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Student and Youth Leadership: A focused literature review

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ABSTRACT: This article undertakes a select but focused review of recent research literature on student and youth leadership in schools and elsewhere. It aims at discovering the current state of our knowledge, using as its focus the point of view of young people themselves in a research field where it is the adult voice that usually holds sway, in studies that are commonly for, rather than with, young people. The review first examines recent and relevant literature related to leadership by students in schools, followed by the discussion of a number of studies of youth leadership in sport. Projects which investigate links between leadership and citizenship or civic engagement are then examined, whether in schools or other social settings. The review then attends to the various ways in which youth voice is being accessed and for what purposes. It concludes that young people's voice on leadership is in need of a hearing.

Introduction

When a close examination of general leadership literature is undertaken, three fundamental concepts invariably appear, not necessarily together but in discussions about the particular leadership issues being reported. These are *purpose*, *context* and *human agency* (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009). In the literature about adults and leadership, vision, mission, goal, intention, direction or purpose figure prominently because leadership is always associated with the pursuit of something, somewhere, with someone or some others (Leithwood et al., 2006). Pursuing a purpose is always within a known environment or context and with other individuals whose agency is sought in order to achieve the desired purpose (McKinsey & Company, 2010). Are these three fundamental leadership concepts evident in the actions of young people when they

implement their versions of leadership or do other concepts or factors come into play in what they do?

In their analyses of student leadership amongst adolescents, Whitehead (2009) and Dempster and Lizzio (2007) raised concerns about the lack of empirically-informed knowledge about just what young people think leadership is. How do they conceptualise it? What actions constitute leadership actions? Do the circumstances adolescents encounter in schools and elsewhere call forth leadership actions from them? If so, what kind of circumstances and what kind of actions? Does an adolescent view of leadership automatically involve individuals in harnessing human agency in the pursuit of explicit intentions, as the adult literature would indicate? Or does something else happen when young people are engaged in what they say leadership is?

All of these questions add fuel to the fire in the minds of adult researchers who are interested in youth-centric understandings of leadership. To find out what the current state of our knowledge is from the point of view of young people themselves, this article undertakes a focused review of recent research literature which reports the use of a number of different methods including student and youth voice as the instruments of inquiry. The review is organised so that first, recent and relevant literature related to leadership by students in schools is examined, followed by the discussion of a number of studies of youth leadership taken from the field of sport. A third source is projects which investigate links between leadership and citizenship or civic engagement, whether inside educational institutions or in other social settings. These studies are supplemented by work with a concentration on methods aimed at getting as close as possible to the views of young people. Our approach to uncovering youth-centric views of leadership acknowledges that we are stepping aside from studies which begin with or are influenced by adults' views of leadership such as those concerned with the development of school captains, prefects, and other organisational or positional leadership (see, for example, Lavery, 2003; and Lilley, 2010). While there are methods in these works that seek student responses to leadership roles, the research terrain is somewhat prescribed. Overall, our review is somewhat limited but we contend that it provides an illustrative account in support of our argument that young people's voice on leadership is in need of a hearing.

What Are We Learning about Student and Young People's Views of Leadership in Schools and Elsewhere?

Schools

A review and analysis of student leadership focused research studies shows that there is 'churn' in the research agenda rather than a 'smooth' output of verifiable and replicable themes. Researchers are travelling watchfully over a terrain which covers issues such as leadership development and when it occurs, youth leadership concepts and when they are in evidence, as well as a lament for the paucity of leadership studies to date which link understanding to grounded theoretical explanations. Three recent studies illustrate these conclusions.

Sacks (2009) studied leadership amongst primary school aged children and early adolescents using grounded theory methods to uncover 'implicit theories of leadership'. Her findings resulted

in the use of the term 'stories' rather than 'stages' to describe the development of leadership activity amongst children from approximately 6 to 15 years of age. Across these years, she says, children told stories about themselves and others which suggested movement along a continuum from helpers at younger ages to ambassadors when older. These stories about being a helper, deputy, agent or ambassador in a set sequence as youngsters grow, hide a stage theory of student leadership with 'stories' acting as de facto stages. The links to 'good works' as the circumstances in which the children in this study 'saw' leadership is self-evident in the stories. Sacks' work leaves unspoken the meanings students attach to the concept of leadership, preferring to centre her data collection and analysis on the kinds of activities children and young people engage in at school and to which they attach the term 'leader'. For example, I am being a leader when I help the teacher or when the teacher asks me for help and I do something for her; I am being a leader when I say things on behalf of my classmates or I say things about particular issues. What leadership actually is or how it is viewed as a social concept by young people remains unclear.

Whitehead (2009) picks up this concern arguing that views of student leadership lack empirical support. His work emphasises that leadership is authentic when it results in pro-social outcomes. Pro-social leaders, he theorises, are inclusive and build affiliation while anti-social leaders are exclusivist and rely on power. There is some evidence emerging in the work of Lizzio et al. (2010) to suggest that young people themselves would agree with Whitehead's view. They say themselves that leadership can be exercised in youth environments for 'good' and 'bad'. Coercive processes, they report, are seen by adolescents as more likely when 'bad' outcomes are sought. Whitehead's view and the views of Lizzio et al. point the way forward to research which needs to 'get underneath' the surface activity of children and adolescents, their good or bad works, to uncover the assumptions, beliefs and understandings they have about leaders and leadership amongst their own age groups.

