

**USING LINKAGE THEORY TO ADDRESS THE STUDENT VOICE
ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PARADOX**

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Abstract

The organizational improvement paradox occurs when change agents anticipate that a particular change initiative will spread to other areas of the organization, but those anticipations are never realized. That is, positive outcomes in one part of the firm may happen, but they might also fail to translate into gains elsewhere in the organization. Change agents such as youth and adult collaborators in schools often experience this improvement paradox, which also contributes to issues of sustainment. In response, this paper offers linkage theory as an analytical tool to gauge how designers of student voice work might better spread the benefits of their change initiative to other areas of the school and get others to take ownership. A multi-site qualitative case study of Youth Court is analyzed to illustrate how linkage analysis might be leveraged to proliferate change and foster sustainment in school reform efforts.

Introduction

The field of student voice advances the idea that the positionality of young people as students can provide important perspectives, solutions, and leadership for improving school across a wide range of important indicators, and thus, should be involved in formal management processes (Cook-Sather, 2010; Levin, 2000; Raymond, 2001). Student voice initiatives have illustrated tremendous benefits for the students and educators most involved; and at times, schools and community-based organizations experience program improvements (See Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Rudduck, & McIntyre, 2007). But more often than not, impacting the wider community and sustaining change efforts has been a struggle for student voice practitioners and researchers because initiatives tend not to spread beyond initial adult implementers nor the students integrated into school management processes. Instead, student voice initiatives often remain isolated—both in identity and inclusion with other established decision-making processes—which reduces educator buy-in, implementation, and impact of the initiative throughout the organization.

This isolation causes what is known in organizational change literature as the *organizational improvement paradox* (Goodman, 2000; Goodman & Rousseau, 2004). An organizational improvement paradox happens when positive benefits of a change strategy do not spread throughout an organization despite implementers' expectation and intention to do so. For many student voice initiatives, students and their adult collaborators study a school problem at great length and provide actionable steps, but their ability to move from recommendations to actions becomes more challenging due to exclusion (and sometimes genuine inclusion) into the school's main decision-making body (Kaba, 2001; Thomson, 2011). Some have argued that exclusion, despite students' efforts, is a direct result of negative images and assumptions about young people's abilities to partake in leadership (Costello, Toles, Spielberger, & Wynn, 1997; McQuillan, 2005; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Sherman, 2002). Another explanation for the lack of proliferation is the student voice group can conflict with the established student leadership structures, such as student council, raising concerns about which body leads, making it less likely to cultivate a unified action around change strategies (Mitra, 2006; Mitra & Biddle, 2012). As a result of these sociocultural conditions and structural arrangements, an organizational improvement paradox emerges—student and educator collaborators' sphere of influence tends to be limited to the initiative's creators even though the participants' intention was to impact the wider organization. Such confinement affects the sustainability of student voice initiatives, reduces efforts to develop an adhocracy, and eventually becomes short-lived. Overtime, champions put their efforts into other organizational priorities, making the integration of student voice into the operations of a school less likely. In essence, student voice needs more building-level advocates and linkages to other aspects of the organization that would spread, and possibly help sustain the work.

This article uses linkage theory to explain structural isolations causing the organizational improvement paradox for several student voice initiatives. Linkage theory reveals possible pathways that can intentionally connect student voice initiatives' activities, events, and outcomes to other areas of the organization in order to foster a greater possibility of proliferation. Yet, as this article shows, linkage theory suggests such connections do not happen naturally; but rather, its design is intentional. So, linkage theory provides analytical tools that aid in uncovering and addressing structural causes for isolation. These tools form the

basis for secondary analysis of a three-site qualitative study on Youth Court, a peer adjudication program situated in a northeastern urban school district. Analysis uncovered structures and processes that contributed to or inhibited spread and sustainment. Thus, this article aims to answer the following questions: To what extent do student voice initiatives experience the organizational improvement paradox? What is linkage analysis and how is it useful for widening impact and shifting the ownership of the reform to others? What does linkage analysis reveal about impact and sustainment of three, school-based Youth Courts used as illustration?

The Organizational Improvement Paradox

An organizational improvement paradox occurs when positive outcomes in one part of the organization do happen but they fail to translate into gains elsewhere (Goodman, 2000), which is frequently the case for student voice work. In fact, the premise behind this perspective is that the benefits of a particular change strategy have been proven; yet, those benefits may never become organization-wide (Goodman & Rousseau, 2004). Goodman (2000) suggests one cause of this paradox is due to change agents assuming that impressive work would logically spread to other areas of the organization without giving consideration to the relationship between design, implementation, and impact of change work at multiple levels of an organization. The designers of change activities must account for this assumption by considering internal organizational behavior, structures, and processes, and how new initiatives fit into or alter those models of interactions. Much of the student voice research that considers impact and sustainment focuses on organizational behavior more so than structures and processes.

Benefits of Student Voice Initiatives

Outcomes of student voice activities have been quite promising for involved students and educators. Research reports students improving academically and socially when given power to work with their teachers to improve curriculum, instruction, and school rules (Cook-Sather, 2010; Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2004; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Rudduck, 2007). Student participation in community-based and school-based governance and reform activities resulted in the development of students' and adults' knowledge, skills, sense of agency and belongingness, and dispositions. In terms of agency and belongingness, participation in governance activities enabled students to explore their own identities and build social capital (Dempster, 2006; Zeldin, 2004a; Zeldin, Camino & Mook, 2005; Rudduck, 2002, 2007), attain a greater sense of attachment to the organization and adults (Mitra, 2004; Rudduck, 2002, 2007; Zeldin, 2004a), and produce an avenue of meaning-making for both students and educators (Fielding, 2001). Moreover, students develop academic and social skills such as researching, critiquing and problem-solving (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2004; Silva, 2001), practice metacognitive strategies (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2001; Rudduck, 2002; Silva, 2001), improve public speaking (Mitra, 2004), and discuss pedagogy with adults (Mitra, 2001; 2003).

