Does Sociocracy Support Student Voice? Student Perceptions of a Student Council Using Sociocracy in a Public School

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Received August 2022 Accepted for publication Sep. 2022 Published Dec. 2022

Abstract

Previous research has suggested benefits of greater student involvement in school decision-making (i.e. student voice). These benefits may include improved academic outcomes, higher GPAs, fewer absences, and gained social skills. Despite these benefits, research has also indicated that many student council members express perceived limitations to their decision-making power. In this qualitative interview-based study, I explore how students at the New Roots Charter School in Ithaca, NY, perceive their own student council, which uses sociocracy, a consent-based governance method. During interviews, six students provided specific examples of student-led changes in school policies. Nine of the 10 student council members expressed positive opinions of sociocracy as a governing method. Another nine of the 10 cited participation in their sociocratic student council as positively impacting their personal growth, especially communication skills. I conclude that in a school with an administration that is ready to carry out changes based on student input, sociocracy supports the inclusion of all students in expressing student voice. From these results, I encourage more schools to consider using sociocratic processes in their student councils.

Keywords: holistic education, student voice, pupil voice, decision-making, student participation, student council

The Benefits of Including Students in Decision-Making

Evidence suggests that there are several benefits to higher student involvement in school decision-making. A Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations study (2016) found that "students who believe they have a voice in school are seven times more likely to be academically motivated than students who do not believe they have a voice" (p. 6). A study focusing on academic outcomes found that the student perception of higher responsiveness of the administration to student voice was related to "higher GPAs, fewer absences, and less chronic absenteeism" (Kahne et al., 2022, p. 407). In a meta-study of 16 student councils, 12 were found to have positive impacts on the school as a

whole (Griebler & Nowak, 2012). Youth involvement in decision-making may also have a positive impact on adults and organizations in certain conditions (Zeldin et al., 2000).

There is also evidence for social, emotional, and developmental benefits for students with greater participation in school decisions. According to Mitra (2004), youth developmental outcomes of agency (exerting influence or power), belonging (developing meaningful relationships in school), and competence (gaining abilities and being recognized for their talents) were enhanced by student voice efforts in one school. Reviews of empirical research into student participation in student councils (Griebler & Nowak, 2012) and decision-making in schools

(Mager & Nowak, 2011) also found evidence of positive effects on self-esteem, life skills, democratic skills, and relationships with adults.

Arguments for Increasing Student Participation in School Decision-Making

Some advocates for increasing student participation in decision-making assert that civic participation in a democratic society demands early lived experiences of participatory decision-making, especially in schools (Duerr, 2004; Solhaug, 2018). Researchers who advocate for school reform argue that students as stakeholders need to be included in decision-making to make significant changes in schools (Fielding, 2001; Rudduck & Flutter 2000; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). Additionally, a human rights argument for student voice supported by the UNCRC (1989) states that all children have "the right to express [their] views freely in all matters affecting the child," (Article 12.1).

The Limitations of Student Councils

In many parts of the world, student councils are the primary avenue for student voice in schools. A recent international literature review about student perceptions of student rights found that "other than a single qualitative study of young students in Sweden (Quennerstedt, 2016), the literature consistently shows that students [participating in student councils] tend to criticize the limited scope of participation rights in school," (Perry-Hazan, 2021, p. 937). The same review characterized some of the student councils studied as discussing "trivial" matters. At five schools in Norway, where student councils are required by law, the school principals still hold veto power over any decision (Børhaug, 2007, p.33). As Jones & Bubb (2020) conclude about implementing student voice for school improvement in Norway, "even in the most 'perfect' conditions, however, there are challenges," including lack of action from the administration in response to student feedback, and lack of time or ability for teachers to implement students' ideas (p. 242). As one student expressed, "When we give our opinion, teachers say 'yeah, yeah we'll do something about it later' and then they never end up doing anything," (p. 240). Even if they are given real decision-making power, majority-rules democratic student councils are at risk of tending toward a "tyranny of the majority," like any democratic institution (Adamóva, 2013).

