

STUDENT EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME

Student empowerment is any attitudinal, structural, and cultural activity, process or outcome where students of any age gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement changes in their own schools, learning and education, and in the education of other people, including fellow students of any age and adults throughout education. There are countless ways this can happen as well as many potential outcomes, all of which feature learning, teaching and leadership. Student empowerment happens in schools; child empowerment and youth empowerment happen outside of schools.

HOW IT HAPPENS

Throughout our society, adults act as the apex (top) power holders, using adultism to enforce their power. This is true within schools, too, where adults are ultimately responsible for all activities, outcomes and processes. Student empowerment happens when adults share any amount of that power with students.

There are times when students can attempt to grasp the power of adults without adults sharing it willingly, too. However, these are fleeting because of adults ultimate grasp on power.

Student empowerment generally happens through student authorization and student action. Student authorization, which is part of the Cycle of Engagement, happens when students acquire the knowledge and positions they need in order to affect schools.

WHAT STOPS EMPOWERMENT

As reflected elsewhere on this site, there are many barriers to school transformation reflecting student empowerment. They include the culture of schools; structures within education; adults throughout the system; and students themselves. There are also many ways to overcome these barriers.

However, one of the barriers to student empowerment is the concept itself: By dispensing their power without discretion or well-informed intentions, well-meaning educators can actually do a moderate-to-severe disservice to students themselves. Placing students on a pedestal, the behind these actions is often that any power is better than no power, and that students are devoid of power within schools right now. However, that's simply not the case, and learning about student empowerment before taking action can do a lot to improve students' experiences with this approach.

WHAT MANY EDUCATORS ARE ACTUALLY STRIVING FOR IS NOT STUDENT EMPOWERMENT AT ALL, BUT MEANINGFUL STUDENT INVOLVEMENT.

WHERE MEANINGFUL STUDENT INVOLVEMENT FITS

When student empowerment activities are most effective, they reflect Meaningful Student Involvement. Students' ideas, knowledge, opinions and experiences in schools and regarding education are actively sought and substantiated by educators, administrators, and other adults within the educational system. Adults' acknowledgment of students' ability to improve schools is validated and authorized through deliberate teaching focused on learning about learning, learning about the education system, learning about student voice and Meaningful Student Involvement, and learning about school improvement.

SOME WAYS TO EMPOWER STUDENTS IN A CONNECTED WORLD

- **PRACTICE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT**

Students would want to find their voice. Make it a positive experience for them.

- **ALLOW FOR CREATIVE EXPRESSION**

Students should be given the freedom not only to voice what they think but also to voice it however they choose. Let them be creative with the how and you will most likely be pleased with the what. This can be done by organizing debates, drawing competitions etc.

- **GIVE STUDENTS MORE DISCUSSION TIME TO EXPLORE AND DEVELOP THEIR IDEAS**

Many of us are afraid that we won't be able to cover all the material we need to cover if we devote too much time to discussion. The truth is, discussion enhances learning and memory, as does forming an opinion about a topic. Use this to your advantage and you won't have a time crunch on your hands at all.

- **OFFER MORE ENGAGING PROMPTS**

The best marketing and advertising provokes us on emotional, personal, or comical levels. Try using these same strategies to get students to speak out on topics covered in our curriculum.

- **BLOGGING**

Perhaps one of the best tools available for supporting student voice, blogging has become a common platform in schools across the world.

- **USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NEW WAYS**

Using social media to promote and share and document is a fairly well-established practice in the classroom. But finding new ways to use social media—for change, for research, or for critical thinking, for example—can help students not just 'connect' but connect in intentional and specific ways.

But simultaneously make students aware of its disadvantages so that they can use it in a fruitful way and doesn't become its victim

- **PODCASTING OR VOICETHREAD**

Tools like podcasting and VoiceThread bridge the gap between real-time discussions and standard video lectures or online presentations. This makes both great platforms for teaching, learning, training, and student collaboration in project-based learning.

- **YOUTUBE CHANNELS**

Invite students to create their own educational videos to post on YouTube.