Participation also improves students' dispositions about school and overall sense of self-worth. Improved dispositions were exemplified by increased motivation (Zeldin, 2004a), amplified confidence in intellectual abilities and capabilities as change-makers (Mitra, 2004),

and strengthened self-esteem (Rudduck, 2007; Siva, 2001). In addition, students who participate in these initiatives develop a more positive outlook on life (Mitra, 2004) and show an increased willingness to learn (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Importantly, partnerships lead to strengthened trust between youth and adults (Cushman, 2005) and result in greater skills working with others (Mitra, 2004; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007).

Adults also experience benefits when partnering with students in school reform efforts. For example, youth-adult partnerships have been found to bring deeply held negative stereotypes about students to the surface (Camino, 2000; Kenworthy, 2011; Mitra, 2001; Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). In addition, partnering with students has been shown to improve teachers' ability to communicate, engage in teamwork, and coach youth (Camino, 2000; Zeldin, 2004a). Finally, adults report a renewed sense of excitement for teaching (Mitra, 2001; Rudduck, 2002).

These promising findings fuel the idea that student voice work can have positive outcomes in schools. Yet, rather than spread to other areas of the organization, these outcomes tend to be limited to those directly involved in the initiatives. Researchers have been trying to understand this isolation for quite some time by examining organizational structure and culture.

Conditions Undermining Student Voice Efforts

Student voice researchers argue sociocultural conditions in schools—mainly the images educators have of young people—undermine youth-adult led change efforts. For example, Cook-Sather (2002) reminds readers that John Locke, one of the founding fathers of formal education, paternalistically conjures up wild images of children who need to be controlled in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1823). This centuries old belief can be easily found today. For instance, the United Nation's Convention on Rights of the Child in 1989 was a pivotal moment in the student voice movement. Article 12 asserted children have the right to be heard and to express a view about the processes that affect them (Rudduck, 2007). Yet almost two centuries after Locke, opponents of that convention argued youth lack the morality, self-control, and experience to draw from in order to make schools better (McQuillan, 2005; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). The United States has yet to ratify that document. Furthermore, many adults continue to adhere to *storm and stress* images of youth, namely, conflict with adults, mood fluctuations, and risk-taking behavior (Arnett, 1999; Costello, Toles, Spielberger, & Wynn, 1997; Rudduck, 2002; Zeldin, 2004b).

Despite critical theorists and pedagogues challenging the manifestation of these stereotypes in schools (Breault, 2003; Freire, 2002), educators use the aforementioned negative images to argue that young people are incapable of participating in school leadership, thus justifying their exclusion from change processes (Camino, 2000; Costello, Toles, Spielberger, & Wynn, 1997; Gvirtz & Minvielle, 2009; McQuillan, 2005; Mitra, 2007; Oser, Althof, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Ryan & Rottmann, 2009). Consequently, researchers found individual, group, and organizational cultures, and dialogical processes undermining student voice initiatives (Bickmore, 2001; Bryk et al., 2011; Clark, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2006; Critchley, 2003; Gvirtz & Minvielle, 2009; Kaba, 2001; Mitra, 2006, 2007; Pekrul & Levin, 2007; Silva, 2001; Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003).

Others have looked beyond sociocultural conditions to structural issues that contribute to the isolation or exclusion of student voice in important school decisions, and ultimately, the

lack of wider impact and sustainment of student voice initiatives. For instance, researchers in Canada and the United States discovered that many examples of student voice initiatives at the district and/or school level were unable to have wider impacts (or disappeared altogether) due to the following structural issues: administrative changeover, school board displeasure, loss of funding, lack of understanding around the purposes of the initiative, inflexible school governing structures, and lack of time (Bickmore, 2001; Clark, 2002; Critchley, 2003; Kaba, 2001; McQuillan, 2005; Mitra, 2006, 2007; Pekrul & Levin, 2007; Silva, 2001). Ultimately, student voice competes with other organizational priorities and is not embedded into a school's or district's formal leadership structure and decision-making processes.

Concepts of “Shifting” and “Spreading”

Mitra's and Biddle's (2012) four-year evaluation of Vermont's multi-school student voice initiative, *Up for Learning* (UFL), one of the largest student voice efforts in the United States, considered both inhibiting sociocultural conditions and structural arrangements to explain the lack of impacts and sustainment in participating schools. UFL uses youth participatory action research (YPAR), a youth-led or youth-adult co-led action research model, to drive its youth-adult partnerships. UFL participants, in this case teams of students, teachers, and administrators, develop a study to address a school or community problem by forming a research question(s), building and implementing change strategies, collecting and analyzing data, adjusting or building on established strategies, and then repeating the process. Mitra and Biddle (2012) found various levels of successes and challenges with UFL depending on the clarity of how teams functioned in relation to each school's leadership arrangement and decision-making processes. Struggling teams continued to compete with student councils and leadership teams, which usurped the ad hoc YPAR committees' power. It became less clear which group was making decisions about school and consequently ad hoc teams were less influential and sustainable over time. Mirroring findings from aforementioned sociocultural studies, some schools experienced resistance from educators, who felt confused and threatened by the idea of students leading change efforts, creating conflict between implementers and faculty.

