarities that bond the two meaningfully in order to construct a perspective through which to view the need to empower students through voice. Bandura (2018) explains that self-efficacy is the root of human agency. He also makes connections between agency and human motivation. Within a school setting, it is imperative to align opportunities for students so that they are meaningful to the child. This

supports the self-efficacy theory in that it is through experience that a student builds perceived efficacy and therefore impacts their later views about their capabilities and their future.

Analysis of social cognitive theory and agency prompted Martin (2004) to draw connections as expressed above. Martin contests that work based on social cognitive theory has "assumed a broadly constructivist position" (p. 136). Specific to agency, Martin posited a more cohesive connection between constructivist and socioculturalist views. Martin noted that Bandura does not accept constructivist and sociocultural beliefs as contradictory concepts of behavior (p. 136).

John Dewey, a progressive educational theorist, presented his pedagogic creed which expressed the role of education, schools, subject matter, methods, and school and social progress (1897). It is within this creed that relationships are created between the importance of efficacy and the ways education can create positive learning for students. Dewey (1897) begins his creed by expressing that education comes from "the stimulation of the child's powers by demands of the social situations in which he finds himself" (p.34). This establishes the importance of the social construct of school and the need for children to be empowered within the social construct. It is a child's instincts, posits Dewey (1897), that should furnish the material and starting point of education. A child should have "command" of themselves so capabilities are developed, and experiences occur within personal tastes and interests. Dewey explains that children are social, which makes relatable experiences an important factor in tailoring educational encounters.

Dewey (1897) also reiterated that school is a social institution and should be constructed to become more than preparation for the future. It should represent the present and connected with that is meaningfulness to the child. This directly influenced Dewey's view of subject matter.

It is essential for learning to be presented in relation to a student's social life and provide students the chance to develop new attitudes and interest in experiences.

Some research connects John Dewey's beliefs (1897) to the Cosmopolitan perspective (2009). This perspective is rooted in a loyalty to oneself and values with an openness to new influences (Hansen et al., 2009). It is a responsive view that rejects globalization. It is by preserving an individual's integrity and that of a community that values of both are nourished and sustained. It offers plural perspectives in which values are foundational to building, understanding, and growing within a community. One need not be aligned to a singular set of values, but rather embrace reflection of values. When considering the construct of most schools, it is evident that the values expressed represent a white middle-class system with a focus on obtaining skills to become successful in a post-secondary educational environment. This does not always reflect the values of the very students our schools serve. By adopting a cosmopolitan perspective, one can reflect on these values as it illuminates what gives people "meaning, direction and purpose" (Hansen et al., 2009).

David Hansen (2009) notes the importance of John Dewey's view of "the space between" self-that-was and self-in-formation. He posits that this space as a foundational element in relating Dewey to the cosmopolitan perspective. The movement between Dewey's defined "space between" enriches and expands a person. This movement, coupled with the expressed importance of interest (Hansen, 2009), builds a connection for students. This is essentially an authentic connection between a person and their community experience; it joins interest and values with a primary community in which these values need also exist.

Case Study Research

Yazan (2015) compares three case study methods to identify key features and differences between methodologists Robert K. Yin, Sharan Merriam, and Robert E. Stake to share insight with novice researchers interested in conducting case study research. As a researcher, Yazan positions himself to disseminate knowledge from the three main methodologies as a guide for further studies. The work of Robert K. Yin is central to this literature review. Yin defines a case study as a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (Yin, 2002 as cited in Yazan, 2015 p 138).

Based on Yin's methodological perspective, a case study is an empirical study that investigates cases by addressing the "how" and "why" of a phenomenon (Yazan, 2015). The design includes five elements: "a study's questions; its propositions, if any; its unit(s) of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings" (Yazan, 2015). It is first necessary to examine literature and propositions regarding the study before collecting any data. Yinian's perspective allows for minor changes in design, even after data collection has started. However, major changes require a study redesign and review of the design conceptualization.

Data analysis under Yin's methodology requires a sequence of examination, categorization, tabulation, and recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence (Yin, 2002 as cited in Yazan, 2015). Caution is expressed as adhering to a strict, well-structured data analysis process is crucial to ensure validity and reliability.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter presented common themes and beliefs about the impact student voice and leadership can have on students, staff, and the culture of a building. It is recognized as a significant contributor to engaging students who might not otherwise feel connected in schools. Additionally, the literature notes a wide range of ways researchers and educators define student leadership and student voice. Although there are differing interpretations and measures of student autonomy, there is empirical evidence of its significance in children's connection to school and their success beyond elementary years.

A focus on student voice, which seeks to promote collaboration with adults and peers, one that is anchored in meaningful context and problems, and moves toward positive change, will directly impact students' perceived self-efficacy. This includes students who are already engaged and successful and school, along with the disengaged who demonstrate little motivation to participate and succeed. An authentic environment that cultivates student voice for influence and representation of concerns directly affecting the community and school must have a positive effect on children. This researcher speculates that Bandura's research in cognitive processes provides a framework for educators to establish a structure in which student voice becomes the path toward enhancing perceived self-efficacy.

Contribution of the Study

This study will add to the definition of student voice by providing a format to engage fifth-grade students in autonomous contributions to their school community. It will allow for an examination of student voice and motivation over time through a case study of students who represent varied cognitive abilities and backgrounds. The research will give voice to children in

their self-perception and illuminate potential causal relationships between engagement and the development of agency.

Student leadership in these terms is an underexplored topic, and traditional school-based activities have a history of exclusion. This study will expand readers' conceptions of leadership and offers student voice and autonomy as a means of enriching leadership experiences. It also presents a design for enhancing leadership that takes place outside of the academic setting, but is still supported within the structure of a public school. Opportunities to replicate, improve, and enrich the exploratory program could also come to light from the data analysis in this study. Quantitative and qualitative measures could offer insight into other deeper student social-emotional considerations which will impact future practices.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study is to contribute to research as it pertains to student empowerment and student voice in an elementary school setting. This research will further examine how opportunities such as authentic student contribution and student voice impact a child's perception of self-efficacy, specifically for students in fifth grade, typically aged ten and eleven. Students can be empowered to have an impact on the world around them, especially within the structure of a school. The level of empowerment and student voice varies in complexity and impact according to a myriad of elements. These are defined in the literature review as expression of oneself and their personal views (Vibret et al., 2002), identification of problems and collaboration with adults (Mitra & Serriere, 2012), and building a capacity for leadership (Mitra, 2006).

One way children can be provided empowering opportunities is to make critical contributions to their environment. A critical contribution, for the purposes of this study, is defined by the researcher as an authentic service to the school as a member working toward a meaningful goal. Students can contribute to their educational setting by identifying areas in need of improvement, setting goals to make change, and participating in efforts to reach these goals.

Setting

The setting for this research study was a public rural elementary school serving 250 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Students attending the school (pseudonym Morton Elementary) participate in a traditional school schedule, Monday through Friday from 7:55 AM – 3:30 PM. The location was selected because the researcher was a school administrator in this

setting during the time of the study. This exploratory study included the facilitation of a program initiative with the purpose of engaging students in a unique approach to inclusive leadership.

Participants

This study involved 33 fifth-grade students aged ten and eleven. Only students who participated in the program from its inception were included in the study. Program participants were not limited due to behavior, attendance, or extracurricular activities. Any child who had permission and expressed an interest was involved in this study.

The student sample was convenient and purposeful. Students were enrolled in Morton Elementary during the 2022-2023 school year. The study participants were actively engaged in the contribution program and represented the demographics listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Student Participants

Grade	Gender Distribution	Special Education Services	English Language Learners	Economically Disadvantaged
5	Boys: 13 Girls: 20	30%	9%	61%

Program

The Contribution or "Fifth-Grade Jobs" Program was introduced and facilitated by the researcher as described in more detail in Chapter 1. Every child in the fifth grade at Morton Elementary was given the opportunity to participate in the program. All students, despite their participation, were included in the preliminary brainstorm as described in the program description in Chapter 1. The researcher worked with fifth-graders to facilitate and facilitated a conversation based on the following questions: *1. How does our school need to be improved? 2. How can fifth grade students help improve our school community? 3. What daily, weekly, etc. contributions can fifth graders make to benefit/help our school community?* The students

generated a list of ideas during a brainstorming session. Ideas were shared orally and were recorded by the researcher. Some jobs that were shared by students needed more clarity, and that was sought during the brainstorm session. The researcher asked clarifying questions throughout the discussion so each job was clearly defined.

The researcher, serving in the capacity of the school administrator, reviewed the brainstorm list. Taking into consideration the limitations of the school setting, confidentiality concerns, master scheduling options, and other factors outside of the researcher's control, a final list of jobs was configured. The final jobs listed reflected the recommendations of fifth-grade students as ones they felt were important and relevant to their school community, and fell within the allowable confines of the elementary school setting. This final list is presented below for clarification.

Student Contribution/Jobs

Student contribution is defined as school jobs determined by fifth-grade students to benefit the school community. These jobs were identified by the participants in a brainstorming session.

Kindergarten Role Model

Fifth grade students will assist kindergarten students in a classroom setting under the indirect supervision and guidance of the classroom teacher. They will assist kindergarten students in academic tasks, social tasks, simple redirection, daily routines, class activities, and other events of a social and/or academic nature. (30 minutes – 2 days per week)

Lunch Helper

Fifth grade students will assist and monitor kindergarten students at lunch under the indirect supervision of school staff working in the cafeteria and playground setting. Assistance may

include tasks like opening milk, reminders to attend to task, helping students line up, gathering needed items, sitting beside students as friendly lunch buddies, pushing students on the swings, playing games with students, helping students play games with one another, and providing various reminders of safety and kindness as needed. (30 minutes – 2 days per week)

Recess & Snack Helper

Fifth grade students will assist recess supervisors by playing with kindergarten students at recess, pushing on them on the swings, playing games with them, helping students play games with one another, distribute snacks and milk to students in the classroom and/or cafeteria, assist students in obtaining or opening snacks/milk, and providing various reminders of safety and kindness as needed. (30 minutes – 2 days per week)

Kindergarten PE Helper

Fifth-grade students will assist the PE teacher during Kindergarten PE class by being a partner, demonstrating activities, guiding and supporting students in activities throughout the 30-minute class. (2 days per week)

Outside Flag

Fifth-grade students will raise the flags outside in front of the building each morning prior to the start of school. They will also lower and store the flags at the end of each school day. (Daily)

Champs Cards

Fifth-grade students will visit all classrooms each Friday afternoon at a specified time t of the day to collect Champs Cards. They will arrive to the class, get the attention of the teacher and then allow students from the class to come up and turn in their cards. Students turning in cards will then select a small prize from the goody basket. At the conclusion of the card collection,

each Champs Card worker will randomly draw two names from the collected cards. These students will receive bigger, weekly prize. (30 minutes – 1 time per week)

Announcements

Fifth-grade students will use the PA system to share the morning or afternoon announcements. These announcements will include any important information, celebrations, reminders, lunch changes, etc. During the morning announcements, one student will lead the Pledge of Allegiance. (10 minutes – Daily)

Daily Joke

A fifth-grade student will select and read a morning and afternoon joke at the conclusion of the announcements. These will be collected from students throughout the school year. (10 minutes – Daily)

Buddy Reader

Fifth-graders will work one-on-one with kindergarten, 1st or 2nd grade students who were selected by their classroom teachers to have additional reading time with older peers. The Fifth-graders will help students select books and will read with them in a designated location in the building. In some cases, the fifth-grader will read to the younger students, and other times the younger student will read. (30 minutes – 1 day per week)

Playground Maintenance

Fifth-grade students will walk the playground before the final dismissal bell to collect any items that were left behind on the playground including jackets, balls, lunchboxes, etc. They will pick up trash, return lost items to "Lost and Found" and report any concerns to the office. (10 minutes – Daily)

Dismissal Slips

Fifth-grade students will report to the office fifteen minutes before dismissal. They will receive the dismissal slips that are written by office staff and organized by classroom teacher. These will be hand delivered to each classroom. (10 minutes – Daily)