The concern by Whitehead (2009) about the lack of deep empirical research into youth understandings of leadership is reprised by McGregor (2007). In a focus on leadership in classrooms, she highlights the generally low levels of discourse about student leadership in schools. From her point of view, she describes a perception of leadership as a 'relational process of influence' which results in individuals facilitating their own and group activity in classroom lessons in particular ways. She goes on to say that there is no hierarchy of power in operation when students use their influence with others. Again, the work of Lizzio et al. (2010) tends to reinforce this conclusion. Students in their study showed more often than not, that the leadership actions described by adolescents were taken from the cues of the moment, not from positional cues. In other words, student positions of power, such as class captains, were not automatically implicated in spontaneous actions to which leadership was attributed. The needs of the moment with the people involved were more likely motivators for leadership to emerge in pro-social or anti-social ways from amongst anyone in the group. Notwithstanding this finding, McGregor (2007) laments a key finding from her study that little attention is paid by teachers to discussing student influence on their school and classroom activity in leadership terms. Students themselves may not be surprised by this finding. Indeed, recognising leadership in classrooms may be a matter teachers feel is missing rather than adolescents. This may be because, as Carter, Bennetts and Carter (2003) found:

[It is necessary] to rethink our prior research findings on the nature of adolescent peer group leadership ... the notion of an adolescent peer leader affirms it as an adult concept that rarely features in the pupils' lexicon.... The pupils [we] interviewed were reluctant to acknowledge the existence of peer leaders even when they were identified as such by their teachers and their peers in their reference group. (p. 237)

To sum up, it would seem that much more attention needs to be paid by leadership researchers to the drivers behind student leadership behaviour in an endeavour to get the inside story about young people's understanding of this important concept. Staying on the surface and observing activity is one way of inferring what informs that activity, but getting below the surface to identify what leadership actually is and why it is understood in particular ways will require multiple perspectives using a range of research methods known to enable young people's voices to be heard.

Sport

With this conclusion in mind, we turn to literature related to leadership in sport to see to what extent the underbelly of young people's views is on display. We encountered disappointment here too, just as we did in the school-based student leadership literature. The sports-focused studies we examined showed that involvement in sporting environments enhanced leadership skill development, social connectedness and leadership processes. Stage theory in leadership development amongst young people was also reiterated. However, answers to the question: *What do sports club members understand leadership to be?* remain seemingly taken for granted. Our examination of a range of sports studies confirms these judgments.

Kay and Bradbury (2009) analysed the capacity of youth sport volunteering to contribute to the development of social capital. They used survey data (N=160) and interviews (N=10) to examine how a national sport programme impacted on 17–20 year-old volunteers' personal and skill development and on their commitment to community involvement. They also added interview data from education and sports professionals (N=33) to the mix. Both sets of respondents reported strong individual benefit to participants including improvements in leadership (though undefined), communication, and organisational skills, self-confidence and increased social connectedness in a range of contexts.

In 2002, Eley and Kirk examined a Millennium Volunteers programme focused solely on sport involving 138 male and 168 female sport leaders (mean age 16.6 yrs). Particular concern was paid to an assessment of their motives and attitudes to volunteer work and their perceptions of leadership skills. They used two instruments for these purposes (a Voluntary Functions Inventory-VFI and a Leadership Skills Inventory-LSI) over a nine-month period. Their findings showed that leadership skills and volunteer motivations increased while the importance of and attraction to volunteering also changed over time. They concluded that the study demonstrated the advantage of using sport and volunteering as a means of encouraging pro-social behaviour and citizenship among young people and the positive impact this combination can have on the volunteer.

Holt et al. (2008) audiotaped interviews with 34 girls in under-12 and under-14 youth soccer teams to assess perceptions of their peer group experiences. Fieldworkers were involved in an 'indwelling process' of intense fieldwork, involving the researcher becoming personally involved

as a friend to players, coaches and parents, to develop rapport before conducting interviews. These included specific questions about leadership (*Who are the leaders on your team? What makes this person [or you] a good leader?*) and specific incidents involving team members. Responses were clustered into categories and themes were coded with member checking undertaken in focus groups. Five categories of peer experiences were defined. Through *interaction* players learned to engage with different types of people; through *relationships* players learned about managing peer conflict; through *groups* a structure of leadership emerged and players learned to work together. Leadership tended to be reflected by two further dimensions, one involving instrumental *task behaviours* (taking charge) and the other reflecting *supportive behaviours* (providing feedback and emotional support).

Moran and Weiss (2006) investigated the relationships between peer leadership in sport and social, psychological, and ability characteristics in 71 female and 67 male high-school soccer players and their coaches. Players completed questionnaires measuring social (peer acceptance and friendship quality) and psychological (perceived competence, instrumentality and expressiveness) variables, and leadership behaviour for self and teammates. Coaches assessed each player on leadership behaviour and soccer ability. For female athletes, all psychosocial variables were predictive of self-ratings of leadership, while coach and teammate ratings were related to ability only. For male athletes, all psychosocial variables and ability were related to self-ratings and teammate ratings of peer leadership, while coaches' ratings were related primarily to ability.