Though *Up for Learning* is an outstanding example of student voice—the multi-high school program provided space for young people to study and attempt to solve school problems—implementers struggled to widen the impact of and sustain change initiatives. Not surprisingly, adults' beliefs and assumptions about the readiness of young people to participate in school change and their structural manifestations undermined work. Whereas much of the extant student voice literature advances our understanding of such school cultures and interpersonal dynamics that can encourage and discourage productive youth-adult collaboration (See Matthews, 2017), there remains a major gap in the literature describing analytical tools that can provide insights as to why organizational structures and processes undermine work.

In a step to addressing this gap, Mitra's and Biddle's (2012) study recommended applying Coburn's (2003) research on scale to redesign student voice work. Coburn (2003) argues that scaling up change within an organization, and thus widening impact and creating favorable conditions for sustainment, requires *shifting* the ownership of the reform to others and *spreading* the principles, beliefs, and norms of change efforts throughout an organization.

Applying these insights, Mitra and Biddle argued that *Up for Learning* (UFL) needs to scale reforms within each school by working to increase adults' beliefs in the ability of youth to be effective change makers, and behave in ways that encourage youth-adult collaborations (spread). Moreover, more members of the school need to take part in the initiative, not just (UFL) participants (shift). These recommendations focus on *what* needs to spread and shift rather than *how* that can be achieved; it is less clear what structures and processes would encourage spread and shift, suggesting further investigation into theory is necessary. Consequently, Mitra's and Biddle's work became an instigator for the development of this article's analytical framework vis-à-vis organizational linkages described next.

Linkage Theory

Recall, the organizational improvement paradox posits change is limited in terms of both impact and sustainment because implementers believe the efficacy of their work will spontaneously result in spread. But without considering established organizational behaviors, structures, and processes, several hurdles for widening impacts can isolate change work. In essence, the organizational improvement paradox helps change agents surface assumptions driving their program design in relation to how the organization currently functions. Goodman's (2000) solution to this paradox resides in linkage theory—the pathways that help connect activity, events and outcomes between change work to multiple levels of an organization. Linkage theory establishes conceptual tools for analyzing and developing ways to connect change work to other areas of an organization. Analytical tools such as political arenas, logic models, concept mapping, and coordinating mechanisms help to understand how an initiative's activities, events, and outcomes are, or could be, horizontally and vertically linked across the organization.

Activities, Events, Levels, and Outcomes

To understand linkages, it is important to identify the various components of change work—the parts that make up the whole. To do this, Goodman (2000) defines the differences between activities, events, outcomes, and levels. Activities are “definable units of work produced by an individual...or things people do.” (p. 30-2). For example, a miner cuts coal or a salesperson rings up a customer. In schools, an activity could be any moment when a teacher, administrator, and/or student completes a singular task—like planning a lesson, writing a memo to staff, or finishing a homework assignment. Theoretically, several individuals and interdependent activities are linked together to accomplish each event, which is a “cycle of interrelated activities performed by two or more people.” (Goodman, 2000, p. 32, Table 3.2 Basic Terms). For instance, teaching and learning within a unit of study, implementing a new behavior management system, or hosting a basketball game might each be considered its own event because they comprise distinct interrelated activities, some sequentially and some simultaneously.

Another object needing linkage is the “output of some production system,” or outcomes, which can be tangible or intangible—for example, the number of widgets produced or customer satisfaction. Outcomes are often considered a way to measure the effectiveness or productivity of individual activities or events. Goodman and Rousseau (2004) point out that

outcome metrics “may or may not be isomorphic across levels,” meaning that individual activity measurements might be quite different across activities and at various levels of an organization, “rais[ing] concern[s] regarding reliability, consistency in measurement intervals” (p. 11, 31). Thus, productivity of an activity might or might not be the same across multiple activities or events and one has to be careful when making conclusions and should view data mainly as a tool for inquiry.

Scaling change has much to do with how change work interacts with the organizational hierarchy (Goodman and Rousseau (2004). So, to begin clarifying the relationship between activities, events, and outcomes within a hierarchically defined organization, Goodman (2000) used the term *level*, meaning a “hierarchal location in an organization.” (p. 31) A level can be physical as well as conceptual space—for instance, the same floor of a building, grade grouping, teachers, administrators, support personnel and so forth. Moreover, levels can be understood as horizontal (same level of the organizational flow chart) and vertical (up or down the organizational flow chart). Hawkins and James (2017) understand school levels as a set of loosely-linked systems such as teaching staff, students, parents, ancillary (administration), and significant systems in the wider system. Interactions across and within these levels influence impact and sustainability of initiatives with their rules and norms.

Examining the hierarchical nature of the organization in relationship to change work—the vertical and/or horizontal movement of activities, events, and outcomes—can identify structural and sociocultural opportunities and challenges for linking initiatives to various levels. Goodman and Rousseau (2004) point out that a multi-layered, socially interactive organization requires more, not less coordination across and within levels. Mitchell’s and Sackney’s (2011) capacity-building research reinforces this understanding; they found school professionals do not necessarily discuss the inner workings of the organization and change work just because they interact on a daily basis. In other words, the more connected levels are to one another the greater the need to think about how they are (and not) linked.