Breakfast/Lunch List

Fifth-grade students will collect walk past each classroom door to collect breakfast/lunch lists each morning. If they are not ready, they will remind the classroom teacher and wait for the list. All lists will be delivered to the office (10 minutes – Daily)

Hall Monitor/Greeter

Fifth-grade students will stand in select areas in the hall, in the front of the building or the back of the building (students exit and enter Morton Elementary from several locations). These students will welcome staff and students each morning with a "good morning" or "hello". During dismissal they will tell staff and students good bye and observe for appropriate hallway behavior. (15 minutes – Daily)

Yearbook

Fifth-grade students will work with a parent volunteer to design, organize and complete the school yearbook. This is an after-school job. (1 hour – once or twice per month)

Photographer

Fifth-grade students will be assigned to special or daily events throughout the year. They will be responsible for taking pictures with one of two school cameras. These photographs will be used for the yearbook and/or Facebook page. (time dependent upon event)

Teacher Cart

Fifth-grade student will organize and manage a snack cart created for school staff. This is a special event cart that is taken around the building approximately one time per month containing

various snacks for adults to have. Students will select items, arrange them on the cart, and walk through the building on Teacher Cart Day to deliver free snacks to the adults. (30 minutes – 1 time per month)

Shout Out Host

Fifth-grade students will assist the principal (or host alone if desired) each Friday morning during Shout Outs. Shout Outs is a weekly celebration to recognize students for positive academic and behavior achievements, and a weekly celebration of birthdays. This is done schoolwide via Google Meet. The Host will either participate alongside or alone for the entirety of the Shout Out event. (20 minutes – 1 time per week)

Organizing Participants

After the final job list was constructed and the job duties defined, it was organized into an online Google form. All fifth-grade students were given the form. The first question asked students, "Would you like to obtain a school job?". If students answered "yes", they were taken to the list of student-generated jobs. They were allowed to select as many jobs as they were interested in, with the understanding that students could not have more than one to two jobs total. They were encouraged to select any that were of interest to them.

Once these answers are collected, the researcher reviews student schedules, job requirements, and other building-specific information to help narrow down student choices. Due to master scheduling, special services, and tiered supports, the researcher had to narrow each child's options prior to their future interview. Although this did impact the element of choice, only the jobs selected by individual students were presented as options.

After each child's list was finalized, the researcher met with students in a one-on-one setting to 'interview' for their job. Through the interview process and one-on-one discussion, the

researcher offered the child one or two job options. If accepted, students met later for an orientation to discuss the details of the job and began planning for the first day of work. Students received a special job badge they would wear while performing their job. This badge had their picture, name, job title, and job details (day of week/time of day). These were distributed prior to the first day of work and were the responsibility of each child to take care of. Once all interviews were complete the jobs began.

Students participated in these contributions/jobs for the entire school year. Quarterly check-ins allowed students to express other interests, concerns and/or celebrations. The researcher met with students to discuss their thoughts on their jobs and gather other data for the purpose of the study. Fifth-Grade Jobs were supported throughout the year by teachers, classified staff, and support staff. At no time was a staff member uncooperative to the process.

Research Design

The study was a mixed-methods exploratory case study situated under Yinian methodology (2014). This exploratory study investigated a potential causal relationship between student autonomy and perception of self. The perception of self, explored self-efficacy and connectedness. Student autonomy in this case study was the result of participation in the contribution program at Morton Elementary School. Based on theories in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 2018) and child development (Issawi & Dauphin, 2017) this study will assume an analytic generalization where a "previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study" (Yin, 2014).

Research Questions

This dissertation explores the concept of student autonomy as it relates to a program structured for student input and school contribution. Understanding the importance of student

voice and the influence a child's experiences can have on their self-perception, the research sought to answer the following questions:

How can schools design opportunities to develop student autonomy and agency?

1. How does student voice/autonomy impact a child's perceived self-efficacy?
2. How does student agency change through a program experience?
3. Is motivation and connectedness impacted by social contributions?

Data Collection

Quantitative

The study began with an age-appropriate questionnaire to gauge student response to the following topics: self-efficacy and school connectedness. In order to conduct data analysis, particularly with the quantitative measure, fidelity was important. The questionnaire was distributed in a small group setting with staff available for read-aloud accommodations and clarification throughout. The results served as the baseline data. Questions reflected the aforementioned topics, with guidance from Albert Bandura's theory (1977) and suggestions in generating measures for self-efficacy. According to Bandura, "Self-efficacy appraisals reflect the level of difficulty individuals believe they can surmount (Pajares & Urdan, 2006). The measures should include a scale from 0-100 because it serves as a "stronger predictor of performance than a 5-interval scale (Parajares & Urdan, 2006). However, due to the age of the participants, a scale of 10 was determined to be more appropriate. Self-efficacy perceptions have multiple consequences to be tested. Therefore, "There is no single validity coefficient. Construct validation is an ongoing process in which both the validity of the postulated causal structure in

the conceptual scheme and the self-efficacy measures are being assessed." (Pajares & Urdan, 2006). Measures of self-efficacy are modeled per Bandura's guide.

Table 3.2 Student Questionnaire - Part 1 Self-Efficacy (Appendix A)

Rate your degree of confidence by recording a number from 0 to 100 using the scale given below.

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100	
Cannot do at all — Moderately can do — Highly certain can do	
Get adults to help me when I have social problems	_____
Get adults to help me when I get stuck on school work	_____
Finish my homework assignments on time	_____
Get myself to do school work	_____
Always concentrate on school subjects in class	_____
Complete tasks I have I am unsure of	_____
Do the kinds of things needed to be a school leader	_____
Resist peer pressure to do things in school that can get me in trouble	_____
Control my temper	_____
Live up to what my teachers expect of me	_____
Live up to what I expect of myself	_____
Carry on conversations with others	_____
Make and keep friends	_____
Work well in a group	_____
Express my opinions when others disagree with me	_____
Speak up when I feel something is unfair	_____
Speak up when I feel something is unsafe	_____

Modeled after the same framework for self-efficacy measures, the area of connectedness will also operate on a 0 to 100 scale. The questions will be presented following the self-efficacy measures and will capture student perceptions of connectedness to the school community.

Measures assessing school connectedness used across research studies. Zullig et al. (2014) evaluated these connectedness measures and determined the *SCM* (Hodges et al., 2018) and 35-item version of *SEI* as having the strongest psychometric properties which best measure student connectedness (Appleton & Christenson, 2004). Questions from the *SEI* were converted to the recommended scale and included in the student questionnaire to measure student connectedness.

Two additional questions were added to the questionnaire to provide insight into the program. From a program perspective, the administrator sought to understand if students perceived a change in their impact at school and the importance of their attendance as a possible outcome of the program.

Table 3.3 Student Questionnaire Part 2 - Connectedness (Appendix A)

Rate your agreement by recording a number from 0 to 100 using the scale given below

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Do not agree					Moderately agree					Highly agree

I have friends at school (SEI)	_____
Adults at my school listen to students (SEI)	_____
Adults care about me as a person (SEI)	_____
School is important for reaching my goals (SEI)	_____
Teachers are there for me when I need them (SEI)	_____
The rules at my school are fair (SEI)	_____

Students here respect what I have to say (SEI) _____

Students can make a difference at school _____

It matters if I come to school _____

The questionnaire was distributed again in May, near the conclusion of the program. The data reflects each individual student's perception as described above. Comparisons between the initial and final questionnaire answers were made to determine changes in connectedness from the implementation and conclusion of the program.

Qualitative

In order to triangulate data and provide insight into the quantitative measures, interviews, focus groups, and observations were conducted. Data collected were incorporated with quantitative data to present a holistic view of student perception throughout the course of the program.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 of the 33 program participants. The questions addressed areas of self-efficacy and school connectedness. The interview was used as additional data to provide more in-depth understanding of student beliefs about the program. The interviews were conducted at the six-month mark of the program in a one-on-one format and digitally recorded and transcribed. The questions were asked of participants, and in the case where a participant might not directly answer the question, it was rephrased and posed again. In some cases, additional clarifying questions were asked to provide more detail than the participant originally provided. The order of questions varied on occasion if there was a more natural progression from the participant's answer in connection with a future question. By the conclusion of the interview, all questions were asked. One participant did not provide clear

answers, regardless of prompting and rephrasing. The six-month mark allowed students to participate in the program for the majority of the school year before data collection concluded.

Table 3.4 Student Interview Questions (Appendix B)

1. How easily can you make and keep friends at school?
2. How well can you stand up when things are unsafe or unfair?
3. How can you hold up to your teacher and personal expectations?
4. How well do you serve as a leader in the school?
5. Explain your thoughts about your current job.
6. Explain why you think we should or should not keep the 5th Grade Jobs Program next year.
7. Share any changes or requests you may have.

Field observations were conducted twice for seventeen participants during their contribution time--once in the first four weeks of the program and again during the 18th week of the program. Each observation lasted approximately ten minutes. A scale was used to examine defined observable traits. The scale followed the aforementioned measures of self-efficacy and connectedness. These data points served as potential themes for coding during the analysis stage.

Table 3.5 Student Observation (Appendix C)

Observer: _____ Date: _____ Time Start: _____ Time End: _____

Student Job/Contribution _____ Class Size (if applicable): _____

Observable Action	**Minimal demonstration (1)**	**Average demonstration (5)**	**Maximum demonstration (10)**
Adult Cooperation	Does not cooperate with adult requests	Sometimes cooperates with adult requests	Consistently cooperates with adult requests

Initiation	Does not initiate interaction with adults/students	Sometimes initiates interaction with adults/students	Consistently initiates interaction with adults/students
Patience	Does not demonstrate patience for others	Sometimes demonstrates patience for others	Consistently demonstrates patience for others
Personal Management	Does not control personal emotions	Sometimes controls personal emotions	Consistently demonstrates personal emotions
Attention	Does not pay attention to the task	Sometimes pays attention to the task	Consistently pays attention to the task
Rules	Does not follow or enforces rules	Sometimes follows or enforces rules	Consistently follows or enforces rules
Initiative	Does not exhibit initiative outside of prescribed job	Sometimes exhibits initiative outside of prescribed job	Consistently exhibits initiative outside of prescribed job
Attentiveness	Does not show attentiveness during contribution	Sometimes demonstrates attentiveness during contribution	Consistently demonstrates attentiveness during contribution
Total	Total score	Total score	Total score

Final data was collected during a single focus group session. This session occurred during the halfway point of the program. Focus group participants were selected to reflect a fair sampling of the student participants with different jobs and backgrounds. Among those who represented different demographics, the selection was randomly chosen by participant number. All students joined the researcher in a collaborative setting in which everyone had equal access to the questions. An unoccupied Zoom meeting was started to record the focus group conversation. Questions were posed to the group to solicit discussion, and every participant was allowed to respond. In the case that one participant may have done the majority of the talking, the researcher prompted others to respond before proceeding to the next question.

Table 3.6 Focus Group Questions (Appendix D)

1. How well do you cooperate with staff and students?
2. How important is your opinion within the context of the school?
3. Are adults available within the school when you need them? Explain.
4. How well do you work with groups?
5. How do you handle disagreements in class or in your job?

Data Analysis

Quantitative

Data from the questionnaires were scored per student. A paired T-test identified any statistically significant measures. A paired T-test allows comparison of two measures taken from the same student. Statistically significant results were reported as they reflect changes in any of the measured topic areas. As mentioned, the questionnaires were given to participants twice, and in both instances, the questions were identical, allowing for the researcher to look for statistically significant changes across the questionnaires. Data were analyzed and considered within the framework of the research questions.

Qualitative

Data from the interviews, observations, and focus groups were collected from transcribed audio, collected via a recording device. Coding themes were identified based on responses. Major themes and underlying themes were presented in conjunction with the aforementioned quantitative data to best explain the results. In an effort to triangulate data, themes from the quantitative data served as a foundation for organization. However, within the context of a case study, these data will also provide an enriched perspective of self-efficacy and connectedness, which might not otherwise be observable within the quantitative measures.