These results were discussed with regard to social exchange theory and commonalities among peer relationship variables (acceptance, friendship, leadership). Overall, the conclusion that a social-exchange framework might be useful for examining peer leadership was reached: players able to meet certain needs of team members were considered to have leadership status. Gender differences highlighted that teammate and self-ratings of peer leadership were closely aligned for male athletes, and teammate and coach ratings were highly correlated, whereas for female athletes the findings were quite different: self-ratings of leadership were highly affected by social variables and were not related to ability, whereas teammate and coach ratings were only related to ability, associating the best skilled players as the team leaders. The study showed that the assessment of leadership is determined by who does the rating, prompting the researchers to call for the inclusion of multiple methods to investigate peer leadership in future studies. We would add that it is critical to find effective ways of eliciting student understandings, particularly given the finding here that female self-assessment of leadership is so different from that of the adults who claim to know them.

Two educational programs serving low-income minority youth were the sites for study by Martinek, Schilling and Hellison (2006) to show how youth leadership evolved in 'veteran' program participants. These veterans had previously been involved in values-based sports clubs teaching sport and life skills to younger children and adolescents. The veterans, in high school or pursuing a certificate, were those who had met the goals of the sports club experiences and were judged ready for 'capstone' experiences. The four case study veterans were 14–19 year-olds while the younger children were elementary and middle school age. Individual and focus group interviews and written reflection on veteran program leaders' field notes were used as data sources. Four case studies are reported to illustrate the transformation of adolescents from self-

serving participants to caring and compassionate ‘veteran’ leaders. Martinek, Schilling and Hellison (2006) argue that the ability of youth leaders to progress through these stages is related to their personal needs and their levels of moral development.

The existence of stages of leadership development is repeated in the work of van Linden and Fertman (1998). Though the stages they proposed were theoretically derived, they claim to have identified three major sequential stages of adolescent leadership development, namely: awareness, in which the concept of leadership seems distant and adolescents need help to see themselves as leaders; interaction, in which teenagers actively test their leadership potential; and mastery, in which leadership skills and abilities are focused in specific areas or activities. In each stage, development includes acquiring knowledge of transactional and transformational leadership; in all stages, adults’ roles are seen as crucial, supporting and guiding adolescents who are incapable of working on their own before stage three. Indeed, half of the book is devoted to disseminating strategies for adults to use in youth leadership development.

When we encountered an in-depth study of two girls by Conner and Strobel (2007), we thought that we were about to see some definitive answers to the youth-centric question that is driving our work. Like us, they expressed interest in conceptions of leadership. However, although they adopted an embedded case study design focusing on the two girls’ experiences in the one youth leadership organisation over 3 years, they reported only on what youth leadership looks like, and the links between leadership development and programmatic structures and supports. From their findings they concluded that leadership may take different forms and serve different purposes, even within the same organisational context. They suggest that youth leadership is composed of three dimensions: communication and interpersonal skills; analytic and critical reflection; and positive community involvement. While this outcome reinforces some of the findings we have highlighted in the studies above, it does not throw further light on youthful understandings of leadership as an individual and/or social construct amongst young people. It seems that it is the adult voice that holds sway.

Summary

To sum up, it is apparent from the review of studies selected from school and sports environments that these organisations have been shown to assist young people in skill development; in making improvements in leadership behaviours (such as taking charge and providing emotional support); in moving beyond self-serving behaviours to serve others (through peer acceptance and friendships); in furthering their commitment to school and community involvement and social connectedness. Various categories of leadership processes have been proposed, as have different stage theories of leadership development. However, we suggest that it is the views of the researchers which are privileged in sport as they are in school research. But as we indicated at the outset of this article, we are concerned with what young people understand leadership to be and the situations or circumstances in which they say they see and experience it themselves. At the same time, we know from the work of Lizzio et al. (2010) that adolescents show an understanding of the social effects of their actions, distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ leadership. Moreover, moving beyond self to connect with the interests of others for pro-social purposes (Eley & Kirk, 2002; Kay & Bradbury, 2009; McGregor, 2009; Sacks, 2009) has been a finding from

both the schools and sports literatures. It is to this linkage of leadership with civic engagement that we now turn to seek added insights into what young people think.

What Is the Literature Saying about the Links between Leadership and Citizenship or Civic Engagement?

In citizenship literature derived from research in schools, we can see that concern centres on a view of citizenship as young people doing something for others in the school or the community. We can also see that a high value has been placed on the voice of youth by only a few researchers with some cautioning against trivialising citizenship through artificial engagement for engagement's sake. What stands out is a tendency towards declarative exhortations by adults about the benefits of civic engagement for young people. What young people themselves say about the links, if any, between leadership and civic engagement is not prominent in the citizenship research we have examined. However, when it occurs, it is immediately evident as it is in the work of Propp (2007) and others whose findings we use later to underscore our overall assessment. But first we review the kinds of discussions which tend to dominate the student citizenship field.

Lodge (2005) writes assertively about how citizenship education through participation contributes to the push by some adults for increased opportunities for the expression of youth voice. Such expression Lodge sees as preparation and practice for the future exercise of political rights. This theme is also addressed by McGregor (2007) using the concept of agency. She argues that human agency is enhanced for the young through active engagement or as she puts it:

In the current excitement and media flurry coming from government about pupil voice/leadership the caveats of activists in this area must be heeded. Holdsworth advocates that for *active citizenship* negotiated classroom processes should be around the why of learning as well as the how and what and must not devolve into 'trivial exercises in temporary engagement' (Holdsworth, 2004: 7). (McGregor, 2007, pp. 96-97)

Wheeler and Roach (2005) continue the declarative tone of Lodge (2005) and McGregor (2007), describing four insights gleaned from various initiatives and partnerships coordinated by an innovation centre in the U.S. at Takoma Park. There, young people are learning to be partners in democracy. They point to four promising practices for organisations and communities to engage young people as leaders in creating strong and healthy communities. These practices, they say, resonate with existing scholarship on youth development, youth-adult partnership, civic activism and community building. The four practices are:

1. Young people are among the key stakeholders of a community and have much energy, talent, and vision that can strengthen democracy.
2. The power of youth/adult partnerships affords both groups equal opportunity to build and utilise skills as they engage together in deliberation and civic leadership.
3. Identity support programming for young people can serve as an entry point into civic engagement, particularly for the disenfranchised.