Political Arenas

Whereas identifying levels of an organization might seem like a straightforward task, understanding the dynamics of how people within and between levels interact can actually confuse hierarchy and processes. Schools are bureaucratic organizations designed with the belief that effective and efficient organizations have supervisors who make the decisions and employees who follow directives and report up the chain of command (Earle & Kruse, 1999; Morgan, 2006). In this view, major policy comes from the school board and trickles down, though school-level administrators might hold some level of autonomy over the formation of policy. Common school-level administrative structures tend to be an administrator and his/her cabinet, teacher and administrator leadership team, and then department chairs. All of these structures include formal leaders with specified spans of control and chains of command. It is in these various levels that formal decisions within school are made. Typically, each level of this structure has a process that deals with some aspect, or fully, the development, enforcement, review and/or refinement of school policies, processes, and procedures.

However, a problem of hierarchical organizations is that even though the line of authority might be formally enumerated, there is quite a bit of “wheeling and dealing” that undermines this unity of command (Morgan, 2006, p. 149). Power over decisions can come

from many sources, and thus in this view, is dispersed to some extent throughout the organization (Elmore, 2000). Earle and Kruse (1999) use the concept of arenas to bring form to these dispersions, or formal configurations and informal networks in which influence over decision making plays out—faculty-principal arena, faculty-student arena, faculty arena, and school-parent arena. Within these arenas, interplay of political patterns emerges in which stakeholders clash or coalesce over values, goals, strategies, and symbolic and material resources. For example, establishing a schedule of classes might be a formal power of administration, but the substance and outcomes of that policy can easily be a result of the formal and informal interactions between and within parents, faculty, staff, students, and administration. Hence, the concept of arenas illustrates growing acceptance of pluralism and the efficacy of organizational conflict to challenge rigid structures and processes, to invigorate an otherwise inert system. Just as important, arenas recognize deliberations and politicking within and across levels, suggesting that politics and conflict can determine how multi-level coordination with change initiatives actually play out.

Clarifying the differences between activity, event, outcome, and level helps participants delineate dimensions of a change initiative's processes and structures. It is these dimensions that are useful in analyzing the relationship of change work to the organization and interactions within school. Change agents can reflect on what is planned versus enacted, parse activities from events to hone in on exchanges between them, identify which tangible and intangible outcomes are or should be tracked, and consider how these activities, events, and outcomes interact with each other within and across various levels of the organization and in political arenas to form organizational mindsets and behaviors. Such clarifications can begin illuminating specific gaps, hurdles, or bridges between people, structures, and processes that move or inhibit the spread and shift of change work. Then, concept mapping, logic models, and coordinating mechanisms become additional analytical tools for assessing linkages.

Concept Maps

According to linkage theory, change activities must account for internal organization behavior, structures, and processes, and how new initiatives fit into or alter those models of interactions. Visualizing how change work is designed to solve important problems and then how it actually moves through an organization is helpful for uncovering gaps, hurdles and bridges to impact and sustainment. There are several useful methods for visualizing linkages, two being concept maps and logic models. Resnick (2010) illustrates how to use concept maps with various constituents to understand what levels, activities, events, and outcomes participants identify in relation to the work most important to them. Participants first looked at maps developed by administrators highlighting how the aspects of the organization from the district all the way down to classroom contribute to improving student learning. Teachers got to edit out areas that were unhelpful. Then, teachers created their own “influence maps” to illustrate conditions, structures, processes, and policies they believed best supported teaching and learning. Together, these maps represented participants' mental images of the organization and shared “theories of action”—assumptions and behaviors that guide or undermine work (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Mayes (2017), using paper, rubbers, pens, and memories, facilitated a workshop where students conceptually mapped their experiences on student council. Subsequent discussions of structures, processes, and other tangible and intangible influencers

illuminated students' experiences, promoting an understanding of agency and potentialities for (and subsequent) reconfiguring of change work. In essence, maps became analytical tools for identifying assumptions of or (re)organizing work so activities, events, and outcomes of change strategy can be aligned with participants' understandings of the forces that influence problems and solutions.

Logic Models

It is not uncommon for schools to have organizational charts; yet as previously discussed, how closely school leaders follow them or how well employees understand or respect them can impact the design of a change strategy. Mapping can help participants acquire a shared sense of how the organization addresses a particular issue, yet it is also useful to actually trace how the path of individuals, activity, and events follow within an initiative and the organization. Yin (2003) outlines a method for researchers tracing process and outcomes called logic models. Individual- and organization-logic models allow for the examination of interventions when there are "repeated cause-effect-cause-effect patterns, whereby a dependent variable (activity or event) at an earlier stage becomes the independent variable for the next stage." (p. 127). In other words, logic models trace events when a specific intervention intends to produce certain outcomes. One can use the individual-logic model by developing flow charts to trace an individual's behaviors over a series of intervening activities/events. One can also trace an individual's or group's flow of experience sequentially to better understand how an intervention in practice actually happens as well as identify subsequent outcomes at each stage. The organization logic model can also be constructed similarly to a flow chart, which maps how an initiative moves through an organization, focusing on the sequence and outcomes of activities and events rather than the movement of individuals through a program. Like concept mapping, path identification can illustrate how activity, event, and outcomes move (or do not), comparing assumptions about a program's shift and spread with reality. Then, coordinating mechanisms can be developed or refined depending on how information and/or decisions are passed between each stage.