Framework of Research Study

Based on the conditions of the study and research in student voice, this dissertation study is framed within the context of perceived efficacy and other measures associated with student development. Analysis of data was constructed in these contexts and serves to answer research questions as they pertain to student autonomy and the causal relationship with self-perception as defined by self-efficacy and school connectedness.

This case study's theoretical framework served to define and measure the outcomes of an exploratory examination of student voice within an elementary setting. As expressed in the literature review, opportunities for student voice are often limited within the structure of a traditional school setting. Additionally, it is difficult to determine the impact of autonomous student experiences outside of the classroom setting.

A focus on child development (Issawi & Dauphin, 2017) and social cognitive theories (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 2018) presents a phenomenon to examine pre-existing theories in a causal exploration. The empirical data surrounding these theories offers a framework to examine the potential impact of student autonomy.

Security and Trustworthiness

Data collected during the research study was stored in an offline structure that allowed for complete confidentiality. Although students were identifiable for comparison in the analysis stage, any identifying attributes were coded to ensure privacy. A coding system was stored offline to connect quantitative measures as they pertain to the same students to create a T-test between pre- and post-assessments of students involved in the program. The same system was utilized to mark links between quantitative and qualitative data collections to note correlation beyond numerical interpretations. Students were referenced by generic markers in the analysis

stage to offer consistency and insight into each child's experience while also preserving their anonymity.

Validity and reliability of data are evidenced in the research-based collection of information. This includes the quantitative student questionnaire, student interviews, observation data, focus group data. Although the measure is modified from the original constructs (connectedness), the questions are based on research in this area (Appleton & Christenson, 2004). The format of each question was organized to promote validity, while allowing for autonomy to best serve the purpose of this research.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of the mixed methods study was to examine how a program with the direct intention to engage fifth-grade students in student-selected building contributions impacts student autonomy and agency. To achieve this purpose, the study included quantitative and qualitative measures to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How does student voice/autonomy impact a child's perceived self-efficacy?

2. How does student agency change through a program experience?

3. Is motivation and connectedness impacted by social contributions?

The school program, Fifth Grade Jobs, served as a foundation for developing these research questions was developed with a framework intended to provide students with the opportunity to identify areas within the elementary school in which they could directly contribute on a regular basis. The initial brainstorming session did not limit student input. All ideas from participants were recorded and considered. Student contribution, also referred to as 'jobs' throughout this study, included activities that could be conducted during the school day, with one exception. This exception was a student-generated contribution to help construct the yearbook alongside two parent volunteers.

The study included 33 elementary school students aged 10 – 11. There were 33 students in total; 20 were female and 13 were male. All attend a public elementary school in a rural district of approximately 2,200 students. Demographic information about students including socio-economic, English language proficiency, and students with special needs will not be identifiable in the individual responses and data of students to protect privacy. However, a global snapshot will offer the following details in that regard. A total of 9% of the participants

identified as English speakers of other languages, while 30% of the participants receive special services as indicated on an individual education plan. A total of 61% of the participants qualify for free or reduced lunches, while 70% of the participants are non-Hispanic Caucasian.

Table 4.1 Student Participants

Student Participants (N= 33)	
Female	60.6%
Male	39.4%
English Speakers of Other Languages	9%
Receive Special Education Services	30%
Free/Reduced Lunch Qualification	61%

Data Collection

Events unrelated to the program impacted the data collected during the study. Some questions were not fully answered. Only surveys with complete responses were included in the analysis. Variations of samples are explained below:

Table 4.2 Description of N for Data Collected

Quantitative Survey (Pre & Post)		
Participants: 27	4- Incomplete Surveys	2- Repeated Absences
Semi-structured Interview		
Participants: 25	5- Extended Absences	3- Not enrolled at school during interview process
Contribution Observation		
Participants: 17	Random selection of sample	
Focus Group		

Participants: 8	Random selection including mixed job contributions

Quantitative

Table 4.3 Demographics of Quantitative Sample

Quantitative Survey Participants' Characteristics (N=27)		
Gender		
Female	18	75%
Male	9	25%
Special Programs		
English Language Learners	4	14.8%
Special Education Services	7	25.9%
Socioeconomic Demographics		
Free/Reduced Lunch	14	51.8%

Two questionnaires were distributed to students. One was distributed at the beginning of the program. The second identical questionnaire was given to participants in May. Data for the first and second questionnaires were collected and compared for 27 of the 33 participants. Of these students who completed both questionnaires, 18 were female and 9 were male.

The data were transcribed from the written documents that the participants completed. Student participants were assigned an identifying code that was used during all data collection. The participant codes were listed vertically and included all 33 participants. The question numbers were recorded horizontally 1-26. The answer selections were then transferred from the written document into the Excel spreadsheet. For each question, there was a corresponding number from one to ten. Two participants created decimal replies; however, this was not

presented as an option (example: 9.5 instead of 9 or 10). In these cases, the decimal number was recorded on the spreadsheet.

The same process was used to collect data for the second questionnaire. Questionnaire 2 was identical to Questionnaire 1. The questionnaire was presented in small groups, and the text was read aloud and explained as requested by the participants. Data from 27 of the 33 participants was collected for Questionnaire 2. These data were transferred from the written documents and entered into another spreadsheet. Scores were recorded according to participants identifying code.

After data was collected from both questionnaires, a third spreadsheet was used to reorganize the data based on the question number. These questions were organized in columns based on the participants' responses. An Excel formula was configured to determine the difference between each questionnaire based on the question number.

Albert Bandura's self-efficacy appraisals (questions 1- 17) and a connected measure (questions 18 – 25) as described in Chapter Three were used to develop the questions on the questionnaires. These constructs were measured as they aligned specifically with the research questions. The first research question asks how student voice impacts a child's perceived self-efficacy. Since the purpose of the fifth-grade jobs program was to provide student voice and contribution, the study aimed to determine if there were impacts from the experience as it pertained to student agency. The questions marked as measures of agency were examined for significant changes over the course of the program. Similarly, the study sought to explore how agency changed over time. Research question two asked how student agency changes. The first 17 questions of the questionnaire when compared pre- to post will show how self-efficacy and agency change over time. In this study, the period of time is the course of a school year.

Statistical significance was determined through a paired t-test, and the results are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Paired t-test Results from Questionnaire by Number

Question Number	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	t-Stat	p Value	Significance
1	1.15	3.24	1.839	.07725	p > .05
2	0.22	3.70	-0.4264	0.6733	p > .05
3	-0.33	2.79	0.6214	0.5397	p > .05
4	0.89	2.00	-2.302	0.0296	p < .05
5	0	2.01	0	1	p > .05
6	0.33	2.42	-0.7163	0.4801	p > .05
7	0.51	1.25	-2.15	0.0408	p < .05
8	2.56	3.50	-3.7930	0.0008	p < .05
9	0.55	1.99	-1.4527	0.1582	p > .05
10	-0.11	1.55	0.37188	0.7129	p > .05
11	0.85	2.61	-1.6945	0.1021	p > .05
12	0.44	2.31	-1	0.3265	p > .05
13	0.30	1.8	-0.81131	0.4246	p > .05
14	0.70	2.26	-1.6129	0.1188	p > .05
15	0.74	2.94	-1.3079	0.2020	p > .05
16	0.55	2.72	-1.0604	0.2987	p > .05
17	-0.07	2.32	0.1659	0.8694	p > .05
18	0.38	1.9	-1.0327	0.3116	p > .05
19	1.08	1.7	-3.2392	0.0034	p < .05
20	0.31	1.95	-0.8026	0.4298	p > .05
21	0.42	1.84	-1.1745	0.2513	p > .05

22	0.12	2.89	-0.2037	0.8403	p > .05
23	-0.15	1.85	0.4245	0.6748	p > .05
24	-0.15	2.46	0.3188	0.7525	p > .05
25	0	1.26	0	1	p > .05
26	0.5	1.75	-1.4575	0.1574	p > .05

A paired t-test was selected to evaluate the data for the beginning and ending questionnaires to compare two paired means; student responses were compared at the beginning of the program and at the end of the program to determine if there was a significant difference between the two data points. Questions from the questionnaire (Appendix A) were analyzed to determine changes that would indicate a statistical significance between the first and second completion. The student questionnaire included 26 questions; four showed a statistically significant change from Questionnaire 1, completed prior to the start of the program, and Questionnaire 2, completed near the end of the program.

Questions 4, 7, 8, and 19 had $p < 0.05$. Question 4, "Get myself to do school work," had a statistically significant change ($p=0.0296$). Question 7, "Do the kinds of things needed to be a school leader," had a statistically significant change ($p = 0.0408$). Question 8, "Resist peer pressure to do things in school that can get me in trouble," had a statistically significant change ($p = 0.0008$). Question 19, "Adults at my school listen to students," had a statistically significant change ($p = 0.0034$).

Based on the organization of the questionnaire, three questions (questions 4, 7, and 8) measured self-efficacy. One question (question 19) measured school connectedness. Other questions on the questionnaire show little to no variation or significance in the before and after distribution. The least significant responses were in question 5, "Always concentrate on

school subjects in class," (p = 1) and question 25, "Students can make a difference at school" (p = 1).

Qualitative

Data were collected qualitatively through individual student interviews, a focus group interview, and field observations of selected participants during their job contribution time and in the evaluation period after their job contribution.

Student Interviews

Table 4.5 Interview Participants

Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Participants' Characteristics (N=25)		
Gender		
Female	17	68%
Male	8	32%
Special Programs		
English Language Learners	3	12%
Special Education Services	7	28%
Socioeconomic Demographics		
Free/Reduced Lunch	17	68%

Interviews were transcribed using the text transcription that Zoom captured. Transcribed words were transferred to a Word document while the audio of the interview was played. All text that was originally captured through the digital transcription was reviewed and corrected to match the exact audio recording. Question numbers were used to organize the data and saved as a document with the participant's number. This process was repeated for all 25 interviews. After the transcripts were uniform, an Excel spreadsheet was created to organize the data according to specific themes.

Open coding techniques were used to analyze student responses. The initial themes were based on research questions and later categorized more specifically. Question numbers were used in the Excel spreadsheet to organize student interview responses. Question 1 was reviewed for all transcriptions and the text was copied and pasted into a corresponding column. In order to capture the entirety of the participants' answers, each main idea in the responses was listed separately. If a participant provided a lengthy response with several different ideas, then it was entered as separate line items to avoid generalizing answers. In some cases, a question that was originally posed to evaluate one aspect of efficacy resulted in responses that addressed unexpected topics and foci. Initial themes and coding were used to determine the specific category that each answer would address. If answers did not fit into the framework of the original research question, they were still recorded and themed. These responses prompted continued research possibilities and will be explored outside of the context of this study.

After all participant responses were recorded and identified by theme, they were reviewed to help further code for more clarity. Themes included participants' perceived efficacy, agency change, motivation, and connectedness. Through continued analysis, a need to further delineate specific efficacy considerations resulted in deeper coding within each theme.

Perceived efficacy was further coded to denote student efficacy to serve as a leader, to positively impact others, and to confront difficult situations. Change in student agency remained a single theme but was identified by student word choice as their responses signified improvement or regression in the aforementioned codes and through other more generic circumstances. Student motivation was coded to signify enthusiasm for future events and student perception of others' motivation to replicate the work they were doing. Connectedness was examined as it related to adults, peers, and school events/functions.

Focus Group

Table 4.6 Focus Group Demographics

Focus Group Participants' Characteristics (N=8)	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	5	62.5%
Male	3	37.5%
Special Programs		
English Language Learners	1	12.5%
Special Education Services	4	40%
Socioeconomic Demographics		
Free/Reduced Lunch	5	62.5%

The data collection used the same procedures as the quantitative data in that the interview data were collected and recorded. The transcript from Zoom was copied into a Word document as a written transcription. This was reviewed and edited while the audio of the focus group played to ensure accurate wording and participant/response correlation. Comments were then reviewed and added to the Excel document. Themes were determined and later expanded to the same codes used in the previous student interview responses.

