

Increasing Student Voice in School Reform and Practice

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Increasing disengagement and detachment of youth from schools

- Increasing alienation and anonymity
- 2/3 of high school students are disengaged
 - Attend school less
 - Have lower self-concepts
 - Achieve less academically,
 - More likely to drop out of school

What is student voice?

- Opportunities for youth to share in the school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers
- Youth and adults collaboration together
 - Mutual teaching and learning
- A.K.A pupil participation, active citizenship, youth leadership, and youth empowerment.

Student voice outcomes

For schools and reform efforts

1) Strategic planning and training

- Raise issues that adults might not see or avoid.
- Identify problems with school structure and culture—especially failing students
 - *Example: Seaside High School*
- Improve pre-service teacher training
 - *Example: Bryn Mawr College*

2) Quality and depth of reform implementation

- Provide information that otherwise are not available
 - United Kingdom and Australia have student voice requirements
- Bridge families and schools
 - *Example: Parent-School Collaborative*
- Reshape shallow or slow reform efforts, especially

Student participation in professional development

- My job at the training sessions was “...breaking down vocabulary. Some students may not understand [this reform effort]. So we were trying to put it [the rubrics and the departmental standards] in a way where all students understand. I guess you could say [I was a] a translator...”

Troy Newman, 11th grader

3) Improve classroom practice

- Student consultation
- *Consulting with Pupils on Teaching and Learning project-Jeanne Rudduck*
- Student improvement in academic outcomes, interest in learning, meta-cognitive understanding
- Increases teacher confidence and improved relevance of the curriculum
- Students want: autonomy; relevant pedagogy; respect and collaboration; greater responsibility in school decisions

4) Improve school culture

- Strong desire for positive, caring relationships with adults and peers

Example: Whitman neighborhood tours

“They [teachers] learned where we lived, worked, the different territories, where we stay away from, where people get killed and hurt for being in the wrong areas.” Marcus, 11th grader

“I was in the car with the principal, and we took him right down the street. We got fifty yards away and he got lost. Now he knows where I live. I see him down the hall and he says hi to me. He’ll go out of his way. I’ve seen a lot more of the teachers try to make an effort to say ‘hi’ and include students in their conversations.” Joey, 11th grader

Changing school culture everywhere

- High-pressure high schools = Stressed Out Students (Galloway, Pope, and Osberg, 2007)
 - Encourage teachers to engage students
 - Change homework policies
 - Increase awareness of high stress levels

Student voice influences on positive youth development

- Preparing young people to successfully navigate the transition to adulthood
- Agency, Belonging, Competence

Agency

- **Self-confidence, self-worth, and the belief that one can exert influence and power in a given situation**

"Now I'm very confident in myself. I know that I can make changes. Sometimes I used to think that our lives were kind of pointless. And now, it's like, you can make real changes. Now it's the school, and maybe in my career and my adult life I could actually do something, with a lot of determination and a lot of will." Rosalinda, 12th grader

I "think a lot of students don't even know that when they first come in [to high school] that they can ... actually make changes. And since they don't know that and something goes bad and they just say, 'I'm just going to drop out of school because I don't like it.' We need to let them know that they can make changes if they put their minds to it." Donald, 12th grader

Belonging

- Increase in attachment and positive relationships to peers, teachers, school, and broader community

“I think that relationships between teacher and student throughout their high-school career are the most important thing. . . Once you have that relationship, you can go to that teacher and you can say, ‘That’s my friend.’ And they will listen to your problems. . . and give you feedback. And they’ll be there for you. Just to have people there for you to support you, you will be successful in anything you do.”

Sala, 12th grader

Competencies

- Problem solving and facilitation
 - *“I learned how to bite my tongue, I learned how to hear out people a little bit more. I learned how to facilitate.”*Sala, 12th grader
- Public speaking
 - *“I learned to speak with no fear. I used to be shy.”* Mary, 12th grader
- Working with people different than themselves
 - *“I used to misjudge people . . . Once you meet the person, it’s totally different. . . I think that made me think about that everybody should be treated equal.”* Jaycee, 12th grader

When student voice fails

- Failed efforts can *increase* disempowerment, detachment, and disillusionment
- Students at BASRC conference in Northern California:
“To our chagrin and disappointment, we did not feel welcome when we attended sessions, which were aimed primarily toward adults and anyone who was especially familiar with the jargon of educational processes... In the end, we are left feeling that our participation is more about creating public relations for [the sponsoring organization] than it is about creating meaningful student voice in the process.”

Enabling and sustain student voice initiatives

Pushing against the institutionalized roles of teachers and students

1) Signs that this is not “business as usual.”

- The intentional creation of new roles for youth and adults other than “teacher” and “student.”
 - Adults as coaches, friends, counselors
 - Youth as leaders, teachers
- Beginning with creation of a safe space and open lines of communication
- Rearranged physical space to establish a different and more equitable form of interaction

2) Creating meaningful, but not equal roles

- Foster equal responsibility and respect through mutual understanding
- Creating a space in which all group members—youth and adults—could develop a common vision and share responsibility for decisions
- Power is not a zero sum game
- Encourage group members to experiment with a variety of roles, including being a critical thinker, a teacher, a learner, a peacemaker, a supporter, a facilitator, and a documenter

3) Creating “visible victories”

(McLaughlin, 1993)

- Legitimacy and credibility of student voice effort needs to be shored up
- Small enough to happen quickly
- Large enough to be meaningful to youth and sufficiently impressive to adults
- Timeline especially important due to school calendar

4) Ongoing professional development

- Adults must learn how to enable leadership in youth
 - Understanding of youth developmental needs and cultural contexts
- Youth must learn how to assume leadership positions
 - “Adult speak”
 - Time management
 - Strategic planning
 - Conflict resolution

5) Partnering with an intermediary organization

- Other terms include: coaches, non-system actors, support providers
- Sustainability of student voice initiatives often is tied to intermediate organizations (IOs) for
 - Vision
 - Funding
 - Networking
 - Training

Increasing Student Voice in High School Reform: Building Partnerships, Improving Outcomes

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