Sociocracy as an Alternative to Majority-Rule Governance

Sociocracy (also referred to as Dynamic Governance), a governing structure that originated in a school (Burke & Könings, 2016; Rawson, 1956), offers an alternative to the more common majority-rules voting system practiced in many student councils. To ensure everyone is heard, sociocracy includes the method of taking turns to speak in rounds (Rau & Koch-Gonzales, 2018, p. 203). In order to ensure the flow of information throughout an organization, working groups called "circles" are integrated into a double-linked circle structure (Rau & Koch-Gonzales, 2018, p.47). Consent decision-making requires that proposals move forward only if there are no objections from any circle members (Endenburg, 1998, p. 20; Rau & Koch-Gonzales, 2018, pp. 109-120). These collaborative structures provide a framework for including all voices in an organization in decision-making. As the aims of sociocracy are to "respect the equal value of people" (Buck & Villines, 2007 p. 29) and to ensure that "no one is ignored" (Rau & Koch-Gonzales, 2018, p. 3), I wondered if students using sociocracy in their school might perceive it as an inclusive and empowering method of decision-making.

The Origins of Sociocracy (i.e. Dynamic Governance)

Sociocracy is a form of "democracy as it might be" (Boeke, 1945, as cited in Buck & Villines, 2007 p.191-199) that originated in De Werkplaats Kindergemeenschap, a Quaker-inspired school founded in 1926 by Kees Boeke and Beatrice Cadbury in the Netherlands. The principles of sociocracy to include student voice used in the school included consulting the students at "talkovers" (Rawson, 1956, pp. 32-33) where the students and teachers would discuss issues "on an equal basis" (Plesman, 1961, p. 6). In a school-wide weekly assembly, "decisions were made only when everyone agreed," a contrast to majority rules vote (Burke & Konings, 2016, p. 726). Sociocracy was further developed by Gerhard Endenburg, a former student of the school, who systematized the Sociocratic Circle Method using engineering and cybernetic principles (Endenburg, 1998). The sociocratic processes used at New Roots Charter School are described in detail in the findings of this paper.

Current Use of Sociocracy In Schools and With Children

Sociocracy is currently used in dozens of democratic schools worldwide with joint student, teacher, and staff participation in decision-making (Osorio & Shread, 2021). It is also used in children's parliaments in India with representatives aged

6-18 in thousands of federated groups from neighborhood, city, state, and national levels (John, 2021; Ravi, 2020).

Potential Benefits of Sociocracy in Schools

A study of Rainbow Community School, a school using sociocracy primarily with teachers and staff as well as "sociocratic-style processes" with students, found that students outperformed 25,000 of their peers previously tested on an assessment measuring reflective judgment and the ability to take the perspectives of others (Owen & Buck, 2020, pp. 13-14). The authors conclude that although there is no proof that sociocracy caused student success, the use of sociocracy may have influenced the culture of the school.

"Sociocracy" vs "Dynamic Governance"

Sociocracy is also known in the United States as "Dynamic Governance," and I use these terms interchangeably throughout this article. This term was popularized to avoid possible negative reactions because of the similarity of "sociocracy" to the word "socialism" (Buck & Villines, 2007, p.14, Rau & Koch-Gonzales, 2018, p. 9). Because "sociocracy" is the original word used by Boeke and Endenburg as well as the term used internationally, I have chosen to use it in most cases. The students at New Roots are only familiar with the term "Dynamic Governance," which is why I used this term in the interview questions, code tree, and when directly quoting students of the school.

Defining Student Voice

For the purposes of this paper, I consider student voice to mean the extent of "meaningful student involvement" (Fletcher, 2005, p. 5) in "decisions about and implementation of educational policies and practices" (Holdsworth, 2000, p. 355).

This includes:

- 1. adults listening to student feedback and then making decisions,
- 2. adults and students collaborating on decisions together,
- 3. and students leading decisions themselves (Mitra, 2007, pp. 727-728).

How This Study Contributes to Student Voice Research

The current study builds on the area of student voice research centered on a "discourse of 'radical collegiality,' "

(Charteris & Smardon, 2019, p. 9; Fielding, 2001, pp. 129-130) which sees students as partners in school policy decision-making. This study aims to add to a growing body of research that considers the perspectives of students in schools with student voice initiatives (Cook-Sather, 2018; Quinn & Owen, 2014). I seek to add to that literature by recording and analyzing the perspectives of students at New Roots Charter School about sociocracy in their student council.

Research Question

The core research question was to characterize how students perceive sociocracy and student voice in New Roots Charter School in Ithaca, NY. In order to understand that question, I also investigated the sociocratic processes at New Roots.

Demographics of New Roots Charter School Students

New Roots Charter School is a public charter school in Ithaca, NY. It serves students aged 13-21 and had 137 students in the 2021-2022 school year. Forty-seven percent of students identified as female, 45% as male, and 8% as non-binary in the 2021-2022 school year.

