Increasing Student Voice and Moving Toward Youth Leadership

by Dana Mitra

The reason that I decided to choose this article on increasing student voice is because that is one of the most important pieces of leadership for youth. When student’s voices are heard by their peers, elders, and administrators, it gives them a sense of empowerment. I remember how it made me feel when I was a youth leader in my community. The two main concepts that Dana Mitra hits are the different typologies of student voice and the trade-offs of student voice strategies.

The different typologies of student voices are broken into a three way pyramid. Being heard is the most common form of student voice. On page 8 it says, “When participating in student voice activities, students often speak with great appreciation that their voice are finally being ‘heard’ and ‘honored’.”(Mitra) This is vital for youth leaders because the more confidence that they have, the better leader they will be. The next typology is collaborating with adults. This is a way for youth to interact with adults better understand them. For example, in the article the teachers thought that one student did not want to be at school, but the reason she was not at school was because she had family problems at home. Because the student was embarrassed, she did not say anything. Now that she was able to tell the teacher her problem, the teacher and the student were able to work together to “develop a common language and a set of skills that created a shared knowledge base from which the group could communicate and proceed with their activities.” (Mitra, 8) The final typology is building capacity for youth leadership. The
students want to take it a little further and build ways on making their school a better place. The students at Whitman high school wanted to get their school out of the “ghetto school” category. With help from staff, they were able to build a student forum to discuss how they will implement ways to do better.

The trade-offs of student voice strategies was the most difficult challenge the Whitman High School students faced. Students still lacked power and were aware that the adults needed to switch roles with them to help them. That is when youth leadership falls back and teachers go back to their “traditional” way of being superior to students. The only way that this is going to change is if the different typology methods are followed.