4. When civic engagement experiences are grounded in and responsive to local community concerns, they are particularly powerful.

The assertive tone of the material we have seen so far is picked up again in a discussion of citizenship in after-school time by Schneider-Muñoz and Politz (2007). This provides the focus for a set of proposals which highlight the importance of after-school and out-of-school time in a democratic society. They say that it offers opportunities for children and young people to experience activities and programs to extend the play of childhood into leadership opportunities and youthful learning about and exploration of the world. Best practice in after-school and out-of-school time, they say, should emphasise the basic building blocks of civil society and civic leadership, especially teamwork and turn-taking, critical thinking and shared decision making, engagement in the rights and responsibilities of advocacy, understanding the diverse perspective of others and mutually using these strengths across cultures to achieve healthy goals.

In a planned citizenship project, Dallago et al. (2009) moved beyond assertion into empirical research. They sought to increase individual empowerment by promoting and researching students' active role in the school and community. They focused their intervention on civic *participation*, increasing young people's knowledge and understanding of the life of their local community, its problems and the root causes of those problems (*critical awareness*), and developing, through relevant experiences (*control*), participants' personal growth, self-efficacy and self-esteem. These three concepts, *participation*, *critical awareness* and *control*, were key features of the project design. In research accompanying the project, limited quantitative data were gathered and these showed an increase in neighbourhood civic responsibility by the participating students compared to a control group. Qualitative data described strong interest in the project by all participants. The involvement of teachers, local government officials and students led to real actions and improvements in the neighbourhood and school and to the creation of an official youth affairs council. The researchers conclude that the project provided a model for service-learning and organised student civic engagement based on the view that civic engagement must be learnt by doing.

In 2007, Weller explored teenagers' acts of engagement with citizenship in the light of the introduction of compulsory citizenship education into the National Curriculum in England and Wales. She was concerned to understand the role of citizenship education in creating future responsible citizens. She presents findings on the pro-social practice of citizenship in school and in the wider community. At the same time she presents teenagers' perspectives on their exclusion from participation, their experiences of statutory citizenship education and their own acts of citizenship and civic engagement. Using several case studies, she highlights examples of young teenagers who have devised creative and resourceful ways to redefine and reconstruct everyday spaces and identities, including developing skate-park facilities and campaigning for the preservation of youth centres.

Returning to the work of Sacks (2009), we note that one of her four stories of leadership, the *agent*, characterises the role-oriented leadership of early adolescent students and their sense of self as budding leaders. Citing a definition of agent as one who has the power to act, she says:

This definition incorporates students' increasing sense of efficacy and personal power to affect change in their schools and communities. In particular, students who participated in community service and civic opportunities saw themselves as young leaders making a

difference for others in need. These experiences help students to see themselves as agents of change. (p. 118)

Summary

The limited review we have conducted has emphasised the need for empirical work to substantiate the claims emanating from the declarative writing which seems to frequent this field. Studies like those of Weller (2007) and Sacks (2009) are illustrative of the direction in which we believe more research should be headed. To emphasise this point of view we conclude this section by describing Propp's (2007) study of the leadership understandings of undergraduate Education students. This is exciting work because interesting insiders' views have been uncovered, such as Propp's major finding and those of others:

It is obvious that from the students' perspective, leadership belongs to the entire group. This position is consistent with findings by Bibby (2001) and Howe and Strauss (2000), the latter of whom claimed that Millennials [students entering higher education this century] represent a new civic mindedness and team orientation... Furthermore, students' leadership understanding reflected elements of relational leadership, including collaborative relationships and working together. Their beliefs substantiated the work of Komives et al. (1998), who found that undergraduate students prefer relational leadership, and research by Astin and Astin (2000), who reported that undergraduate students realize that non-hierarchical, relational leadership approaches contain a transforming capacity that enhances the potential of effecting a greater good within diverse communities. (pp. 220-221)

It must be emphasised that this confirming collection of findings has been drawn from the views of young adults at university level, not from those of younger school age. Nevertheless, they suggest that young adults have a different way of conceptualising leadership as non-hierarchical, relational and collaborative. If this is the case, what might their junior counterparts in schools think? In part, this is a methodological question which has been exercising our minds as it has the minds of other researchers keen to get inside the heads of children and adolescents to see the world through their eyes. It is to the kinds of research methods that enable student voice to be heard that we now turn our attention.

What Types of Research Methods Are Being Employed in Schools and Elsewhere, to Bring Young People's Voices into the Foreground?

The literature we have reviewed on student voice as it has been employed by researchers in various arenas suggests that most researchers concentrate their attention on listening to that voice in organised settings for the purpose of improving what happens in them. How listening is initiated, for what purpose and who controls the dialogue are important questions to which we respond in this section. To discover how listening is initiated, we identify the predominant research focus in terms of age and location, and then review the methodological approaches which have been employed to elicit student voice. We do this to show the methodological trends as well as what we perceive are the gaps in the research attending to youth voice. In seeking to discover

the purposes of listening to young people's voices, we examine student voice in schools, and then in out-of-school settings including after-school activities and community initiatives, and sport. We are also interested in studies which have sought student voice in understandings of leadership and where and how it is manifest in young people's minds. To set the scene, we begin with some contemporary definitions of student and youth voice.