Race/Ethnicity	New Roots 2021-2022 Student Demographics	Ithaca June 2020 Census Data (US Census)
Caucasian/ White	84%	63.8%
African American	8%	5.9%,
American Indian and Alaska Native	2%	0.1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	5%	17.2%
Two or more races	0%	6.4%
Hispanic or Latino	1%	7.2%

Table 1: New Roots 2021-2022 Student Demographics Compared to Ithaca Demographics

Students lived in roughly 25% urban, 25% suburban, and 50% rural areas in Ithaca and surrounding Tompkins County, NY. The graduation rate in 2022 was 85%. The first language of students was predominantly English with two students for whom English was a second language in the 2021-2022 school year. Standardized tests have not been administered in recent years due to disruptions from COVID-19. The pedagogy of the school is learner-centered and project-based and covers the standard New York public school curriculum.

Methods

Participant Selection

Participants for one-on-one interviews were 10 student council members aged 14-17 from grades nine to 12 who were available and consented to participate in the study. The focus group was a group of 12 ninth-grade students in a Crew, similar to a homeroom class.

Interviews and Data Analysis Methods

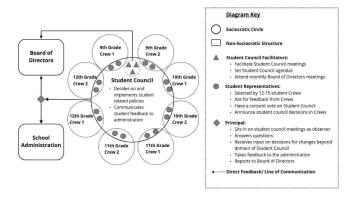
Following the methods traditionally employed in much of recent K-12 student voice research in the US (Gonzales et al., 2017), I chose qualitative methods based on interviews. I conducted half-hour semi-structured interviews throughout the school day as the 10 student council members were available. I conducted one half-hour focus group with the dozen students in the Crew. Two student council meetings were recorded. Interview questions are included in Appendix A. The interviewer and data analyst was the author of this paper. I had no prior relationship to the students interviewed. No members of the administration were present at one-on-one interviews, and I conducted the focus group with one teacher present. I recorded and transcribed all interviews using transcription software. I manually corrected the transcripts for accuracy and then coded them using Dedoose research software. I developed codes as described by Charmaz (2006). First, the transcripts were assigned open codes line by line. The codes were further developed into focused codes and grouped into thematic groupings. The code tree that was developed is included in Appendix B. I developed memos connecting themes from the focused codes, which I presented in the Discussion.

Findings

Sociocratic Processes at New Roots Charter School

In this section, I describe the implementation of sociocracy at New Roots Charter School, based on observation of meetings and interviews with student council members.

Sociocracy was brought to the New Roots Charter School Student Council as a student-led initiative in 2016. One of the student council facilitators and the principal attended a sociocracy training in 2016, and sociocracy has been used in the student council since then. In April 2022 when this study was conducted, there were three student co-facilitators of the student council, all 12th graders, who set the agenda and facilitated the meetings. The principal of the school sat in on the meetings and acted as a liaison to the administration from the student council but was not a voting member of the council.



Note: Each Crew circle is composed of 12-15 students. Since there are two representatives from each Crew, this is called a "double-linked" circle structure in sociocracy.

Figure 1: Student Council Governance Structure at New Roots Charter School

At the beginning of the school year, the annual student council membership was formed via a sociocratic selection of class representatives. Two representatives were elected in September from each Crew, or homeroom class of 12-15 students, to form a double-linked circle structure (see Figure 1). In the 2021-2022 school year, there were 2-3 Crews in each grade. As a 12th-grade student council member said:

"I like how we nominate people to be representatives. And I find that when I'm going around to each Crew and getting the representative, most of the time, it's not by who's the most popular in the class. The people who are

picked are really good representatives. They represent the Crews, and everybody is in a Crew."

The double-linked circle structure ensured that all student voices were included in the student council governance.

After selections formed the student council, weekly student council meetings began. The student facilitators would form agendas based on issues raised in the student council. Sometimes the representatives raised issues that they identified themselves, and sometimes they raised an issue that was brought to them by a Crew member. The student council members would take turns talking one by one (called "rounds" in sociocracy) to share their opinions about the issue. The student council would then begin to brainstorm solutions, again taking turns in a round as directed by the facilitator. Sometimes, feedback was solicited from outside the student council about an issue through student representatives listening to the Crew's opinions, or through a school-wide survey. After feedback was obtained, a proposal would be synthesized by someone in the student council and presented. There would follow a round where student council members shared their opinions about the proposal and refined a working draft.