Field Observations

Table 4.7 Demographics of Observation Participants

Field Observation Participants' Characteristics (N=17)	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	9	52.9%
Male	8	47.1%
Special Programs		
English Language Learners	2	11.8%
Special Education Services	5	29.4%

Socioeconomic Demographics		
Free/Reduced Lunch	11	64.7%

Field observations were conducted of participants during the performance of their job contribution time. In the case that a student possessed more than one job contribution responsibility, the job that required the most amount of time on average was observed. Participants were selected to represent a fair sampling of the students. Considerations were made based on demographic information and job contribution characteristics. A random sampling method of participant codes was used once students were organized into categories.

Field observations were made over the course of one week. Scheduling of the observations, additional responsibilities of the researcher, student attendance, and unanticipated interruptions of daily operations determined the day and time of each observation. The researcher observed participants during their job contribution for ten minutes using the Student Observation Rubric (Appendix C). If a child's job contribution did not last ten minutes, then the observation was conducted for the duration of the job on that particular occasion. The student observation rubric was used at the time of the observation. Scores were recorded within a framework of the previously identified numerical framework. Variation in scores was necessary to provide a more accurate reflection of student performance. These variations were later categorized in the collection and sorting of data.

After all field observations, the numerical scores were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet based on identifying elements (adult cooperation, initiation, patience, personal management, attention, rules, initiative, and attentiveness). Minimal was defined by a score of 1, 2 or 3. Average was defined by a score of 4, 5, 6 or 7. Maximum was defined by a score of 8, 9 or 10. The scores were grouped by category and distinguished by participant code for further analysis.

Based on the rubric definition of initiative, this score was determined outside of the observation scope to ensure inclusive use of behaviors beyond the job contribution timeframe.

In addition to the numerical scores that student performance was used to determine on the rubric, the researcher also included a note to improve clarification. These notes averaged one to two sentences and were recorded under a general category that was later coded according to content.

Data from the observation rubrics were examined individually and collectively. Equal value was determined from the individual scores and later explored using a deeper analysis of themes. Finally, data was defined using means and standard deviation by topic as shown below in Table 4.8. The observation of students during jobs provided another perspective to study students within the program and within the context of their job contribution. The themes offered a framework for the observation as another data point for consideration in the study.

Table 4.8 Field Observation Rubric Scores

	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation
Adult Cooperation	9.06	1.09
Initiation	7.15	2.41
Patience	9.18	1.67
Personal Management	9.12	1.32
Rules	7.47	1.97
Outside Initiative	5.88	2.52
Attentive	8.35	1.58

Analysis

The compilation of data provides insight into the research questions posed in this study. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods offers a broad perspective on student efficacy, motivation, and connectedness. To better understand the interconnectedness of

data as a reflection of participant experiences, the analysis is focused on the individual research questions.

Research Question 1. How Does Student Voice/Autonomy Impact a Child's Perceived Efficacy?

Efficacy as a Leader

Through the coding process, the initial theme of "student voice and autonomy's impact on perceived efficacy" developed into more specific codes. The first code was "student perception of their efficacy in serving as a leader." Student participants had an overwhelming number of positive responses regarding their belief of themselves as leaders. The researcher did not define leadership for participants in the interviews; the students defined leadership as they explained their role as a leader in the building. Kai stated simply, "I am a good leader in the hallway sometimes. Like when we pass other classes and I do the right thing." This example of modeling positive behavior as a trait of leadership was a recurring theme throughout the student interviews.

Another student, saw their leadership through the positive demonstration of actions. "[I am a leader] by being nice. By being nice and helping people with what they need." Student participants also saw other children's responses to their leadership as a defining trait; Sarah works with younger students in one of her jobs. She explained this concept:

> So as a leader, it depends on what it is. Like, I see a lot of kids looking up to me on different things. [A student], as an example. Every day I come in there [the classroom] she is copying me. During my job if I have to tell them to sit down, they usually do.

Students also saw opportunities to demonstrate leadership outside the context of their specific job contribution, but in a manner that directly impacted younger students with whom they worked. Giorgia worked with kindergarteners in the course of two school job contributions.

> Well, I feel really good about myself. I've been trying to make sure that my friends in the hallway, when they are being loud, that they are getting quiet. When they're talking I tell them so we don't get our class in trouble. When I see kindergartners talking in the hallway, I usually just tell them to please be quiet so they don't get in trouble. I think I've been doing real good.

Leadership among peers was not a prevalent theme; however, as one student noted, there is still a consistent effort to serve as a positive model for peers in the same age group. Sylvia explained this idea.

> We've been having kids jump up and touch the flags. Like running in the hall. I caught one doing it and I told him to stop. I told him I'm gonna have to talk to your teacher about that, because I don't want people running in the halls.

This idea is examined in more detail in later themes.

A student who was originally confident in their ability to lead at school, later sought validation from adults in the evaluation. Chris stated, "I think I'm doing pretty well. It…I'd say it depends on what the teachers say. Like, if they think I'm doing good in class, or if I'm being a role model to their students." When asked if Chris felt they were a role model, she affirmed that she was a good model for younger students.

Student perception of a role model as a leader was echoed through other responses. Jada shared her experience.

> [at] recess we're supposed to be quiet when we line up, because when we were in fourth

> grade the fifth graders came in noisy. I remember how annoying it was so I am quiet and if other people start talking, I hold up a zero [to indicate students should be silent].

Confidence in leading by example was often captured in its relationship to younger students. Zola stated,

> Well, I think I'm one of the best leaders we have here. Because, well, I always check myself if I feel like that was probably wrong and I shouldn't do it…if I don't think it's a good example to some younger kids, then I will choose not to do it in front of them.

Others explain leadership as a realistic model for younger students. Ajka explains, "I mean, I kinda see myself as a leader for like, little kids. I just [show them] to try your best and you just can't be perfect." The concept of serving as a leader with imperfections was also captured by another participant who serves in the role of a kindergarten helper. When asked about how well she served as a leader in the building, she explained an effort to model, but was not deterred by a mistake she made.

> I see myself as [a leader]. I'm good at trying. But with the kindergarteners, I may mess up, like on accident. Like, I don't always know the rules or something. One time I signed someone's math paper, but the student got the answer wrong. I didn't see that because I looked over it too fast. So, I said I was sorry and [the teacher] said it was okay. (Lina).

Despite her perceived mistake and the momentarily negative impact it had on another student, Lina still felt confident in her ability as a leader and her ability to fix mistakes she may encounter in that role.

Leadership is also evident in student initiative. Bernardo noticed that one of his classmates had been absent for two days. The classmate's job contribution was to help with the afternoon announcements. Bernardo chose to report to the office on the day of the third absence

to fill in. The job required the student to speak over the school-wide intercom system. He did this without practice, and later identified himself as a full-time substitute for his role.

Efficacy in Difficult/Challenging Situations

Another theme that arose regarding perceived student efficacy was the idea of confronting difficult situations. This was specifically addressed in interview questions as students were asked how they would deal with situations they felt were unfair and/or unsafe. In a few cases, the interviewer had to provide more clarity on these terms. However, the majority of students defined these moments in their direct responses.

Student response to their efficacy in directly impacting unfair and unsafe situations was predominately positive. In situations where students answered the question directly, over 80% of the student participants believed that they could confront and potentially impact a difficult situation.

For some students, they believed their role in a situation was dependent upon adult perception and support. Sarah explained, "[If something was unfair] I would talk to the teacher about it. I would see what my options were. Like, what options I have and go from there." There was no hesitance to attempt a solution, but adult guidance was evidently important. Similarly, another student expressed that she believed she could impact a situation, but only through the support of a teacher. As she stated, "If someone was being mean to a teacher or mean to another student, I would definitely talk to the teacher. But I wouldn't want to talk to the student."

Ajka expressed familiarity with unfair situations, but she explained that she would "probably get in trouble because I'd be talking to them [students involved] the entire time, trying to get both sides of the story." The most common response that directly referenced the assistance of an adult was a belief that their impact came from acknowledging the problem. Yara shares,

"When I see something wrong, I will tell the teacher. Or I'll stop it by myself. But most of the time I just tell the teacher instead of saying 'Hey, you can't do this', unless it's a big deal."

Despite some noted hesitation in student responses, a large number of program participants expressed confidence in addressing situations using their own strategies and problem-solving methods. The first group of participants presented examples of using communication to handle a challenging situation by talking with those involved.

Maija was asked to consider her response to a situation she deemed unsafe. She replied, "I would come over and ask what's going on. I would ask them what they're doing and why they were doing it." As she expanded to consider unfair situations, she added, "I would ask them what they think is unfair. I would see if I could do something to make it [fairer]."

Directly addressing younger and same-aged peers was a common response among participants. When explaining how Charlie addressed problematic behavior from her job partner, she explained,

> I do good in the morning and I try to tell [him] to stop if he's not doing the right thing. I don't want to get in trouble. So, if he's running down the hall and [being dangerous] I tell him don't do that because I don't want you to get in trouble.

Other common responses to negative peer choices resulted in students asking questions or simply telling others to stop a behavior. Yara would approach an unfair situation in the following manner.

> …either I ask someone [that was there] what is going on. I would be like 'hey what's going on?' so they can tell me the whole story, because most of the time I only get a glimpse of it unless I see the whole entire thing.

Amani shared an unsafe scenario she encountered during her job contribution as a kindergarten helper.

> If I don't notice it, I can't say anything. But if I do notice I try to help if I can. But this one time, [kindergarten student] was about to fall off that ladder. She was going head first and I was like, 'Oh my God I need to help you!'. I ran over to her and yelled for a teacher to come help because she [student] was about to fall. They [adults] didn't even see because they were helping some kids on the monkey bars.

In many cases, students presented solutions that paralleled their experiences while involved in job contributions. These responses demonstrated a belief in their ability to directly impact a situation beyond redirecting others with words of warning.

Amani explained that helping with unsafe situations was common in her role. She shared an example about a challenge she encountered in her role as a kindergarten helper. In this role, she works with two particular students who can become argumentative with one another. These repeated arguments are often referred to as 'fights'; however, they are not physical in nature. Amani shares, "I'm usually pretty good at it [helping with unsafe situations] sometimes. Like Lola and Christy, they're the fighters. So I have to try and break up [help resolve] the arguments. If I can't, then I always get the teacher."

The most common response to the question about student perception of their self-efficacy in moments of conflict was to directly solve the problem. Some student participants explained circumstances in which they would alter a situation through their own actions. Sylvia worked with kindergarten students in two different settings; both settings were less structured than instruction time. She was faced with an argument between two children.

> I just told them. I told them that they can take turns. If they don't want to take turns, well there's another jump rope. That is what they were fighting over, a jump rope. So, I just went and got another jump rope and gave it to them so they would stop.

Sylvia also displays confidence in addressing problematic behavior in younger children during the lunchtime portion of her job. Redirecting students to sit properly, keep their hands to themselves, and follow rules of safety is often met with unhappy reactions from kindergarten students. Despite these negative reactions, Sylvia remains persistent in maintaining her role as a kindergarten helper in the cafeteria and on the playground.

Helping younger students deal with conflict was a concept that arose in many interviews. Giorgia easily identified two specific scenarios during the course of her job.

> When something is unfair, I just go up to them [kindergarten students] and go 'let's do rock paper scissors.' Or I tell them we can do eeny meeny miny mo, or something else that helps them take turns. I also tell them they can just share!

Giorgia also demonstrated confidence in upholding classroom rules as the authority when working with younger students. "There was only supposed to be a couple of people playing with the bugs. So, I go over and have two or three people leave the bugs and go do something else. It is the rule of the classroom."

According to the participant responses, most of the conflict between younger students involved sharing and taking turns. Alma was confident in addressing unfair situations, but was unwilling to take the same stance when it progressed to something perceived as unsafe.