Coordinating Mechanisms

Once paths are identified, assessed, and then compared to change agents' assumptions of how initiatives would solve a problem and move through an organization, coordinating mechanisms can be developed or refined. Coordinating mechanisms are meant to remove organizational barriers creating the organizational improvement paradox (Goodman & Rousseau, 2004). Developing liaisons, one form of a coordinating mechanism, can be quite useful in this regard, especially when considerable amount of contact is necessary to coordinate work between and within levels. Liaisons coordinate time, interpersonal and goal orientations between groups, serving as an "organizational nerve center with considerable informal power" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 162). Yet, liaisons do not necessarily have to be formally established, or carry any formal authority.

Task forces and standing committees are also coordinating mechanisms that can bring a diverse group of people together to develop ideas and plan and implement work throughout an organization (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 161-80 Morgan, 2006, p 56). Such mechanisms should

be designed with the hopes of creating a cross-section of the organization and include those with specialized skills and necessary perspectives. Though, these structures tend to operate in the middle of the hierarchy and often are temporary. And, decisions that are made in these types of structures do not necessarily spread throughout the organization without planning for other coordinating mechanisms. So, this mechanism might need to be designed with other linkages in mind.

Coordinating mechanisms do not necessarily have to be solely structural in nature; they can be process-oriented. Brasof's (2015) study on a youth-adult school government model that was designed using constitutional principles and processes, such as checks and balances, gave shape to processes for creating, implementing and reviewing school policy. And, this youth-adult leadership model illustrates how to link committees/task forces to other structures and processes. For instance, the school dress code was determined by a specific law-making process—students in the House of Students proposed, voted, and then passed the policy to the Faculty Senate. From there, a student sponsor of the legislation presented to the Faculty Senate followed by faculty debate of its merits, who decided to create a task force with student-faculty representatives in order to survey parents and negotiate the final details of legislation. After both houses passed the newly revised dress code legislation, the policy presented to the executive branch, comprised of the student president (and his/her cabinet) and principal, was ready for final passage into law or veto. At each stage of the process, presentation, voting, and committee work, were checks and balances that moved policy through the organization. And, the function and sequence of these coordinating mechanisms were made clear in a governing document to help ensure authority is less arbitrary; that is, major school decisions are not made unilaterally and must go through multi-stakeholder, power-checking, policy-vetting processes. Thus, constitutional principles and process—separation of powers, checks and balances, judicial review—were coordinating mechanisms that gave form to the dispersed nature of policy-making by making tacit multi-level interactions more administratively clear.

Creating More Linkages in Youth Court

The purpose of this section is to use a recent research project on Youth Court (Brasof, 2017) conducted in three northeastern urban schools to illuminate how program design and implementation can foster isolation, and how linkages might be used to spread and shift change work to others, establishing important conditions for sustainment.

The data driving this secondary analysis was collected in the 2014-15 academic year at three schools: Boyer, an elementary school; Rodriguez, a high school magnet, and Franklin, an established middle school (Brasof, 2017; Brasof & Peterson, 2017). At Boyer, Youth Court was embedded into a fifth-grade class. Defendants came from within this and other classes on the K-5 floor. At Rodriguez, Youth Court was in its fifth year of operation, embedded into the school's 10th grade psychology class, and run by a teacher new to the school. The dean and principal referred offenders to Youth Court. Youth Court was in its second year at Franklin, run by ninth grade AVID (advanced programming for promising, underserved students) students who heard cases from both middle and high school students. The original study was ethnographic in nature and included observations of hearings, conferences, and training sessions. In addition, the current author and principal investigator also conducted semi-structured interviews with educators and focus groups with students.

Overview of Youth Court

Youth Court is a school discipline model that uses a restorative justice framework and peer adjudication structures and processes to address student discipline infractions. Research indicates that Youth Court is successful at reducing recidivism (Butts & Buck, 2000; Gase, Kuo, Lai, Stoll & Ponce, 2016; Povitsky, 2005). Moreover, Youth Court students were more capable of developing better discipline interventions than adults (Hirschinger-Blank, Simon, Volz, Thompson, Finely & Clearly, 2009). Youth Court is not forced on participants; rather, an offending student must agree to participate, is represented and tried by peers under the supervision of a trained adult, and must adhere to the court's decision. A unique feature of Youth Court is students design consequences that help restore an offending student's relationships (apologizing, serving as a juror on future a case, fixing what was broken, etc.) rather than emphasizing punitive actions such as detention and school suspension.

Isolation

As previous research indicated, Youth Court is quite useful at addressing individual instances of misbehavior. Though analysis indicates this might also be the case at these sites, too much of its processes were isolated, undermining Youth Court's impact on developing an overall school climate in which disciplinary issues do not dominate daily instructional issues, a key function of school leadership (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). That is, Brasof (2017) found Youth Court hearings surfacing vital information about problematic school or classroom policies and practices that cause or exacerbate peer or student-teacher conflicts—information either not originally reported or misrepresented on discipline referrals. Besides learning about the offending students' mishandlings of conflicts, hearings also revealed other variables causing misbehavior. For example, teachers often did not have skills to negotiate problems in their classes. On several occasions hearings also uncovered that classroom disruptions commonly stemmed from unproductive and disengaging instruction. Classroom management also became highly problematic when other students involved in a conflict were not held accountable for their decisions. And, some school policies inadvertently contributed to classroom disruptions. As a result of this newly-acquired information about conflicts from hearings, Youth Court volunteers were able to design interventions that helped some defendants reduce unproductive reactions to classroom challenges. Yet, Youth Court was less effective at directly addressing some of the other conditions that caused misbehavior; and consequentially, was an isolated leadership activity.