Student and youth voice

Student voice, as Mitra (2006) explains, describes 'the many ways in which students might have the opportunity to participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers' (p. 7). Hart's typology (as cited in Bahou, 2011) illustrates a ladder of youth participation, with the lowest three rungs of non-participation reaching tokenism, and the remaining five rungs of participation representing increased relinquishing of adult direction until at the top, projects are child-initiated and decisions are shared with adults. Extending the typologies of Fielding, Hart and others, Mitra illustrates a three-tiered pyramid of student voice ranging from 'the most basic level where youths share their opinions on problems and potential solutions, to a higher order where young people collaborate with adults to address problems in their schools, to ultimate recognition where youth takes the lead on seeking change' (p. 7), the last being the least common form, as our review of the literature has noted already.

In exploring the value of student voice for school improvement, Lodge (2005) presents a matrix with four general approaches of which listening to students is also regarded as the most basic. A dialogic model is proposed as a more active form of participation that will contribute most towards school improvement. In Bahou's (2011) critical review of the UK, U.S. and Australian student voice literature, she concludes that having students as researchers is the most participatory manifestation of student voice in schools. Authors concerned with the importance of accessing the voice of young people seem to agree that there is a variety of ways in which this can happen, that listening is generally the starting point and the most accessible, and that research should endeavour to find more active ways to bring young people's voices into the foreground in education and beyond. In all of these cases, the issue of permission is critical. For the most part, adults control the opportunities when student views will be called for.

The term 'youth voice', while sometimes used interchangeably with 'student voice', is often more broadly applied to contexts beyond the school environment, perhaps in conjunction with civic engagement (Dallago et al., 2009), club leadership programs, or service learning (Webster, Bruce, & Hoover, 2006) but also with sport (Sandford, Armour, & Duncombe, 2010) or health (or both, e.g., Peacock-Villada, DeCelles & Banda, 2007). The 2007 issue of *New Directions for Youth Development* devoted to policy, practices and youth voice presents various country-specific afterschool examples of youth voice. Two examples indicate the scope: (i) Montreal youth interviewed and filmed videos to prevent violence in their communities, and (ii) a pilot program in Zambia and South Africa aimed to build resilience through sport-based education. What these projects show is the breadth of interests to which young people's voices can be applied.

Attention to the voice of young people in research is generally targeted at the post-primary level because there is an implicit adherence to what Grace (in Lodge, 2005) refers to as an 'ideology of immaturity'. This has resulted in numerous studies focusing on the early high school

years (approx. 12–15 year-olds). However, this is not always the case. In the research of Dallago et al. (2009) the students were 12 year-olds; Hill's (2006) literature review deals with children; Schratz and Steiner-Loffler (1998) worked with 5th and 6th graders; McNaughton (2009) with 10–12 year-old children (although this was not necessarily for the children's direct benefit). The soccer players in Rutten et al.'s (2010) study ranged from 10–18.

Methodological approaches

Methodologically, numerous approaches have been taken to elicit student voice, predominantly action research methods. These involve teacher-directed projects, students as co-researchers (e.g., Leitch et al., 2007; Lind, 2007; Weller, 2007; Wheeley, 2011), and students themselves as action researchers (e.g., Dallago et al., 2009; Schratz & Steiner-Loffler, 1998). Within these research projects, it is common to see mixed-methods: case studies incorporating individual and focus group interviews (Martinek et al., 2006) or photo-narratives, group interviews and then individual reviews of videotaped group discussions (as reported by Sandford et al., 2010); visual stimuli to prompt discussion, whether individually or in small groups (Leitch & Mitchell, 2007); students trained in interviewing their peers and bringing the results back for shared analysis (Lind, 2007; O'Brien & Moules, 2007). Marquez-Zenkov et al. (2007) utilised photographs taken by students and written descriptions of these, with the content analysed by the authors.

Regular methods

Not surprisingly, focus groups and interviews, both semi-structured and open-ended, feature prominently in the literature. Logue, Hutchens and Hector (2005) preferred open-ended, unstructured interviews to garner students' experiences in leadership roles. In the semi-structured individual interviews used by Carter, Bennetts and Carter (2003) to illuminate the nature of the adolescent peer group in effecting lifestyle choice, participants were asked to recall critical incidents; vignettes were used by Owens and Duncan (2009) as a discussion stimulus; O'Grady (2008) utilised semi-structured interviews to supplement photographs taken. Focus group discussions were employed in a raft of studies, including Webster, Bruce and Hoover (2006), Leitch et al. (2007), Weller (2007), Propp (2007), Sacks (2009), Owens and Duncan (2009), Banaji and Buckingham (2010), Archard (2011), and Wheeley (2011). In a contemporary variant, to include teenagers' own preferred communication techniques, Weller (2007) employed web-board discussions and a community radio phone-in, as well as the more traditional face-to-face interview settings. The burgeoning digital media, and their popularity with young people, is likely to see inclusion of more of these techniques in research.