The process from opinion to proposal synthesis is described by an 11th-grade student council member thus:

"We went around the circle and asked for opinions. Then we would probably do another round to ask everyone for anything they wanted to add. Then we would come up with a rough draft almost. Then we would go around the circle again to have any final thoughts or anything that we should change."

In the consent round, everyone on the student council would have a chance to consent or object, with consent meaning they approved moving forward with the proposal becoming policy. Reasons would be given for any objections, and the proposal would be altered until everyone consents.

"We find some way to come to an agreement, even if someone does not fully agree the first time.
[...]Everyone has an opinion that's valid and should be voiced and we'll change the proposal until everyone consents" (Ninth-grade student council member).

In some cases, consent was requested from the whole school. An example was the COVID-19 mask policy, which originated as a proposal in student council that was implemented as a policy. All students signed the policy with unanimous consent from the entire school. Proposals that were passed by the student council were communicated to the administration, who communicated the new policy to teachers and staff. Sometimes the student council members directly implemented the proposal, for example, when they made signs to encourage students to properly dispose of waste after lunch. Some proposals were revisited to assess implementation, and were also revised and improved using the same consent process.

In addition to facilitating the creation of school-wide policies within the student council, the student facilitators regularly attended meetings of the school's board of directors to report about the school from a student perspective.

"There's board meetings [...] Normally there is a facilitator that goes to them and gives feedback on what's going on really inside the school. Because a lot of the time, the board meetings are very focused on finances and realities and everything. So it gives them an idea of what's really happening here. [...] All the facilitators and representatives are also welcome to join" (12th-grade student council facilitator).

Student Opinions about Sociocracy and Democracy

Of the 12 students in the focus group and 10 one-on-one interviews combined, four expressed ways in which sociocracy enables students to feel heard. Six student council members said Dynamic Governance is "inclusive," five students said it "works well," and nine of the 10 student council members expressed general positive opinions about sociocracy. Six of the 10 student council members especially noted how the sociocratic process of taking turns in a circle, called "rounds," ensures that all student council members are heard.

"One thing I don't like about normal conversation is that often there's a person who doesn't say anything at all, which in the past has been me a lot. [...]There's always something I want to say, but I can't find the right opportunity to jump in. The great thing about Dynamic Governance is your turn is going to come" (12th-grade student council facilitator).

Five students drew comparisons between sociocratic consent decision-making and democratic majority rules. Two students asserted that sociocracy is slower than democracy,

and that coming to agreement in sociocracy is difficult. However, two students said that democracy can be divisive, leading to a split binary opposition, and that the voices of the quiet are not included. In contrast, they said that in sociocracy, everyone's voice is included, including the quiet ones.

"I feel like everyone feels more content with outcomes of things, whereas if we're voting on something for the school, a traditional democratic school, there's two options and it's like, these are the only two things that can happen. And then one of them wins and the other side is just bummed out and they're upset about it, but with Dynamic Governance, we can come to a consensus and explore options that we might not have considered before, and have that compromise that makes everyone feel happy and heard" (10th-grade student council member).

Other Avenues for Student Voice at New Roots Outside of the Sociocratic Student Council

During the course of interviews, other avenues to express student voices at New Roots surfaced. Seven students cited comfort in expressing their concerns directly to the administration, trusting that changes would be made. One student in the ninth-grade focus group said about the school, "It's more one-on-one contact with teachers and [the dean of students]. The administration, if you have a problem, you can go straight to them."

One 12th-grade student council member wrote a letter with a signed petition to end a class that the students didn't like, and the class was canceled by the administration.

"There was a new class that was suddenly a requirement. It was a thing I think that a lot of people weren't very happy about and it wasn't really working. So we wrote a letter and we had everyone sign it and we gave it to the administration and it's actually changed now" (12th-grade student council member).

Experiences at New Roots Compared to Other Schools

When asked to compare their voice as students at New Roots to other schools, 11 students said they felt more listened to or that they had more of a voice. Five students said that because New Roots is a small school (137 students with a 1:15 staff to student ratio), their needs are better

met. Ten students said they perceived a lack of ability for students to make changes at other schools they had experienced, and two said they had "felt lost" at another school.

Reflecting on their experiences of New Roots, three students cited an inclusive experience of community with shared decision-making, and two students cited a sense of equality with teachers.

"I feel like any other Dynamic Governance has always sort of carried over into classes. [...]Small things like, students and teachers both addressing each other by first names [...] I feel like it puts students and teachers on a more equal level" (10th-grade student council member).

I observed students referring to the dean of students and the principal by their first names as well.