Activities, Events, Outcomes, and Levels

Youth Court is a series of events that disperses decisions about discipline from administration to faculty and student levels of the organization. Youth, with the support of an adult advisor, make discipline decisions about individual instances of misbehavior. This event starts as an activity in which an adult such as an administrator or teacher refers a student to Youth Court and the offending student is provided an opportunity, if they agree, to this disciplining route. From there, students run all activities, from hearing to sentencing and monitoring of interventions. Student attorneys interview the student and examine the referral

and any subsequent document such as attendance records or affidavits submitted. These activities support the construction of questions and cross-examinations that help defendants tell his/her story, reflect on the impacts of behavior on self and others, and consider possible helpful interventions that could reduce this behavior in the future. Once each side presents his/her case, the next activity has the student jury weigh the evidence and consider all presented variables along with the defendant's level of reflection in order to recommend an intervention. Then, the judge delivers a decision, allowing the defendant to agree or be sent back to administration for traditional disciplining. The hearing is then concluded, which signals the completion of the event. The jury foreman records the decision and sets up a case file, and then the advisor, Youth Court volunteer, and/or dean follows-up with the defendant to make sure the agreed upon intervention is completed—a set of activities that comprise another event.

Each hearing is an event with a set of interrelated activities that proceeds another event (sentence completion), resulting in several outcomes—some more documented than others. Besides the referral to Youth Court, the intervention is the only documented outcome. Either the student did or did not complete the intervention. Non-completion triggers a new event in which the defendant is sent to administration so the case could be processed by the school's typical disciplining system. But, one undocumented outcome is the additional knowledge gained about the causes of misbehavior that have less to do with the defendant—information that is omitted from the referral yet central to understanding the conflict. That said, school leaders and participants assumed that the more successful cases Youth Court handled, the less discipline referrals administration would have to handle and the better school climate and culture would get. That was not necessarily the case.

Political Arenas

Examination of discipline referrals illustrated a teacher-student arena in which power played out, helping to explain why school outcomes were unrealized. In several cases teachers omitted crucial information about conflict on discipline referrals—teacher dispositions and biases informed earlier unproductive reactions to misbehaviors, other students edged on defendants to cause problems, and student boredom and inactivity, to name a few (See Appendix A: Forces Engendering Misbehavior). The Dean of Students at Boyer shed some light on the issue of referrals missing important data about the causes of conflict:

On paper, no one can see that maybe you raised your hand three times to try to tell the teacher that you were having a problem. In your report, no one can see, no one can hear the tone of voice you used. It's between you and the teacher...a lot of times, quite honestly, I get behavioral referrals that are not written objectively.

The dean, who has been head of discipline at Boyer for 16 years, offered several stories of teachers' misunderstandings of student behavior, explaining how discipline write-ups represented power struggles between teachers and students rather than a means for resolving conflict.

[A] lot of times demerits are given out in an act of frustration, sometimes in the middle of a power struggle between teacher and student. Sometimes, demerits are given when

a demerit is really not warranted.... And then before long you have a situation where they are getting referred to me and they didn't have to. All because of the phrase, "Oh my god."

As the dean suggests, discipline referrals were not always accurate; but rather, excluded vital information about the causes of incidents. This supports the notion that discipline, like other aspects of school life, represents a student-faculty political pattern in which perceptions about fairness impacts behavior. Indeed, Youth Court at these three sites found students' perceptions of the fairness of discipline policies and processes impacted their willingness to follow rules. There were other instances in which the faculty-principal arena impacted the consistency and clarity of classroom rules, causing student-teacher conflict that could only be partially addressed in Youth Court due to its isolation from the school leadership structure.

Many participants felt addressing individual instances of discipline by helping defendants improve their ability to self-regulate—better manage the student-student and sometimes student-teacher arenas—represented a success of Youth Court structure and processes. But due to its design, some students found Youth Court as an additional avenue for teachers to continue unfairly meting out punishment on young people, especially when the conditions that engendered misbehavior were left unaltered. In other words, Youth Court only restored the student back to the classroom while ignoring teacher or administration contributions to conflict. Further linkage analysis will contribute to an understanding of why this happens and what might be done to improve and integrate its structures and processes more widely and intentionally in order to for Youth Court to more successfully impact the political arenas.

Concept Mapping

As the political arenas suggest, there is more to understand about misbehavior happening at these three sites that may go unexamined. For example, observing and interviewing participants about Youth Court surfaced a number of important variables behind misbehavior that went undocumented such as other students' behaviors, teachers' dispositions and behaviors, and/or classroom and school-wide policies (See Appendix A: Forces Engendering Misbehavior). Such findings echo other studies that found youth and adult perceptions, out-of-school factors, curriculum, school size, and social relations impact student misconduct and school safety (Lee & Burkham, 2000; Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2015). In many cases, Youth Court volunteers leveraged some of this information to design effective interventions to help students learn how to cope with and more positively respond to these forces. Consequently, offenders were better prepared to self-regulate despite returning to unproductive spaces or unbalanced student-teacher arenas. Though, the lack of attention to the latter issues suggests further investigation into the assumptions undergirding the design of this change strategy was necessary to determine whether Youth Court's singular focus on restoring the student back to the classroom was undermining the sustainment of that restoration and its abilities to have wider impact on the school culture and climate. Conceptually mapping the causes of misbehavior helped to illuminate why Youth Court's structure and processes was not helpful in addressing the myriad variables influencing misbehavior, suggesting new linkages

might help create more congruency between the reality of the organization and this discipline model.