While less prominent in this literature, surveys were employed, sometimes as the primary data collection method (e.g., Kay & Bradbury, 2009) but often in conjunction with another method, for example to obtain a broad sample prior to interviews (e.g., Carter, Bennetts & Carter, 2003), to collect data from a large cohort prior to qualitative methods with smaller samples (e.g., Banaji & Buckingham, 2010), to operate as a pre-test (e.g., Dallago et al., 2009), or to follow up differences identified in focus groups (Sacks, 2009).

Digital techniques

Raynes-Goldie and Walker (2008), who run an online civic engagement site (TakingITGlobal.org) (TIG) that embeds social networking tools within the context of civic engagement and activism, reason that if youth are provided with access through youth-friendly tools such as blogs, profiles and discussion forums, they are more likely to engage. Surveying the communication tools of a number of online civic engagement sites, the authors note that while discussion forums are the oldest and most widely used tool, multiple modes of communication should be offered, including the most innovative forms, to appeal to youth with sophisticated Internet literacy. The TIG organisation operates on the assumption that ‘through the opportunity to connect easily and efficiently with young leaders in their areas of interest, more active members will inspire less active members to take action’ (p. 172). TIG provides offline engagement opportunities in addition to online, and the authors have begun to research the impact of online engagement on civic engagement. Based on an initial exploratory survey (N=769; 18.3% under 21 and 75.16% aged 21–30) the authors report that young people are interested in civic issues and that interest can lead them to take action, with TIG members far more likely to do so than other respondents: close to 50% of respondents agreed that using the site had helped them to change something in their own lives, with 44.1% agreeing that ‘the information, networks, and tools to mobilize and organize found on TakingITGlobal.org have helped them make change in lives or community’ (p. 172). Follow-up qualitative responses further confirmed that the presence of a large network of youth leaders online was of great value to many TIG members.

The correlation of online activities and offline engagement is questioned in much more extensive research by Banaji and Buckingham (2010), whose 3-year CivicWeb project examined the potential contribution of the Internet to promoting civic engagement and participation among 15–25 year-olds. To provide basic quantitative data about young people’s use of the Internet and their online and offline civic engagement, they conducted a broad online survey of over 3,300 respondents in the seven participating countries, followed by in-depth focus group interviews (10–12 per country). Their findings lead them to question the perception that increased (online) voice for youth will lead to greater empowerment and thence to increased (offline) engagement; a specific finding was the existence of ‘a continuing digital divide along socioeconomic lines both in the quality and extent of access to technology and in the extent of civic engagement’ (p. 18). Furthermore, while the Internet may be accessed for civic and political purposes for those young people already active in these contexts offline, it is unlikely to encourage disadvantaged and ‘hard to reach’ youth into offline civic engagement.

While it is clear that opportunities for interaction amongst young people are facilitated by online technologies, the accompanying research reported at this stage seems to concentrate on usage rather than on conceptual substance. Using discourse analysis on discussion ‘postings’ amongst young people would be one way to bring their views out into the open quite powerfully. Co-operative discourse analysis involving adults with adolescents would add even more authenticity to this method of research. It is our hope that the textual data available through online sites will provide new entry points to leadership understanding.

Image-based methods

As mentioned above, image-based methods in this literature are often prompts for discussion.

Occasionally however, they might be used to provide documentation in their own right (notably in the recent work by Pope, 2010). In any case, as argued by Heath et al. (2009), these methods can grant young people greater control over the research process, a factor which makes them of particular interest for our purposes. Heath et al. summarise three broad approaches to the use of visual methods in researching young people's lives: those based on the analysis of naturally occurring material; those which are produced by researchers; and a growing number of studies that are making use of visual material produced by respondents. Techniques include student drawings (Leitch et al., 2007; Leitch & Mitchell, 2007; Morrow, 2001) and photographs taken by the young participants (Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007; Morrow, 2001; Pope, 2010; Schratz & Steiner-Löffler, 1998; Weller, 2007). In O'Grady's (2008) study, photographs taken by participants about their daily lives were supplemented by interviews and discussions in a process using Photovoice, which the author identified as 'a respectful approach to engaging those usually excluded from research projects, such as adolescents' (p. 132). Photovoice was also one of the methods employed in Dallago et al. (2009). Photo elicitation has enjoyed increasing popularity among researchers as it accords authority to participants' voices; for this reason, Pope (2010) uses the method along with what he terms autodriven photo-elicitation discussions, where the students in his study led the conversation about their selected images.

Pope (2010) argues cogently for the visual turn in qualitative research, and the potential of visual research methods to fill the gaps revealed in scientific research. Citing Becker's claim that 'photographs, more aptly than words, display social phenomena in context' (p. 191), he argues that visual methods are particularly appropriate for articulating the voice of young people in research. Other benefits ascribed to image-based methods include a more relaxed atmosphere, where the focus is on the visual objects or activities. Leitch and Mitchell (2007) note the effectiveness of image-based methods for revealing students' experiences of their school's culture that might not otherwise be so easily articulated. They recommend 'a wider range of approaches to student voice which use creative and image-based work that complements more traditional approaches ... through developing "cultures of listening"' (p. 69). These methods present their own ethical dilemmas, however, as Morrow (2011) and Heath et al. (2009) note.

Forum drama

A method not reported extensively, yet one with some interesting results, is forum theatre, in which actors present dilemmas relevant to the context of the audience, and audience members are progressively drawn in to voice their opinions and suggest and enact ways to resolve the dilemma, culminating in discussing the outcomes and proposing further solutions. O'Toole (1997) describes its effectiveness for teaching conflict management as students clarify, re-enact and reconstruct situations. In a rather different environment, Rutten et al. (2010) used forum theatre in a pilot study to examine the possible effects of an intervention in organised youth soccer to positively influence antisocial and prosocial behaviour.