Inclusion and Being Heard: "Students Have More Powerful Voices Here."

Throughout interviews, the theme of "being heard" emerged. Although they were not specifically asked about the staff of the school, seven students including student council members and focus group members said they think that staff are open to student ideas and concerns.

Ten students interviewed shared the opinion that student voices are heard by the administration, with three using phrases including the words "everybody heard," and one saying, "Student voices are more powerful here, I believe." They stated that there is inclusion across all grade levels with equal representation on the student council. One senior student council member said, "I think the ability for a freshman to have the same voice that I do as a senior [...] that's what makes Dynamic Governance amazing, is the fact that everybody has the same voice."

Three student council members used the words "empowering" or "liberating" to describe their experiences using sociocracy.

Student-Led Change at New Roots: "They Listen To You, and They Actually Change."

Six students interviewed said they had experienced specific student-led changes at New Roots. One student in the ninth-grade focus group said, "I think it's really good that they listen to students because in regular schools they listen

to you, but they just feel sorry [...] then nothing changes. [...] And here, they listen to you, and they actually change."

Some changes cited by students included a policy regarding school lunches to reduce waste, a COVID-19 mask policy developed in the student council that was signed and consented to by all students, and classroom traditions such as "cell 30, take 30" meaning 30 seconds for students to check their phones and 30 seconds of silence before class begins. As one student council member said:

"[I said in the student council meeting] that filters aren't being changed frequently. And then that was immediately put on the working agreements. And then a week later, all the filters were on all the time and they're being changed. So that's a pretty good feeling when one thing that you say ends up being implemented in the whole school." (12th-grade student council facilitator)

In addition to direct policy changes, issues raised in student council included an initiative to increase the student experience of community at the school by organizing cross-grade social events and service learning projects for Earth Day. At the time of this research, the student council was acting in an advisory role to the administration by creating and implementing a school-wide survey about the issue of gender-neutral restrooms.

Perceived Impact of Sociocratic Student Council Participation

When asked "How has participation on the student council at your school impacted your life, if in any way?" students gave answers falling into several categories, listed below. Most student council members cited some form of impact or change, and only one answered neutrally.

- Neutral / no impact (one student)
- Social opportunity: seeing student council as a means unto itself for meeting new people (two students)
- Gaining skills: including collaborative skills (two students), communication skills (nine students), organizational skills (one student), and intellectual growth (two students);
- In-school impact: willingness to participate in class (one student), and interest in being involved in student council in the future (two students)

- Outside actions: greater awareness of the outside world (one student), seeing opportunities to change things outside of the school (one student), raising the voices of others outside of student council (one student)
- Future benefit: gaining experience to put on their resume or for college applications (three students).

One student said they have begun using rounds and other tools from sociocracy such as consent decision-making at home and with friends.

Perceived Social and Emotional Outcomes of Sociocratic Student Council Participation

Many students spoke in-depth about their perceptions of social and emotional outcomes of participating on student council, especially speaking skills, listening skills, and considering the perspectives of others. As one student council member said:

"It's made me feel more capable and confident in my intellectual abilities. And also increased my capacity to handle criticism and grow intellectually. Because before I felt like there was no one ever really listening to me. And then I'm going to be in that space [student council] where I'm heard and there's people who appreciate my ideas and what I have to bring to the table, even when I'm playing the devil's advocate [...] It increased my ability to handle criticism because of the way sometimes you bring up an idea and another person points out a flaw in that, which is a vital part of Dynamic Governance. The manner it's done in is less of, no, you're wrong and you should feel bad. It's sort of like, let's reevaluate." (10th-grade student council member)

The theme of hearing and expressing opinions arose many times in student interviews. Four students spoke about their ability to express differing or opposing opinions.

"I guess in Crews when we gather feedback a lot [...] most of the time there's a common voice. Everybody kind of has the same opinion, but sometimes there'll be somebody who has an opposing opinion to that. And we still go in-depth about that opinion" (12th-grade student council facilitator).

Three students said that they gained listening skills through hearing the opinions of others. Three stated they see the value in multiple views, and one spoke about changing their opinion based on others' ideas.

"The great thing about rounds is that you not only have a chance to really revise your thoughts or take back a statement, or even add something to your statement, based on what others have said. I think that's a wonderful way of doing it" (11th-grade student council member).