> Whenever somebody fights, I always [ask] them what happened. I see if I can solve it. Like if somebody won't give them back their toy, I ask what happened and why they

won't give it back. If that doesn't work, I tell them to go find a different toy, or they can share.

Zola shared examples of her work with younger students and was openly confident about her ability to handle difficult situations.

> Well, I have a good explanation for this one, because you know that little girl [Student C]? Sometimes she gets more upset than others and is a little sassy to me and [the paraprofessional]. But I feel like I handle it pretty well. Like, I just don't try to feed into it that much. Because in my book, the more you feed into it, the more involved you get with it. Yeah, and the more you get involved, they more they want to do it. So, if she gets mad, I might ask her, 'Hey, what's going on?' If she refuses to answer then I just say she can come talk to me if she needs to. Even when she is mean to someone, I tell her she can't be like that and try to get her to apologize.

In one case, an unfair situation was not described in the context of a conflict between two children. Instead, a student participant recalled a dilemma on the playground that he helped solve. Eugene explained,

> When you first added [the new swings], other people were on them all the time. There was not a chance for other people to use the swings during recess. I thought it wasn't fair. So, I said to [Teacher], 'this isn't fair because other people should be on it.' I told her that we should do a rotation so some people could be on there [the swings] for five minutes and then other people could be on it after.

In contrast to the majority of students, some participants were not confident in their efficacy regarding challenging situations. Gabriel explained that he would just ignore negative behavior. Another participant, Jameela, did not feel confident in telling adults if something was

unfair. Konrad conceded to the idea that he would not address a situation involving adults because, “It’s different for an adult. I mean, I don’t feel like I have a say. They’re just gonna say no every once in a while.”

A notable detail is the frequency of answers directly related to younger students in comparison to peers. Overwhelmingly, students showed self-efficacy in scenarios where the conflict occurred between much younger students.

Positively Impacting Others

A final theme in perceived self-efficacy also emerged through the focus group discussion and in a small number of interviews in which the elaboration of students provided insight into the concept. This theme is defined as student efficacy in positively impacting others through their actions. In most cases, the examples are derived from direct work experiences. However, this theme is woven through other themes as the human element is further discussed.

A common thread woven through the interviews and observations is the recognition that the job contributions of each student are intended to help the school community. This is demonstrated in earlier revelations from students in their role as leaders. The focus group conversation posed the question about how the student contributions impacted the school. There was not a single reply that conveyed any negative impact. Instead, students expressed how they are positively impacting others.

Konrad identified his supportive role as benefiting the paraprofessionals in and out of the classroom. “[My job] relieves the work of the paras. When I come in they are tired and it helps when we come in so they aren’t so tired.” Additionally, Charlie acknowledges how her work is a benefit to adults. “It helps with teachers so they don’t have to stop what they’re doing to take

care of it. It also helps [office staff member] because if I wasn't doing my job, she would have to do it twice."

Another participant expressed the perceived value in her role as a means to provide a more positive interaction than the adults are able to offer. Sylvia shares an observation of her impact with kindergarten students in the lunch room,

> …the little table at the end has been having some trouble. There are a few kindergarteners who just aren't agreeing. I feel like I can help. I feel like [the teacher] is being too strict on them. So, I can help make it better.

A student who serves as a photographer acknowledges how his job helps capture special moments, which staff and students can enjoy through the yearbook. Another student expressed the value he brings to his classmates' classroom experience. Although the example does not occur in the context of a job, it serves as Marco's example of his role as a leader.

> I usually do this a lot [be a leader]. Sometimes one of the boys keeps raising their hand in class. The teachers don't call on him. So, I raise my hand. When the teacher calls on me, I tell them that [classmate] has a question and then the teacher will help. … I think that's what gets him to be a little more motivated.

Two students share a more detailed belief in how they impact others during their job contributions. The theme of helpfulness is prevalent in many answers, but Zola provided more detail.

> Like for the kindergartners, I feel like I am [a counselor] to them. I have them come give me hugs to relieve their inner 'not calmness'. I feel like I'm more than just a lunch helper to them and they appreciate me being there. The teachers appreciate me being there

because it means a little less work for them. On Monday, I love seeing the smiles on their faces. Actually, I was wondering if I could work with more students.

Not all work experiences with a meaningful impact revolved around direct work with students. Marco had a daily job to raise and lower the outside flag. He expressed the impact his daily contribution has on the school community.

> Well, I like my job, the flag one. Basically, if I don't do it, if I don't raise it, we can't do the Pledge of Allegiance. But me raising the flag. Well, basically it mainly only helps people. It makes possibly some sins go away and helps people feel better. We can celebrate the people in America and the US Army and the people who fight for our country.

Research Question 2. How Does Student Agency Change?

A more detailed evaluation of this research question can be conducted through analysis of the quantitative questionnaire responses. However, student participants did demonstrate a change as noted through interviews and observations.

The most common agency change was student quests to take on additional job contributions. In many cases, students utilized the semi-structured interview time to directly request additional and new jobs. In one example, Yara expresses a desire to add on to the roles of her current job as pledge allegiance leader. She also sought to work in collaboration with other workers to "put a little beat" into the daily jokes.

Other students expressed concern about the limited amount of time they have to contribute through their jobs. They sought to add on additional responsibilities and jobs so they can have a more regular presence in the work community. In one example, Sarah sought more time to work with younger students. At the time of her request, this student worked with

kindergartners on Thursday and Friday. She elected to sacrifice her Monday recess to add another work day to her schedule.

There were also student participants who independently recognized ways in which they changed over the course of time from job inception to the individual interviews. Although no interview question asked students directly how they changed, there were cases in which students made these connections.

Jada expressed her discomfort in being in front of an audience or thinking that other people were looking directly at her. However, her job required her to enter various classrooms and engage groups of students by collecting cards and distributing small prizes. In her reflection she noted, “That is why I don’t participate in things. It’s so scary for me because I feel like everyone is going to look at one person, and that person is me.” She later explained, “With this (points to Champ cards) they are looking at that instead of me. Or if I was doing the teacher cart, they are looking at the treats instead of me. It’s easier.”

Similarly, Maija remarked. “[The job] kind of helps me get over my shyness. Now I’m coming into different people’s rooms and delivering things. I wouldn’t normally do that.” This suggests the job experience offered Maija a safe situation to become more comfortable interacting with new people.

Two additional participants noted improvement in daily interactions. One student expressed, “I have gotten better since the beginning of the year. I know what the expectations are so that helped.” Another participant, Marco, noted his progress in serving as a leader.

> Actually, I am a lot better. The boys actually listen to me now. Instead of arguing with [Student], now we’re actually friends. We don’t argue. When he is feeling down I will

come over to him and see what's wrong. Before, I wouldn't ask him anything. That's it, and basically teachers listen to me a lot more, too.

A final note regarding the change in students' agency is evident in the expression of ideas and suggestions that impact the school as a whole. It is not clear if the opportunity to talk with the interviewer one-on-one or the impact of their school contributions impacted their agency. However, it was not until the interview reflections that new suggestions were brought to the surface.

One student proposed a new leadership opportunity for fifth-grade students. A recommendation regarding designing activities for the school to participate in during a rotation day was shared with the students. Yara requested that the fifth-grade students be allowed to collaboratively create activities for students to rotate through in celebration of winter break. She additionally sought to create an art club after school.

On two occasions, student participants created new ideas for jobs based on their perception of student needs. They created a plan for these jobs and volunteered to take on the responsibility. With no guidance from a program perspective, these students defined two new school contributions and created a schedule for each of them.

Amani also identified a need that she could address with some planning and collaboration. Her goal was to enhance a job by including other students in the building. The original job was to deliver teacher treats at various times during the month. Amani organized an opportunity for a group of students to create kind notes and pictures that would be distributed to teachers alongside treats.

Research Question 3. Is Motivation and Connectedness Impacted by Social Contributions?

Themes of motivation and connectedness appeared immediately in the qualitative analysis of student and focus group interview questions. Each theme was broad enough to warrant further coding to isolate and explore more specific implications. The concept of motivation took many forms, ranging from personal motivation from the student participants to perceived motivation of other students in the school.

Enjoyment as Motivation

There were an overwhelming number of responses in which student participants expressed commitment to their work due to the enjoyment they took in the work. Some of the participants found refuge in the work time as part of an escape from the regular school routines. Yara explains,

> I get to feel like a kid again. I mean, how many schools actually let fifth graders play in a kitchen set or play with blocks. You might think it would give you a headache, but it is a lot of fun.

This student contributed to the school community by working with kindergarten students. Some of the interactions involved parallel and collaborative play.

Other students found enjoyment in doing something they would not typically get to do. The joy in working was highlighted by the small amount of time Marco was able to be outside, "Normally I'm not allowed to stay outside when it's cold. But since it takes me five minutes to put up the flag and five minutes to take it down, I actually get to be outside in the cold." Similarly, Marcel expressed enjoyment in the opportunity to spend time on the playground independent of other students. He and another student were responsible for picking up lost or forgotten items on the playground before dismissal. This experience was atypical from a normal school day; this had an impact as noted through his response.

> [My job] is amazing. I love it. I go outside and clean, you know and me and [another student worker] make challenges out of it. Sometimes we see who can find the most things. The winner is the one who can find them and put them away the fastest. But he always wins. It is always really fun. Sometimes, like my mom and dad will drive by and stop on the side while I'm picking up the soccer field. They get to ask me about my day before school is even over.

Unique experiences recur as a theme for students in a variety of working experiences. Zola noted, "It is good to sometimes just get away from adults and have some fun with little kids. I want to do jobs every day." There was joy for one student in the identity she associated with her school job. Chris explains this as she reflects on her job as the presenter of an afternoon joke every day on the dismissal announcements.

> I really like the jokes and I really like the kindergarten lunch and recess. I like telling the jokes. I like that you let me tell my own jokes or my friends' jokes. But I really like being known as the person who does the jokes every day. With my kindergarten job I like that the kids are younger than me and that I can talk with and play with them at recess and lunch. When they need help and raise their hand, I am happy they feel comfortable letting me help.

A notable correlation with this student participant is the evident changes made during field observation. Chris showed remarkable improvement in attendance after obtaining her job. When she did have to miss a day, she would make sure to connect with the students she didn't see in her absence.

Future as Motivation

The student's perceived future experiences and the connection those experiences had with their ability to work in the school served as another prominent theme of motivation. To begin exploring simply, Page notes that fifth grade jobs are important for students because, "there is more responsibilities when you have a job. You have to help other people and stuff. It will help you when you have to do more stuff later."

The student participants' ages likely had an impact regarding their responses; some were beginning to think about jobs they could have in the recent future. Two participants connected their experience working with kindergarten students with the potential of babysitting. Alma explained, "Fifth grade jobs are good because we learn what it's like to have a real job, like babysitting or something." Kai expressed the benefit of her job as a good practice for her current babysitting jobs.

Aside from responsibilities and the connection to jobs involving younger children, several participants perceive the work experience to benefit them on a broader level. Marco expressed the importance of his job,

> Because it helps [us] since we're all of us fifth graders. Soon we are going to middle school and after that high school. Then we will be full blown adults. I think it's good we have these jobs. I think the job we have is the job we need and it might be the job we have when we grow up.

Chris shared a similar belief in relationship between school jobs and upcoming experiences,

> Well [the job] gets us ready for middle school. I think it also prepares us more for life because there are similar jobs that you can have when you're older. There are also jobs like this we might do in middle school.

When asked to consider the relevance and need for fifth grade jobs to continue as a program, Sarah shared her insight,

> Yes, jobs for fifth graders should continue. It gives [this year's fourth graders] an opportunity and it's a fun way to develop a sense of what you're gonna be doing when you get older. You gotta get to your job on time and stuff. If you have housework to do or important things today, you might rather go do that instead of your job. But if that happened [in the future] you wouldn't get paid. That is what this experience [teaches us].

Perceived Motivation of Others

A final theme in motivation occurred in the context of how others perceive the fifth-grade job experience. In some cases, students recalled their time as fourth graders and their anticipation of the coming year when they would have the opportunity to participate in job contributions. Other students share their interactions with other students. In all of these examples, there is a presumed motivation to serve as a participant in the program.