Summary

As the methodological approaches to eliciting voice favour case studies, interviews and discussions, the body of research is largely qualitative, although not exclusively so. Mixed-method

approaches feature regularly in this corpus: the multi-method action research of Dallago et al. (2009), for example, began with surveys, then in an intervention introduced the students to analysis, discussions, and image-based methods, and encouraged the students to disseminate their findings through a magazine, comic strip, and posters; process evaluation of the project also employed multiple methods including observations and self-report questionnaires with closed-ended questions for the participants and a control group. While no studies are entirely quantitative in approach, some rely quite heavily on survey instruments or questionnaires, including Rutten et al. (2010) who used a battery of questionnaires pre-test and post-test.

To sum up, it is clear that researchers are utilising a range of research methods to elicit the voice of youth, and that the increasing use of visual methods, assisted no doubt by modern technology, is offering new forms of access. There is no justification for rejecting old methods in favour of newer methods with more supposed ‘youth appeal’ however. As Hill (2006) reminds us in his review of children’s and young people’s perspectives on methods used in research and consultation, there is some merit in an eclectic approach, for while ‘children are normally passive with respect to method choice ... they negotiate differing degrees of engagement related to considerations such as time control, comfort with the research medium, rewardingness and privacy [and] their views about methods of research and consultation are sharply affected by notions of inclusiveness and fairness’ (p. 69). Having reviewed the methods employed to hear and ‘see’ student voice, we now turn to the purposes for which this is employed, firstly in schools and then beyond.

Youth voice – Employed for what purposes?

The purposes for employing youth voice in research, as noted at the outset, have often been adult rather than student centred, in studies that are commonly *for* rather than *with* the young people concerned. Furthermore, the trend has been to hear what young people have to say as an end in itself, with no heed to Hill’s (2006) warning that young people are primarily outcome focused, so when they are asked their views they expect a response, and are often disappointed when nothing happens. In schools, the purpose of research with students has tended to be for what teachers can do with the outcomes, while in sport it is often for the purposes of examining behaviour, including motivation, but not necessarily to act with young people upon the understandings thus gained. Our review of the literature reveals that there are some welcome exceptions to this trend, with some youth-centric research aimed at the co-operative improvement of young lives (e.g., Dallago et al., 2009; Sandford, Armour & Duncombe, 2010).

In schools

Lodge (2005), exploring the value of student voice in school improvement, argues that any claim that student voice can contribute to school improvement needs to be analysed in terms of ‘the degree to which students are regarded as being active in participation in school life, and the purpose for which their voice is being used’ (p. 125). She draws a distinction between ‘those that are for community purposes, such as the improvement of learning, and institutional purposes such as improvement in the [academic] appearance of the school’ (p. 125). While some of the literature

reviewed identifies the use of student voice for institutional purposes, the improvement of learning is often the purpose.

The research of Schratz and Steiner-Löffler (1998) with relatively young children provided them with the means to explore the culture of their school as a learning organisation. The researchers concluded that the self-evaluative photos taken by their students can become a valuable instrument leading to institutional change. Their consultation with pupils regarding learning and assessment in classrooms in Northern Ireland highlighted for Leitch et al. (2007) the difficulties and tensions, but also the positive outcomes, of working with students as co-researchers. They concluded that the use of student-centred methods contributed to student involvement and empowerment. The 'Through Students' Eyes' project (Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007) explored city students' perceptions of what they considered effective or 'quality' teachers and called for 'a more authentically complicated understanding of urban youths' perspectives on school' (p. 407) but did not go beyond giving their point of view. Leitch and Mitchell (2007), referring to the gaps between schools' espoused views of how student involvement occurs and students' views of their reality, argue that with the advent of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is necessary to develop genuine processes of student engagement through school councils, curricula and pedagogical approaches. This human rights imperative is underscored also by Lodge (2005).

According to Mitra (2006), student perspectives are sought most often on learning, pedagogy and curriculum. Whether, and to what extent, those perspectives then impact on practices is unclear. It may be that these views are sought more commonly for evaluation purposes. Brooker and Macdonald (1999) suggest that student input can be sought also in the development processes of the curriculum, arguing that 'the challenge is to embrace curriculum-making practices that are more inclusive and valuing of student voice' (p. 95). In researching student involvement activity in relation to teaching and learning in the Networked Learning Communities project, McGregor (2007) argues for a perception of leadership not as relating to hierarchical power, but rather as a relational process of influence, bemoaning the fact that activities in lessons which offer the opportunity for students to exercise leadership are rarely recognised or discussed.

In her doctoral research with high school students in Australia, Wheeley (2011) used a multiple case study approach to elicit the views of students about their learnings in extracurricular activities. She argues cogently for an acknowledgement that 'student voice has a vital role to play in informing curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation in secondary schools' (p. iii).