Three students noted that an outcome of participation on student council is the acquisition of speaking skills. As one 11th-grade student council member said, "It overall made me feel more well-spoken and confident in what I have to say. And I feel like my opinions are valued and they'll be taken into consideration." This ability to articulate opinions clearly and present an argument was given as one student as a reason why their proposal was acted on by the administration.

"So if I have something to say, and I form my opinion [...] very well and organized, they definitely take it to heart. For example, that letter that I wrote about the class, they read it and they changed it because of the way it was written, and the impact that the writing had on them" (12th-grade student council member).

Limitations to Student Voice and Sociocracy at New Roots

One student council member interviewed expressed discomfort raising issues directly with the administration and cited perceived apathy of other students at the school. The same student described feeling unable to personally make changes, even though they mentioned they had seen other students make changes in the school. Another student council member said student voice varies from student to student. Five students in the ninth-grade focus group interview declined to answer questions about student council or said they didn't know much about it. Four students asserted that sociocracy is not widespread throughout the school. An 11th-grade student council member said:

"I feel like within the student council it's pretty good [...] we have a nice system and it's a positive experience and we changed some things, but I feel like the whole thing hasn't been out spread to the rest of the school [...] I guess the representative

talks to certain people at Crew, but a lot of people don't show up to Crew sometimes or don't really care when you talk about it. It's a separate thing with all the people and then the student council and like then the administration isn't as connected as it could be."

At New Roots, according to the principal, very few teachers have attended sociocracy training, and according to the same 11th-grade student council member, "I'm not even sure if some teachers know about it, quite frankly."

Discussion

Research suggests that in order for students to successfully make changes in schools, adults must be willing to listen to students, take action on their opinions, and work to change power dynamics (Cook-Sather, 2006; Robinson & Taylor, 2013; Rudduck & Fielding, 2002). At New Roots, four students cited examples of the administration taking action on their opinions. There is also evidence to suggest that adults at New Roots are taking actions to change power dynamics. I observed students at New Roots addressing teachers and administrators by their first names, and two students interviewed said that they feel a sense of equality with the teachers. Rudduck & Fielding (2006) consider "authenticity" to be a necessary precondition for successful student voice efforts. This includes not only the ability of students to voice their authentic opinions, but also the administration taking action on their suggestions (pp. 226-227). There is evidence to suggest that this "authenticity" exists at New Roots. Eight students interviewed mentioned an experience of expressing their opinions. Additionally, 11 students asserted the opinion that their voices were heard by the administration. The code "opinion that everyone in the school has a voice" occurred in seven out of 22 interviews, and "experience of being listened to at New Roots" compared to other schools occurred in 13 out of 22 interviews. At New Roots, students were actively involved in identifying problems and making changes at the school. They acted in all three of the areas of student voice identified by Mitra (2004): they gave feedback on school policies, collaborated with the administration in creating policies and initiatives, and led decisions themselves. The statements from student council members at New Roots stand in stark contrast to the student council members cited by Perry-Hazan (2021) who "tend to criticize the limited scope of their participation rights in school."

Most of the student council members interviewed expressed generally positive opinions of sociocracy and expressed the opinion that the school was inclusive of their voices. Students in the ninth-grade focus group who were not student council members said that the student council "worked well," that they had seen it "take action" and make changes. I believe the findings of this paper suggest that sociocratic processes at New Roots may have contributed to the student council members' stated perceptions of "being heard." Students asserted that sociocracy includes the voices of quiet students as well as more opinionated ones by the use of rounds. Students described the inclusion of feedback from the entire student body via the structure of double-linked circles. Several students cited improvements in their ability to articulate their opinions due to participation in the student council, and one speculated that may have been the reason for the administration being willing to act on their proposal.

Therefore, in a school with an administration that is ready to carry out changes based on student input, sociocracy appears to support the inclusion of all students in expressing student voice. I encourage schools seeking a student council governance method to consider sociocracy as one method. At New Roots, student council members asserted that sociocracy "works," "it's a very successful model," and "it's made changes to the school."

More research is needed into the effectiveness of various student voice initiatives in order to guide best practices for implementation. Hall (2017) states regarding state-mandated student voice efforts in the United Kingdom, "Our greatest challenge now is how to facilitate the creation of spaces in which student voice is not merely demonstrated as being present, but in which that presence also has power, authenticity and validity" (p.186). In seeking that power, authenticity, and validity, it is especially important to note instances such as at New Roots when students themselves perceive student voice efforts to be working well. In the words of a 12th-grade student council member, "When you're using Dynamic Governance and everybody's voice is being heard [...] it's pretty empowering for students."

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Acknowledgement

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