Kai shared a personal belief in the benefit of the program experience. "I feel like [younger students] just haven't done a ton of stuff as leaders. They should get a chance to be leaders in the school, too." Konrad shared the sentiment that younger students should have the opportunity to experience job contributions. However, he also reiterates the importance of positive behavior for those who are serving in the role. "I feel like we should keep the program going. If some fourth graders are doing good maybe we can let them start practicing if they want to do jobs next year. If they're paying attention in class then they can see what jobs are like. I can help with that."

Behavior was expressed as a continued theme in motivation. This is directly connected to the student participant's experience and the anticipated experience of future student workers. Amani explains,

> The jobs really have an impact on how the people's behavior is. So, as long as fourth graders become fight graders, they can have the right job for them. I think they should get to because it will really impact their behavior and probably make them a better person.

Rio expressed the same belief of the job benefit for other students.

> There are some fourth graders that are very independent and are hardworking. I think they would enjoy having something to do. I feel like they would be a little bit more independent and have more responsibility if they could have a job next year. If they have a little bit of like bad grades and have a bad attitude and go to the office, maybe you should just keep an eye on them. You could make sure that if they want that job, they need to work a little bit harder.

One student participant recalled her thoughts last year as she anticipated becoming a fifth grader who might have the chance contribute to the school. It served as a motivation to participate in the program. Yara reflected,

> As a kid, I knew that those fifth graders did jobs and I looked forward to that. Like, it kept me going all these years. I know I was gonna do a great job. I knew it was gonna be fun and I think other kids might see it the same way. I think they should have the opportunity to do it if they want.

Maija considered the program value with a similar memory.

> I feel like a lot of fourth graders are super excited because they see all the fifth graders going around getting their jobs. That's how I felt when I was in fourth grade. I felt super excited to be able to do a job. It always sounded fun.

Students also observe younger peers' reactions when they are working on their school job. Charlie shared, "Sometimes when we're picking up the sheets in a classroom, the class is lined up in the hall. I can hear them say 'I wanna do that! I wanna do that! I wanna have a job!"

In a final student's explanation, motivation that spans beyond the school in which the program exists is evident. Giorgia explains her conversations with friends outside of this school and the continued benefit she finds in the experience.

> [The job] really helps other people in the school and makes it a better place to be. I have some friends that go to another school and they tell me you're so lucky, our school doesn't do that! I tell them they really should talk to [their school] about trying it out, too. It really helps people impact other people and helps people have fun. Some people might be having hard times and doing stuff like this really helps. So, I say for me, it is kind of like therapy.

The recurring motivation themes demonstrate a wide range of insights into student belief in self and others. There are also future considerations to explore in motivation that is more specifically focused on academic achievement.

Connectedness to School and Adults

Connectedness was among the most prevalent among the themes discovered through the qualitative analysis. It should be noted that the only interview questions that pertained to a student's connection to others were based on their view on friendship as it related to school in general. Only a few of these interview responses were directly connected to that prompt.

Overwhelmingly, students described their jobs, their enjoyment, and their belief in their school jobs as it pertained to personal connections. Zola expressed a connection to the teacher with whom she worked with two days a week, “It is fun to help some teachers. [Teacher] definitely makes it good to hang around because she is very relatable and it is good to be in her classroom.”

In a few cases, students are assigned to jobs that directly connected them with previous teachers. Giorgia recalls a fondness for a former teacher and her experience there as a kindergarten student,

> I got the job of being in my old classroom. It was great for me. As soon as I started working with [Teacher] all of the memories came back. Everything, even my little sister’s memory. Now I get to help [Teacher] and remember things like the black and white dog I always used to play with.

Sometimes the connection a student experienced went beyond the school community. In one case, a student recalls his job within the context of cooperating with staff and students. His response to this was a recollection of a single moment in time that was referred to with great pride. Marco shares,

> Sometimes I have trouble getting students’ attention. But when I am raising the flag people walk by and always say hi. Some people even come by and help. A police officer came by yesterday. He stopped to ask if he could help me and I let him. I will do this job even if it’s hot or cold, as long as I can raise it.

Connectedness to Peers

The final theme that was defined in the qualitative analysis of student interview responses shared insight into participants’ perception of student connection. The responses were not

solicited with specific interview questions about how students became closer or better connected to peers. Instead, these themes emerged through discussions on a variety of topics among over half of the participant responses. In some cases, the connection was perceived based on interactions. In others, it was a recurring relationship that prompted the child's belief.

One way that participants acknowledged connectedness was in exploration of their friendships. With some variation in phrasing, students were asked how well they made and kept friends at school. For a large majority, fifth grade students saw the younger students with whom they worked as friends despite the age difference.

Amani acknowledges her current friendships simply, "Friends wise? Well, some of my friends are kinda getting on my nerves sometimes. But the kindergartener [friendships] are going really well. I think I'm really good at it." Rio agreed that the kindergarten students with whom she worked had become her friends. "The kindergarteners are very easy to make friends with. They're adorable and they're nice, but sometimes they can have a little bit of a tantrum." This student went on to consider aspects of her job, which included weekly interactions reading and interacting with kindergarteners, "I like my job. It is so very, very entertaining. It is fun and I'm never bored, especially with the kindergartners. They are really nice and accepting. I need to learn their names though."

Another participant, Page, reflected on younger students as friends as she considered some early challenges that she overcame. "I feel like when I first met [two first grade students] it was hard. We didn't really know what to say to each other. But now we kinda got used to it." She continued by sharing, "Yeah I like working with them. They're fun and funny. Sometimes they will have a bad day, but they're mostly good. I like how funny they are and stuff."

For other students, it was their younger peers' reactions to them that prompted the theme of social connectedness. Some shared stories with pride, suggesting that being sought out by their younger peers made them feel connected. Alma recalled, "Sometimes I come into the classroom and a lot of kids run up and hug me. They even come up at other points. Whenever I leave, they like to hug me again."

Yara also shared an example in which she felt she became a special focus for the younger students with whom she worked, "Those kids can be like wowza, it's gonna give me a headache. But they are the sweetest. Plus, they fight over me. They always want me to work with them." Many students recalled times throughout the day when they were recognized by younger peers outside of their student contribution time. In these recollections, the reaction to hug fifth graders was repeatedly reported and done so with feigned exacerbation and happiness.

Giorgia, who felt very connected to the location of her job as it was her former kindergarten classroom shared stories of students by name.

> Most of the kindergartners in [the teacher]'s class have improved. They listen to the teacher a lot better and have been cooperating more when I am in the room. Especially [Student]. He is so much better with me and his other friends. They are all usually sad when I'm leaving. They try to stop me from going by giving me a bunch of hugs. Sometimes it's a little too much, but when I tell them they are understanding. But they always tell me 'But I want hugs!'

For two other students, the connection was seemingly simpler; however, it still impacted their experience and their evaluation of their job. Konrad expressed, "I enjoy seeing the kindergartner, seeing the next generation. It is good to see them in classes."

One student worked in a classroom where his younger brother was a student. His experience of connection was no less significant. Gabriel shared, “It is kinda nice to hang around with the kindergarteners. My brother is in there and it’s really cool. I get to help him and his friends with their stuff.”

Connections were not limited to those with younger students. Bernardo shared a story about the new friends he’d made through his job as a deliverer of afternoon notes. He explained, “I have new friends now. I used to make friends when I signed up for indoor soccer. But now I’m friends with almost everyone.”

Another student recalled how her job enabled her to see students she knew in other contexts throughout the day. Jada shared,

> I don’t normally make a lot of friends because I’m too scared to ask. But it’s fun and I get to see kids that might be in my [school] family or in the same club. Now I can say hi. If a class is lining up and I see one of them I can slightly wave.

Sarah expressed the opportunity that her job gave her to work with same-aged peers she would normally interact with.

> I would say [Student]and I talk and have conversations through jobs. I never really talked to her before. Because, like, there’s some kids that just don’t want to talk to me. They’re just like ‘eh’. And sometimes these kids will now tell me jokes once in a while. And it’s really fun to make connections with them.

In a final highlight of the connection participants made with same-aged and younger peers, Zola recalled a new bond she had created with a kindergarten student.

I went up to [Student] when I saw her one time. She was sad and sitting by the little green pole. I saw a ball next to her. So, I took the ball and rolled it to her. At first, she didn’t say

anything, but then she rolled it back. It became a soccer game and then we had some then. Then some other friends joined in and my heart felt so good because I made [Student] feel better and then my other little friends could also play soccer.

Chapter 5 – Discussions and Implications

This mixed-methods case study examined the impact of student voice and contribution on youth agency as organized through a program in a rural elementary school. The concept of student agency has been studied in a myriad of contexts and depths of complexity. The definition of student voice as an identifiable topic is as varied as the studies exploring the topic. For the purpose of this study, this researcher defined student voice as the opportunity to participate in and influence decisions that shape students' lives and the lives of their peers (Mitra, 2018). In many studies, student voice is examined explicitly within the context of student input and shared leadership in school policies and classroom. How students are positioned within the context of student voice is important in analyzing the data that are reflective of the program evaluated in this study. The intention of the program was to provide a voice to students and place them in a contributory role in igniting action for their verbal expression in improving their school community.

Within any educational system, there are boundaries within which all programs must function. Whether the rules and regulations are local or state-mandated, these limitations are in place by stakeholders who employ and manage the larger structural system. This study did not seek to disrupt this system, but instead to fit within the boundaries and still provide opportunities for students to provide their authentic voice in examining the impact on perceived agency, school connectedness, and motivation.

Through the study, I sought to better understand if this fifth-grade jobs program offered students improved perceived efficacy and school connectedness. In my many years of education, I have seen successful leadership programs in middle and high school settings. These programs are focused on building skills of those students who demonstrate strong leadership and providing

other students with a voice through this select representative group. Such programs exist on a much smaller scale in elementary schools, but follow the same premise. A select group, such as high achieving students who demonstrate traditional leadership abilities serve as representatives for their student community. In designing the program at Morton Elementary, I aimed to give a voice and opportunity to all fifth-grade students regardless of how they might pass a traditional leadership checklist.

In my effort to provide this opportunity to students, I wanted to know if there was way to cultivate a meaningful impact. Over the years, I observed positive conversations and excitement among participants of the program, but I was unaware if any deeper impact existed. This study offered the chance to explore a program and to contribute to the study of student voice among a population where it is seldom studied.

Importance of Study

The importance of the study is to examine student voice in an elementary setting and discuss the correlations between autonomous opportunities and a child's sense of efficacy and connectedness to school. Bandura's (1993) work in self-efficacy provides a framework for the research study through exploration of how human agency is developed. Additionally, Erikson's Stages of Development (Batra, 2013) provides a foundation on which this study rests. A child's progression through the elementary stages of their lives serves as a meaningful factor to their perceptions and motivations. The students engaged in the fifth-grade jobs program are all typical of children in the "industry versus inferiority" stage of development. There are connections made between the developmental stages and efficacy framework that serve to contribute to the definition of student voice among researchers. As Holquist et al. (2023) explain, literature on the topic of student voice topic remains inconsistent in its definition; coincidentally, the research on

student voice can become widespread and difficult to interpret due to the varying definitions and degrees to which students participate in these attempts for autonomy. To understand what student voice means and the impact it can have on children, this case study explored a program over the course of a single school year.

Findings

This mixed-methods study revealed student participants' insights into their experiences in a program over the course of a school year and examined the impact it had on their connectedness to school and their perceived self-efficacy. The following research questions were examined.

1. How does student voice/autonomy impact a child's perceived self-efficacy?
2. How does student agency change through a program experience?
3. Is motivation and connectedness impacted by social contribution?

Child's Perceived Self-Efficacy

Research question #1 examined the impact, if any, that student voice and autonomy had on a child's perceived agency. The fifth-grade jobs program sought to provide voice to fifth-grade students in a meaningful way where they could actively decide and contribute to the needed change and improvement they recognized as important. Based on theories of development and learning theories, the researcher framed inquiry around these areas to see if connections might occur over the course of the program.