Recall, conceptual mapping is useful for testing out assumptions of a program's ability to address a particular problem. Youth Court is considered a restorative justice practice. A premise of restorative justice is that by giving misbehaviors an opportunity to correct the harm done to him/herself and others, the community can remain inclusive and productive for all. As a restorative approach, Youth Court handles individual instances of misbehavior by developing an intervention intending to improve behavior rather than solely punishing a student. By correcting this individual instance of wrongdoing, the student would return back to the classroom ready to learn. In other words, removing problematic students from a class permanently or for long periods of time does not cultivate learning; it would be better to find productive ways to reintegrate a problematic student back into the classroom if he or she illustrated self-growth. If the previous findings on recidivism are true, then Youth Court would be an effective instrument for reducing problematic school behaviors over time, providing educators time to place their energies on other important school matters.

Yet, this research uncovered conflicting reports about Youth Court's wider impact on the school culture and climate and even its ability to reduce individual instances of misbehavior at times. Whereas, on most occasions, Youth Court handled individual instances of misbehavior well, school-level data on school climate and culture did not necessarily improve, and in some instances, got worse. And, some schools had repeat offenders. Certainly Goodman's (2000) insights about the validity and reliability of conclusions made when comparing program data to school-wide outcomes seems applicable—reducing the number of discipline incidents handled by administration does not necessarily foster a positive school climate and culture. Still, this system of disciplining seems more productive than more normative approaches, which typically are exclusionary, punitive systems of punishment. But, the focus of attention in Youth Court is still the student rather than the student and contributing forces, illuminating a possible reason for why both traditional and restorative approaches lack wider and lasting impacts on reducing discipline problems and sustaining a positive culture and climate in more challenging school environments. A system designed to focus solely on the student easily missed important contributing problems at all three sites, explaining why Youth Court's theory of action was undermining its own impact and sustainment. Youth Court in its current form might not be restorative, or the right strategy for impacting the wider issues engendering discipline challenges (at least at these three sites). Comparing the factors that influence behavior with the assumptions of the program with conceptual mapping exposed this design challenge.

Logic Model

Tracing how a case eventually is referred to Youth Court, the process of building and hearing a case, and sentencing and monitoring of interventions can illustrate gaps and opportunities for linkages. Concept mapping already illustrated that the forces engendering misbehavior was not part of the design of the program, yet surfaced in its processes. Individual logic modeling could now trace where that information could be captured within its current activities and events and possibly trigger inquiries as to how and which coordinating mechanism might form pathways between and within multiple levels of the organization.

As discussed, closer examination of data revealed important variables influencing student misbehavior omitted from the penning of the behavior fractions by educators to the final intervention case files. An individual logic model that followed several students through the entire process identified when this information initially surfaced—pre-trial preparations when defense attorney’s interviewed defendants. These perceptions and the information were either further elaborated on or challenged during hearings, often validating these concerns and uncovering or raising questions about other forces at hand. These lines of inquiries did not let defendants off the hook for their behavior. In fact, these explorations often resulted in Youth Court volunteers challenging defendants during cross-examination to be more cognizant of their surroundings and how s/he were responding to them. The most effective cases took these explorations into consideration prior to the hearing and had adults involved in the conflict serve as a witness, and in some cases, observe the entire hearing. Tracing several individuals through the discipline process suggested linking pre-, during, and post-hearing events within and across several levels might create new pathways in which to spread impact.

System Coordination, Ownership, and Spreading Principles, Beliefs, and Norms

If the goal of a discipline system is to establish a school climate in which behavioral concerns do not dominate instructional issues, then coordinating activity and events within and across levels to align with such a goal can help widen the purpose of Youth Court from just handling individual misbehavior to informing school’s policies and professionals’ practices. It seems clear at all three sites examined that more than just students were to blame for misbehavior, which begs the question, “How can Youth Court be redesigned so the crucial information uncovered about school life that engendered misbehavior might be integrated into structures and processes elsewhere in the organization?”

Liaising would be quite useful in this regard. For example, a faculty and/or student liaison could privately share individual hearing findings with the referring teacher in hopes s/he might integrate some of this new information into their wider reflection about classroom practices. At two sites, student attorneys gathering information only had access to submitted documents rather than being able to examine its origins—the referring educator. The gap of information between what was written versus what actually happened was wide enough that acquiring at least a deposition from the referrer seemed necessary to gain a better understanding of the situation. Likewise, a Youth Court liaison could sit in on the student council or other established leadership structures to provide feedback on what s/he is learning about school climate and culture.

School administration can be another important liaison for directly impacting school policy and shifting educator practices. Under current assumptions about the purpose and outcomes of Youth Court, there is less need for school leadership involvement. At Franklin and Rodriguez, Youth Court was mostly disconnected from other school structures. Principals approved of Youth Court, though never visited nor inquired as to what students were learning. At Rodriguez, the dean of students only observed a hearing when directly involved in a case, and at Franklin, the dean of students, in this case the assistant principal, never visited. In all three schools, teachers ran Youth Court but did not serve on other school leadership structures. Additionally, there was no sequence in the program that moved hearing-level data to school-wide structures and processes.

A coordinating mechanism such as a task force or standing committee on school discipline might also help to shift and spread the practices and learnings of Youth Court to other areas of the organization. This coordinating mechanism could perform its own or add an additional set of interrelated activities to Youth Court that produce a working paper or report on its individual and collective outcomes to be then shared with other school leadership structures. The conceptual map was an exercise for this article rather than produced at any of the three sites. If conducted at the schools, participants would most likely produce more site-specific maps and recommendations, which could also be incorporated into the sequence of leadership activities or events.