Youth voice as it is being reported elsewhere

Beyond the regular school environment, the voice of young people is sought in research into mental health promotion, in exploring health and well-being, in illuminating the nature of peer influence in effecting lifestyle choice, and to understand various dimensions in sport. In participatory action research at a Canadian alternative high school, where adolescents were involved as research partners to explore mental health promoting nursing practices, Lind (2007) concluded that 'conceptualizing adolescents as research partners with valuable voices promises to create future possibilities for important health promoting change' (p. 371). In an empirical

research project in England, Morrow (2001) explored Putnam's concept of 'social capital' (including civic engagement) in relation to the well-being and health of children and young people for the purposes of promoting community health, while Carter, Bennett and Carter's (2003) case study of an Australian high school cohort sought to understand the nature of peer influence and the peer reference group in the context of health, personal relations and lifestyle. For her doctoral research in Australia, O'Grady (2008) explored the psychological sense of community and wellbeing in adolescents with and without an intellectual disability. In the research project of Dallago et al. (2009) in Italy, children talked about their own life contexts in order to voice problems about their neighbourhoods to decision makers. This project led to improvements in the neighbourhood and the school, including the creation of an official youth affairs council. Sandford et al. (2010) report on research into a variety of UK programs for disaffected youth with attention to how young people's voices have been used to articulate themes in the dissemination of findings. A participatory action research evaluation of the Positive Futures initiative (aiming at engaging disadvantaged, disaffected and marginalised youth through sport and leisure activities) sought to develop a flexible and inclusive research methodology which would use learning from the study to inform future direction.

The voice of young people has been sought in sport to examine motivation, peer group experiences, and behaviour. In Canada, Holt et al. (2008) audiotaped interviews with girls from two youth soccer teams (U12 & U14) to assess perceptions of their peer group experiences. Kay and Bradbury (2009) in the UK examined youth sport volunteering on the development of social capital. In his research in surf clubs in Australia, Light (2006) conducted extended, semi-structured interviews with 14 year-old informants, employing Lave and Wenger's concepts of situated learning and communities of practice to examine learning and identity formation. In this research he also sought to understand how learning/membership in the surf club compared to school. The research of Rutten et al. (2010) in The Netherlands was a pilot study of male adolescent soccer players from 10 to 18 years of age to determine the effects of a forum theatre intervention on moral reasoning and team atmosphere, including fair play attitude and on- and off-field antisocial and prosocial behaviour. Pope's (2010) photo-elicitation study explored student sport experiences in rowing to determine the educational meanings young people ascribe to sport. Sandford et al. (2010) provide further examples of recent youth sport research in which participants' voices are heard, particularly the insights of disaffected youth, with the purpose of recognising their input in public policy and discourse to aid the development of future sport/physical activity initiatives for personal development.

As foreshadowed at the outset of this section, hearing students' voices is the beginning of a continuum, and some of the research involving young people does not get much further than this passive stage. It appears to us that there is a need to get active, to move determinedly to students and young people as researchers or at least to seeing them as involved co-researchers.

In examining the links between voice, young people and action research, Hadfield and Haw (2001) conclude that there is a relative lack of discussion in education of collaborative action projects involving young people that set out to get their voices heard. Sandford et al. (2010) argue that the approach to hearing youth voice is often tokenistic because young people's contributions are directed and limited by adult research agendas; Holdsworth (in McGregor, 2007, p. 97) similarly warns against tokenism, suggesting that 'at times a focus on voice "being heard" can be

a safety valve, reducing the pressure for real change'. This view is echoed by Banaji and Buckingham (2010), who conclude that:

Young people are repeatedly encouraged to "have their say," but our project has found little evidence that people in positions of power are listening in a systematic and respectful manner—or, if they are, that they are doing anything in response. The superficial appearance of participation can easily justify recourse to a kind of cynicism'. (p. 23)

Closing Summary

The point of departure for this review was a series of questions about our understanding of student and young people's views of leadership, how and where they see and experience it and how we find out what underlies what they do.

The review has revealed that while numerous studies concern themselves with aspects of leadership in schools and elsewhere, understandings of leadership of the young people themselves are rarely heard, the work of Propp (2007) being a notable exception. His conclusions reinforce those of a small number of other youth voice focused researchers who found that leadership for this age group is best described as relational and non-hierarchical.

The links between leadership and civic engagement are somewhat better articulated in the literature we reviewed, and there is some move towards uncovering insiders' views in this regard, such as in the work of Weller (2007) and Dallago et al. (2009). It appears that young people are likely to hold collaborative views and that they see the connection between leadership and civic engagement as leading towards a greater good. Furthermore, any civic engagement is likely to be contextual, a point underscored by Banaji and Buckingham (2010) who found that 'when young people were involved in civic activities that are related to their immediate contexts ... they seemed to feel more confident in their capacity to bring about change' (p. 20).

In terms of how we find out what young people think about leadership and how it might be enacted, our examination of the research methods employed revealed a variety of ways in which their voice could be foregrounded, but at the same time illustrated that having a voice did not necessitate its assumptions, informing ideas and conceptual background being heard.

Our analysis of the studies we selected from the student and youth leadership literature has also revealed that there are researchers in various locations finding new ways to gain greater access to student voice, such as Dallago et al.'s (2009) work to increase students' empowerment in the school and community and Rutten et al.'s (2010) work with forum theatre to determine if interventions can contribute to the achievement of educational goals in sport. It is not surprising, given the proliferation of digital media and a generation fluent in their use, that visual methods are well represented in this niche and we should not be surprised to see them figuring more prominently in the future in youth leadership research.

Staying on the surface and observing activity is one way of inferring what informs that activity, but getting below the surface to identify what leadership actually is and why it is understood in particular ways requires multiple perspectives using a range of research methods known to enable young people's voices to be heard and acknowledged. We hope that the collection of articles presented in this issue lives up to this claim.

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