Efficacy as a Leader

Student participants were asked about various facets of their jobs with a general focus to determine the themes that emerged from their experiences. Through the format of the fifth-grade jobs program, student voice served to promote a child's representation in the world around them.

Their influence and representation of their concerns came to light, and captured their view on the world (Burgh, 2014). This is a foundation for leadership, which emerged as a theme in both the quantitative and qualitative analysis. Students were engaged in jobs they felt were most meaningful to them. Some jobs involved working directly with other students and some were roles that involved performing daily or weekly actions that contributed to the functioning of the school.

The child's perception of self as a leader was one of the statistically significant changes captured through the quantitative survey over the course of the program. At the beginning of the program to the end of the program, the change in leadership progression, measured using a paired t-test, had a statically significant p value of 0.0408. Student participants saw themselves as capable of completing tasks needed to serve as a school leader at the conclusion of the program more than they did at the beginning.

Student experience and participation in sharing their voice can best be described as child-led participation according to Hart's "ladder of participation" as explored in Gillett-Swan and Baroutsis's (2023) systematic examination of student voice literature over a 25-year timeframe. This participation level assumes the child's full contribution with limited adult guidance; it is important to note how a variety of research argues regarding the level of student participation in sharing their voice and its impact on children.

Program participants saw themselves as leaders within the school setting. Some students equated their leadership to the impact they had over others. They expressed the ability to stop negative student behavior, such as talking or running in the hall and felt that their presence was the reason their same aged and younger peers chose to change their behavior and follow the rules. Other participants viewed their participation in the job itself as a leadership trait. The

responsibility was seen as an important task held only by someone who must be a leader because of its importance. Overwhelmingly, the students who participated as kindergarten helpers or role models saw themselves as strong leaders in the daily lives of others. Although there were always adults nearby in all cases, students felt it was their responsibility to solve problems for children and therefore took on these responsibilities.

Efficacy is developed when there is perceived controllability, especially over one's environment. Efficacious people have less self-doubt and can envision solutions even in new or challenging situations (Bandura, 1993). The influence and impact students had over their environment and the positive contribution they had on those they assisted fed into their sense of leadership. The social system provided structure for this development of perceived leadership belief (Bandura, 1999).

Considering the purpose of the program was to provide leadership opportunities, as defined by student voice, for all students, this theme was essential to examine. Due to the statistically significant change in quantitative data, which was determined by the average change of 27 participants over the course of the program, and the number of students who shared positive examples of themselves as leaders through semi-structured interviews, it can be assumed that in this context, self-efficacy as a leader was impacted in a meaningful way. Student voice as a contributing member of a school community can positively impact the way a child perceives themselves as a leader in that same community.

Efficacy in Difficult/Challenging Situations

Social and peer interactions are perhaps the most challenging in early and late adolescence as children begin to position themselves in the world around them and to find their identity within the context of others outside of their family (Batra, 2013). They are exposed to

cultures, beliefs, ideas, behaviors, and values that may vary greatly from those they experienced among their immediate family in early development. Belonging in a new social setting is not always an easy transition, and there are countless studies and theories that explore this phenomenon over the course of history (Batra, 2013).

Students rated how well they could resist peer pressure to do things that could get them in trouble. Comparing the student scores from the beginning of the program to the end of the program, there was a statistically significant change (p value = 0.0008). Of all the questions asked on the student questionnaire, this question had the most statistically significant change. During the semi-structured interviews, over 80% of the student participants answered positively that they could stand up to a situation that was unsafe or unfair. In many cases they also felt they could resolve the problem. Program participants provided examples of situations in which they stepped in and became the person to solve conflicts for younger children. Some expressed notions of understanding what it was like to 'be a kid' and found it easy to redirect them because they knew what it was like to feel that way. Other students felt it was an obligation in their role to make sure that the students with whom they worked were safe and treated fairly. In all cases, program participants used job experiences or potential job experiences as examples when they answered this particular question.

Efficacy to Impact Others

Social cognitive theory explains that the way a person's performance is socially evaluated can influence future action because it affects their self-efficacy and will most likely influence the possibility of attempting a similar task again (Bandura, 1999). The student participants' experiences were all socially evaluated and measured, providing a stage prime for analyzing future potential. Student program participants fondly shared stories of influence and impact over

others throughout their interviews and focus group discussions. These stories demonstrate a connection between the experience the students had at their job and how they saw the potential to influence or impact others. Students saw themselves as the cultivators of relationships and as leaders and problem-solvers to the benefit of others. To varying degrees, students connected their roles as building helpers to be betterment of others.

Change in Student Agency

Research question #2 examined how student agency changed over the course of the program. Theories in child development note the productive struggle that happens at various phases of life and the negative impact that can happen when this development is interrupted (Batra, 2013). In their review of student voice literature over the course of twenty-five years, Gillett-Swan and Baroutsis express the gap in the findings that are presented as outcomes of student voice research. Very few research "report on the actions from the views expressed," In the context of student voice research, the analysis that manifests beyond the student voice experience holds little space in the research world. Through the analysis of this case study data, there were themes of agency change that might be linked to their participatory voice through the fifth-grade jobs program. It is important to consider the developmental stage of the participants. Competencies are cultivated during this time when children struggle between industry and inferiority.

Confidence

Competence can be cultivated; students will only find their voice by using it. In programs that offer student voice and an active role in contributing toward that voice, the scaffold toward competence can begin (Iannuci & Parker, 2022). Although not every fifth grader participated in the program, it is appropriate to say that the participants represent a variety of personalities,

academic abilities, interests and social competencies. This is stated to highlight that not all participants would regularly seek out opportunities to be in the spotlight or to serve in a typical leadership role. Some were shy around adults and/or unfamiliar students and this shyness might commonly serve as an obstacle to participating in activities. Additionally, not all participants have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities outside of school; this applies to students at this school. Additionally, many students across the country lack this opportunity. These student participants in this study still chose to participate and later expressed that the opportunity allowed them to be in situations that would usually be unnerving for them. It was the distraction of the job that allowed them to experience something that might typically feel uncomfortable to do. This is critical during early adolescence, especially for children who do not have experiences to explore new and challenging situations with the support of others to guide them. Children need to learn that they can survive and that they can one day know how to 'adult' (Batra, 2013). It is this competence that provides the fuel to agency. To change, there must be experiences.

Empowered to Problem Solve

Consider Erikson's developmental theory and the experiences children have in the course of their schooling. The 'impending crisis' (Batra, 2013) to build industry and purpose requires children to experience society and influence social outcomes. Depending on the options that are presented to a child, they may not have an opportunity to see how meaningful their ideas and actions can be as a benefit to others or as a way to influence others. In the fifth-grade program, a majority of the jobs had staff directly supervising students or in close proximity during the job contribution time. However, the student participant had responsibility of the job. This was by design and by choice. If they were in need of assistance they would ask, but throughout the

course of the program, every child participant facilitated the task for which they were responsible. Field observations noted students taking risks to solve problems without seeking the input of adults nearby. Situations ranged from helping children work through problematic situations with others to handling faulty equipment and encountering poor behavior of a classmate who was performing a job alongside them. As experience in the job contribution grew, so did the participant's confidence in their ability to initiate change, problem-solve, and sometimes even make changes to procedures. When children use their voice and demonstrate the capability of working through problems and impacting others these progressive experiences impact one another. They build upon each other and invite children to have agency in their contribution (Iannucci & Parker, 2022).

Problem-solving took a different form as the program progressed throughout the school year. As student job contributions became more routine, participants sought to improve different aspects of the jobs. They presented these proposals and put them into action with confidence in their ability to manage the changes. Two other students came up with additional jobs they felt were needed based on circumstances at the school. They created a plan and presented it to help solve a problem. These two participants were ready to tackle the new jobs for the betterment of the school community.

Students with high agency can set challenging goals and see success in situations they haven't yet encountered. They have an anchored belief in their ability based on their experiences and are more likely to be forward thinking and efficacious in new endeavors (Bandura, 1993). Bernardo showed agency when he chose to take on a task he had never done when a classmate was ill and unable to perform her job. He arrived on his own, took on the difficult role of presenting the announcements, and performed without hesitation. Bernardo assigned himself the

official substitute for the position, and was not a student who would typically step into a role that would require him to perform in front of large groups or to take on a responsibility without first being told. This act demonstrates his shift in agency, which may have roots fostered in his leadership experiences.

School is a practice ground for citizenship (Kan et al., 2024) and the form this takes depends on the voices of those who are most directly impacted by the outcomes. Children see problems around them every day. When given the space to create and solve, students will tackle problem-solving with confidence.

Motivation and Connectedness

Research question #3 asked how motivation and connectedness are impacted by social contributions.

Many student voice studies position students within social justice concepts. Holquist et al. (2023) emphasize that it is the administrator that holds the decision- making power that becomes the bridge between students and adults. This is the path to flattening the power dynamic and providing authentic and participatory voice opportunities for students. Although this research was not rooted in a quest for social justice outcomes, the sentiment and aim are the same. The choices students make and how they move within their school matters. Consider the amount of time a child spends in school. It might be assumed that school serves as a prime influencer or at least as an influential setting in which a child's identity is developed. Disconnection and lack of motivation in this critical place can lead to negative outcomes (Hodges, et al., 2018). Because of this, it was important for this research to explore any potential relationship between school social contributions and how a child is motivated and connected to school, peers, and/or the adults in their school community.

Connected to Students and Adults Within the School Community

Students exhibited a statistically significant difference on one question of connectedness in the pre-post program questionnaire. This question asked students to rate their agreement to the idea that adults listen to students at their school. This question had a p value of 0.0034, which represented a positive change in this outcome. Analysis of this result suggests that students' perception of their ability to be heard and understood by adults in school improved over the course of the program. Interestingly, the focus group discussion did digress to examples of times in class when students' peers experienced a lack of being heard by adults. In these examples, the participants shared their roles in speaking out to provide voice for their seemingly neglected peers. Despite some of these perceptions, there were significant changes in the majority view of the power or importance of their voice among adults at school.

During this stage of development, children are determining their industry or competence in many things, including creating connections and relationships with others (Batra, 2013). Connections between the student participants and adults were contextualized through the interviews when they expressed a growing relationship between them and the teacher with whom their job was performed. In all cases where participants worked with younger students, they were either in a classroom, at recess, or in the cafeteria alongside other adults. Fifth-grade participants took on leadership roles alongside adults, teachers, and paraprofessionals. One student found nostalgia in returning to her former kindergarten teacher and connecting with her again as it brought back memories of her time there. Another student made a new connection with a teacher she would not have otherwise interacted with outside of her role in the kindergarten classroom.

More common, however, were the connections participants made with the other students through their job experiences. In nearly every case where a student contributed through a job that

involved helping others, they shared stories of joy and pride in their encounters. Some simply recalled memory of the smiles they would bring to the faces of younger children who were often eager to hug and ask for their attention. Others felt a connection better defined as a friendship that was established in their role as a helper. When fifth graders were asked about how their friendships were impacted by jobs, many of them spoke of the kindergarten students as new friends they had made. They would see them and acknowledge them in the hall and sought to provide a positive model for them beyond the setting of their job contribution. Many conversations about friendships at school included examples of kindergarten students as friends. These friendships were also extended to other students as a participant noted a budding relationship with classmates they would not normally socialize with in a school setting. The job provided them with another avenue to connect outside of the classroom and playground.

Enjoyment

Students enjoyed participating in their jobs. This was noted in observations and throughout the semi-structured interviews with participants. For some, the joy came with an opportunity to do something different besides the regular routine of classroom work, even if it was just a twenty-minute pause twice a week. They found value in the variation and a much-needed time to have fun and do something different. Within this enjoyment, students expressed sentiment of doing something that was out of the norm or that made the student feel special or unique. As an example, one student was connected to the idea that she was known as the person who shared jokes every day. There was purpose in that and a sense of identity correlated to the experience.