- **DIGITAL STORYTELLING**

The topics used in digital storytelling range from personal tales to the recounting of historical events, from exploring life in one's own community to the search for life in other corners of the universe, and literally, everything in between.

CBSE is working on it and has asked schools to prepare short videos on storytelling by students of various groups and it has provided topics for it too.

- **SHOWCASE INSPIRING STORIES**

The more evidence of successful self-expression students see, the more likely they are to try it themselves.

- **SUPPORT INNOVATION**

Making something new both necessitates and perpetuates new thinking.

- **LET STUDENTS DISAGREE WITH YOU**

Most of us relish arguments we haven't heard before. Make sure your students feel comfortable enough to express them.

- **ENCOURAGE CASUAL DEBATE**

Debate is one of the best excuses to exercise your voice.

- **REWARD RISKS**

Students will find their voices much more quickly if they aren't afraid of taking risks.

- **GIVE SECOND CHANCES**

Nothing's worse than a failed attempt at self-expression. Be aware of attempts when you see them and encourage students to keep trying.

- **WELCOME FEEDBACK ON YOUR TEACHING**

This is one of the best ways to show your students' voices matter.

- **BE A BETTER LISTENER**

No one admits to being a poor listener. We all think we've got the gift. The truth is, no matter how good we are, we can always be better. Our students' voices depend on it.

- **INQUIRE, THINK, REFLECT**

Have students ask questions on a topic, consider possible answers, and evaluate the accuracy of each. This can be a great voice-strengthening exercise.

- **LET EACH STUDENT SOLVE A UNIQUE PROBLEM**

Don't make every problem a competition; let students feel personally connected and responsible for their own issue from time to time.

- **PROMOTE RESEARCH**

An opinion backed by research makes for a stronger voice.

- **BRAINSTORM WITH YOUR STUDENTS**

Be part of the process in order to treat all voices equally.

- **SHOW THAT YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS**

Having a voice doesn't mean you are always right.

- **RECOGNIZE PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE**

While all of us appreciate effort, it's the progress we really want to see. Make sure students know the difference between the two, and help them understand what you expect.

- **HELP STUDENTS ELABORATE AND DIG DEEPER**

- **HAVE PATIENCE**

Let each student finish their thought, and don't immediately step in when they struggle with words.

- **PRACTICE VISUALIZATION TECHNIQUES**

Students who visualize self-expression will be more likely to express themselves in real life.

- **BUILD RESPECT FOR ONE'S OPINION**

A student's voice doesn't have to be 'right' or 'popular' but it does have to reflect self-respect.

- **PERSONAL MISSIONS**

Make students think about personal missions early on in the year and have them conduct 'self check-ins' every few months.

- **REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST**

It's sometimes easiest to view your present self in terms of how your past has shaped you. Ask students to reflect on their "old selves" and they may learn a thing or two about who they are today.

- **IDENTIFYING PATTERNS**

Encourage students to remain aware of their own interests, passions, and ideas, and to try to identify themes and patterns when present.

- **DOCUMENTING NEW IDEAS**

Encourage students to record new ideas, in the moment, as they arise.

- **INVITE EACH STUDENT TO LEAD**

Students should be asked to lead, whether they accept the offer or not. Keep asking, throughout the year, and eventually, having watched so many others do it, they will realize it's not so scary.

- **PRACTICE EMPATHY**

Empathy is one of the most powerful tools students can use to make themselves heard. It's all about knowing your audience.

- **DON'T FORCE PARTICIPATION; INSPIRE IT**

Cold-calling or requiring participation won't help students find their voice. If you can spark participation with an engaging lesson or controversial question, you're on the right track.

- **URGE STUDENTS TO EXPLAIN THEIR VIEWS**

Agreeing or disagreeing with a concept is a start, but if students can explain why they agree or disagree, they'll be one step closer to turning all those opinions into a single voice.

- **EMPHASIZE THE RIGHT TO VOICE YOUR OPINION**
- **PROVIDE A PLATFORM**

Whether your students like writing, speaking, or building—you'll need to support their means of self-expression with an appropriate platform.