At Boyer, Youth Court used coordinating mechanisms to develop champions throughout the organization. First, the fifth grade teacher brought Youth Court to the lower school and ran it in his classroom. Acting as liaison, that teacher began by asking colleagues on a weekly basis if they had cases to recommend to Youth Court. Second, he introduced the new discipline model during a professional development session at the school. In addition, he did his best to arrange cases to take place during times when the referring teacher could participate in the hearing. When impossible to include the referring teacher, the advisor reached out to the teacher for additional feedback about the case and shared that information prior to students building their case. These interactions resulted in interventions that had self-reported positive outcomes in each participating teachers' classrooms, prompting the lower school teachers to push other colleagues to consider the efficacy of responsive classroom practices, which then became a topic of several professional development sessions at the school.

Boyer's Youth Court program also was integrated in other levels within the organization. For example, the lower school Youth Court served as a pipeline of trained students for the upper level Youth Court, facilitating a smoother transition and successful implementation of the program. In addition, the upper court implemented a supplementary event for recruiting additional capable and influential volunteers. Additionally, the dean served as liaison to the school's leadership team, creating a feedback loop. The dean also pressed more teachers to use Youth Court when he thought it would benefit students.

Even though at Rodriguez sustainment was a struggle, participants did experience similar impact due to the liaison coordinating mechanism. For instance, the Youth Court advisor, along with a few students, informally met with the principal periodically to discuss trends in cases, which also informed adjustments to a highly problematic uniform policy and provided push back to administration when unilateral and unpopular snap decisions were made.

The outcomes of Youth Court at Boyer began to impact other structures and processes. Teachers, with the support of the dean, requested administration carve out space during the school's professional development in-services for the formation of professional learning communities focused on understanding restorative and responsive classroom practices. In this way, professional development became an additional event that supported Youth Court. Unlike the other sites, Boyer's Youth Court advisor's initial prompting of peers, along with decisions to develop professional learning communities and position the dean as both a court consultant and member of leadership team, facilitated spread of the new program's principles, beliefs and norms, and shifted the ownership of the reform from a few people to several adults. Though not triangulated with other data sources, the Boyer dean was adamant that the implementation of Youth Court was instrumental in reducing the violence that besieged the school for several years prior. Notwithstanding, Boyer's attention to linkages and structural spread, along with

philosophical alignment with wider efforts aimed at improving school discipline, helped to overcome the organizational improvement paradox found at the other two sites.

Conclusion

Designers of student voice can see wider impacts and sustained work if linkages are considered. Linkage analysis provided a means for understanding struggles with student leadership efforts such as Youth Court, and informs our understanding of how more congruently designed pathways between specific activities and events, coupled with the realities of the organization, could increase its impact. And, those increased impacts would involve more adults. Connecting work across an organization or multiple levels of an organization provided openings to develop coordinating mechanisms between the change strategy and other structures and efforts. Breaking down work into activity, events, and outcomes in order to trace processes helped identify at which point(s) in the program's logic model work was expected or could be spread, and therefore, what coordinating mechanisms might assist. Connecting expected outcomes with level-specific or organization-wide goals/tasks set the foundation for building shared understandings and revising change strategies. Capturing those outcomes throughout the process provided necessary feedback for adjusting goals and strategies. In these ways, linkages became a tool to analyze and refine student voice change strategies.

This analysis of Youth Court demonstrates that even though it might be a unique student voice change strategy, harnessing its potential without considering linkages, makes it another student leadership structural arrangement that can easily disappear due to an advisor wishing to discontinue (which happened at one site). With more champions advocating and engaging in similar practices throughout Boyer, it is less likely that the principles, beliefs, and norms of youth-adult collaboration initiated in and developed through Youth Court will easily disappear even if that specific program were to end.

It is imperative that change agents consider inhibiting sociocultural conditions—if people do not believe in the efficacy of young people as change makers within schools then there is little hope of impact and sustainment of student voice work. Interestingly, the more adults work with young people around important school problems, the more they believe in the efficacy of both their labor and youth involvement to be positive agents of change (Camino, 2000; Kenworthy, 2011; Mitra, 2001; Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Though, believing in young people is not enough to cultivate youth-adult leadership practices, especially ones that can be sustained over time. Rather, of equal importance is the focused design of structures and processes that undergird partnerships, especially if designers are intending to spread the benefits to other areas of the organization. While it is laudable to get a few educators to work with youth on school problems and document positive impacts on those most involved, for many schools operating in market-driven policy environments this level of partnership and outcomes might not provide the necessary political justification for maintaining youth-adult partnerships, especially when outcomes are not so clearly linked to organization-level outcomes. Therefore, it is imperative for the designers of student voice work to consider how to integrate or attend to the structural barriers of student leadership so their involvement will lead to wider reach in school improvements and/or impact the overall discourse around school reform.

With the dearth of literature on the subject of structures and processes that proliferate impact and sustain student leadership efforts, it is imperative to engage in the work of theorizing and modeling. As this article shows, using linkage theory to reexamine the student voice literature can uncover that which encourages and/or discourages impact and sustainment of organizational change. Similarly, linkage analysis can serve as a formative assessment tool when building and adjusting change strategies.

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Appendix A: Forces Engendering Misbehavior