Future Experiences

Motivation is such a personal experience that it is impossible to speak about a single event that would motivate the majority in any scenario. However, understanding student development and the impact of voice can provide insight and a path to the factors that might motivate some children. In the case of this program research, the opportunity to experience something that they might do in the future was a motivational factor. As Gillett-Swan and Baroutsis (2024) expressed in their research, when children have a defined participation voice, it can lead to active and informed citizens. Knowing and experiencing what is to come helps cultivate competence at this state of industry and can provide a vision and moments of success in an unknown future place.

Students in the program expressed appreciation for the opportunity to experience contributions and to grasp how it might feel to have jobs or similar responsibilities in the future. For some students, the future was immediate as they prepared to move on to middle school. For others, they saw a relationship to the adult world. To reiterate a concept Batra (2013) referenced from Erikson's work, a child must learn that being an adult is possible. The importance of the program rested in the correlation between the experiences they had at school and what they anticipated would be working experiences in years to come. It is possible that confidence was built, or at least a sense of connection that it might come in future years. From a motivation perspective, many students aim to demonstrate their ability to succeed at tasks. Taking on a challenge that mirrors adult skills could provide motivation and in turn build confidence during this developmental period.

Perceived Motivation of Others

A theme that was not anticipated but worthy of addressing was how the participants perceived other students to be motivated by the job contributions they performed throughout the

school. One student shared a memory of their year as a fourth grader and seeing fifth graders doing various jobs around the school; she had high hopes of obtaining a job and had looked forward to the opportunity. Other students shared this sentiment in their observations and assumptions of other students. Similarly, students felt that when the younger students observed them performing their jobs, they would be inspired to do and behave well so they could hold the same responsibilities. Representativeness is key when considering the impact of voice and contribution. Whose voices and practices are represented and how well they are represented matters when student voice needs to have a meaningful impact (Holquist et al., 2023). When students at Morton Elementary see their peers serving in perceived leadership roles, they are in turn represented. In many ways, theories of self-efficacy through vicarious experience (Bandura, 1977) can contribute to the way other students perceive their ability to perform similarly in the near future when they serve in the same capacity.

School is a practice ground for citizenship and how student voice is perceived and acknowledged during this time can have critical implications on a student's belief of the influence of their voice (Kan et al., 2024). The perception of younger students and the belief that their older peers have an influence on their school holds meaning during this critical time in child development. Perhaps equally as important is the participant recognizing that they are a model of citizenship that younger students look up to with admiration.

Suggestions for Additional Research

The concept of student voice continues to be defined in the research; this idea of defining student voice deserves deeper study. The variations in student participation and the context in which children produce their voice can become a wide, intricate web with many variations. Studies explore substantial topics that impact an excessive amount of people; however,

examining the student voice behind the moment is quite insignificant in the research. Other studies explore much more inconsequential scenarios that only impacting very few individuals such as the students participating in these studies themselves. However, in these cases, the students serve in the highest of participation roles. These variations are worth deeper study. There is extensive research on participation and its connection to voice, but an equally interesting aspect to study is how closely students are involved in the outcomes of the movements or changes their voices aim to influence.

Agency is a heavily researched idea that is a topic of many systems, including education. Studies in adult, child, and collective agency are providing educators with insight into better performing and serving students in instructional settings. However, the rich link between efficacy and confronting unknown and difficult challenges is a matter to be explored in more depth. Considering the current knowledge regarding a child's developmental stage in their elementary school years and the way that some curriculum, instructional environments, and even systems set up experiences for children to develop agency in the context of challenging situations, it stands to reason that child-perceived agency deserves the attention of researchers. What can educators do in the instructional environment to provide children with opportunities to contribute meaningfully, to struggle, to fail, to problem-solve, and to persist through challenges in the safety of a school environment? In much broader terms, this could provide meaningful contributions to the current research.

Study Limitations

This study was limited to one program in a rural elementary school that was under the observation and organization of the researcher. Student participation was sometimes interrupted by absences and school events that made the collection of data for all participants difficult to

obtain. Additionally, the program only spans one school year. There might be more value found in a longer study that allowed for more student input over time. While this study examined student agency in a general sense, there was a very limited connection to how this agency transferred over into student behaviors and/or changes in the classroom. Interview questions that integrate questions about classroom performance would benefit the study. Teacher input from those who had workers with them and fifth-grade teachers who had participants in class would have also provided an interesting perspective for this study. A longitudinal investigation of participants could offer data into agency over time; this study was limited to a timeframe spanning only seven months.

Recommendations for Practice

Our understanding of human agency and child development can provide a foundation to begin changing practices to improve how we empower and engage children in the world around them. Research on student voice, particularly studying the levels of voice participation, can serve as a vehicle toward potential change. If the systems that work with children at critical stages of their development can provide them with a participatory voice and authentic experiences in leading change even if it is a small change in the community around them, there might be an impact on how children see themselves as leaders in their present and future selves. Schools can create opportunities for all students to share their opinions about how their school communities can be improved and how students can contribute to the improvement. Students can become a part of this change, creating a model of leadership for others and building the belief in themselves that what they think and do can have a positive influence on a community that matters to them. This is not an exclusive task. It is recognizing leadership potential in all children through their voice in what matters to them. Further study on the implications of the academic

impact and how participatory voice could also contribute in this realm may even shed light on connecting kids more closely to their learning.

Conclusions

A child's time in school contributes to more than just the academic knowledge gained as they navigate through the phenomenon of learning a myriad of subjects and grow in their understanding of themselves and their place in the world around them. How they function in a school setting and the experiences they have can have long-lasting effects on their future beliefs of self and how they navigate their futures. When children have a chance to be a meaningful contributor in this social establishment, it matters. Albert Bandura's efficacy research explores the concepts of how our experiences can influence the perceptions we have of ourselves and our abilities to impact the world around us. Coupled with the foundation of Erikson's developmental theories, there are sound reasons to credit the concept that a child's voice and contribution can have a positive impact on their view of themselves and how they connect with their school community. The opportunity to learn more about how educators can empower children and provide a foundation for building agency is through continued research and programs in our schools.

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Appendix A Student Questionnaire

Student WRID: _____

Rate your degree of confidence by recording a number from 0 to 100 using the scale given below.

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Cannot do at all					Moderately can do					Highly certain can do

Get adults to help me when I have social problems _____

Get adults to help me when I get stuck on school work _____

Finish my homework assignments on time _____

Get myself to do school work _____

Always concentrate on school subjects in class _____

Complete tasks I have I am unsure of _____

Do the kinds of things needed to be a school leader _____

Resist peer pressure to do things in school that can get me in trouble _____

Control my temper _____

Live up to what my teachers expect of me _____

Live up to what I expect of myself _____

Carry on conversations with others _____

Make and keep friends _____

Work well in a group _____

Express my opinions when others disagree with me _____

Speak up when I feel something is unfair _____

Speak up when I feel something is unsafe _____

Part 2

Rate your agreement by recording a number from 0 to 100 using the scale given below

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Do not agree					Moderately agree					Highly agree

I have friends at school (SEI) _____

Adults at my school listen to students (SEI) _____

Adults care about me as a person (SEI) _____

School is important for reaching my goals (SEI) _____

Teachers are there for me when I need them (SEI) _____

The rules at my school are fair (SEI) _____

Students here respect what I have to say (SEI) _____

Students can make a difference at school _____

It matters if I come to school _____

Appendix B Student Interview Questions

Student WRID: _____

1. How easily can you make and keep friends at school?

2. How well can you stand up when things are unsafe or unfair?

3. How can you hold up to your teacher and personal expectations?

4. How well do you serve as a leader in the school?

5. Explain your thoughts about your current job.

6. Explain why you think we should or should not keep the 5th Grade Jobs Program next year.

7. Share any changes or requests you may have.

Appendix C Student Observation Rubric

Observer: _____ Date: _____ Time Start: _____ Time End: _____

Student WRID_____ Class Size (if applicable): _____

Observable Action	**Minimal demonstration (1)**	**Average demonstration (5)**	**Maximum demonstration (10)**
Adult Cooperation	Does not cooperate with adult requests	Sometimes cooperates with adult requests	Consistently cooperates with adult requests
Initiation	Does not initiate interaction with adults/students	Sometimes initiates interaction with adults/students	Consistently initiates interaction with adults/students
Patience	Does not demonstrate patience for others	Sometimes demonstrates patience for others	Consistently demonstrates patience for others
Personal Management	Does not control personal emotions	Sometimes controls personal emotions	Consistently demonstrates personal emotions
Attention	Does not pay attention to the task	Sometimes pays attention to the task	Consistently pays attention to the task
Rules	Does not follow or enforces rules	Sometimes follows or enforces rules	Consistently follows or enforces rules
Initiative	Does not exhibit initiative outside of prescribed job	Sometimes exhibits initiative outside of prescribed job	Consistently exhibits initiative outside of prescribed job
Attentiveness	Does not show attentiveness during contribution	Sometimes demonstrates attentiveness during contribution	Consistently demonstrates attentiveness during contribution
Total	Total score	Total score	Total score

Appendix D Focus Group Questions

Student WRID: _____ **Student WRID: _____**

Student WRID: _____ **Student WRID: _____**

Student WRID: _____ **Student WRID: _____**

Student WRID: _____ **Student WRID: _____**

1. How well do you cooperate with staff and students?

2. How important is your opinion within the context of the school?

3. Are adults available within the school when you need them? Explain.

4. How well do you work with groups?

5. How do you handle disagreements in class or in your job?

Appendix E Informed Consent Form

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
University Research Compliance Office

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Informed Consent Form
comply@k-state.edu | 785-532-3224

PROJECT TITLE: Student leadership and empowerment: Impact of fifth-grade students' school community contributions and their perceived self-efficacy

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE: August 23, 2022 **PROJECT EXPIRATION DATE:** August 23, 2027
LENGTH OF STUDY: 6 MONTHS

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Cynthia Shuman, Associate Dean for Research and External Funding at Kansas State University

CO-INVESTIGATOR: Jennifer Ray, Doctorate of Education candidate at Kansas State University

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Dr. Cynthia Shuman, cshuman@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION: For the subject should he/she have questions or wish to discuss on any aspect of the research with an official of the university or the IRB. These are: Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this study is doctoral research for a dissertation to be completed by co-investigator, Jennifer Ray. The study will examine the impact of 5th grade jobs and school contributions in leadership on a child's self-efficacy.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: The study will include 5th grade students who have chosen to participate in job contributions for the 2022-2023 school year. Participants will be asked to complete a survey/questionnaire, an interview, and participate in a focus group (if randomly selected to do so) about their experiences in the program and the impact is has made on their perceptions of themselves. Surveys/questionnaires will be completed on paper. Interviews and focus groups will be recorded to enable the researcher to create scripts that will serve as qualitative data for the study.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: The primary potential risk of participation is a breach of privacy. However, the researcher will be the only person collecting or analyzing data for this study. All questionnaires,

surveys and interview videos will be stored securely, accessible only by the researcher. Data collected are used solely for the purpose of analysis and not connected with the participants' identities.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: The main benefit of being in this study is being a contributing member to research regarding the jobs program at Lowell and the impact it has on students. This study will contribute to larger research on self-efficacy, student voice, and student empowerment. No additional personal benefits are anticipated, outside of the leadership experience provided by the program.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: The researcher will create multiple layers of anonymity to ensure confidentiality of the participants. Each participant will be identified by a randomly assigned set of numbers that will distinguish him/her only to the researcher. Data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups will be recorded based on this randomly assigned number. Paper copies of the questionnaire and audio/video used for the interviews will be stored securely. Participants' names will remain confidential. Only the researcher, Jennifer Ray, will know which children are participating. The information that will be collected as part of this research will not be shared with any other investigators.

I have read and I understand the provided information. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and he/she is free to withdraw at any time. I agree that my child may participate in this study.

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE: _____ Date _____

CHILD'S NAME: _____

INVESTIGATOR'S SIGNATURE: _____ Date _____