

Stories



Meaningful

Student Involvement

Adam Fletcher

meaning

*“Meaningful Student Involvement
is the process of engaging
students in every facet of the
educational process for the
purpose of strengthening their
commitment to education,
community and democracy.”*

Adam Fletcher

Stories
of
**Meaningful Student
Involvement**

Adam Fletcher

Presented by

www.SoundOut.org
promoting meaningful student involvement in school change

Stories of Meaningful Student Involvement
Copyright ©2004 by Adam Fletcher

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in articles or reviews.

For more information on this publication or for additional copies, please contact:

SoundOut!
c/o The Freechild Project
PO Box 6185
Olympia, Washington 98507
(360)753.2686
info@soundout.org

The author wishes to acknowledge and thank the HumanLinks Foundation for their generous support of this booklet.

The author also wishes to thank the following for their contributions: Sue Paro of the HumanLinks Foundation; Beth Kelly and Jessica Vavrus of the Washington Reading Corps; Andrea Felix of Youth Service America; Dr. Michael Vavrus of The Evergreen State College; Nasue Nishida and Greg Williamson of the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; Wendy Lesko of the Youth Activism Project, and; Joel Tolman, of the Forum for Youth Investment.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Overview of Meaningful Student Involvement	6
Students as Education Planners	11
Students as Education Researchers	15
Students as Classroom Teachers	19
Students as Education Evaluators	22
Students as Education Decision-Makers	25
Students as Education Advocates	30
Conclusion	34
References	36

Introduction

Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects.

– Paulo Freire (1970)

OR

In light of the above words of the renowned Brazilian literacy teacher Paulo Freire, violence permeates schools today. This violence becomes apparent in the reports of growing percentages of students who have expressed feeling alienated from their teachers and peers, as well as from their families and communities at large (Gerwetz, 2001; Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998). Many students report feeling mistreated by teachers because of their racial or ethnic heritage, language barriers, gender, as well as other prejudice (Cushman, 2003; REAL HARD, 2003; California Tomorrow, 2001). The school violence and the resultant crackdown on students' civil liberties in the last decade stand as the sad manifestation of this violence.

Ironically, students in all grade levels are increasingly being embraced as powerful market segments by companies vying for their consumer spending power. Young people of all ages are targeted in their homes, on the playground, in their classrooms, and throughout schools (Schlosser, 2001). While budget constraints and education reform are limiting the *real* choices students can make in their schools, *vis-à-vis* classes and after-school programs, corporate America directly appeals to students by giving them one of the few actual choices they can make in school: how to spend their money. As professor Henry Giroux has noted, the commercial hijacking of schools glorifies the role of young people as customers in the marketplace while simultaneously undermining their ability to be engaged, critical learners (Giroux, 2003).

There is hope for schools, embodied in the growing buzz of classrooms and boardrooms, brought to life by the assertion of student's ideas, opinions and knowledge. There is hope for students, made real when students are engaged as education planners, researchers, teachers, evaluators, decision-makers, and advocates. This is the hope represented by Meaningful Student Involvement, brought to life by students and educators who are building a truly progressive pedagogy with democracy and social justice at its core.

Today, more than ever before, educators are empowering students with the critical skills of reading, writing, language, and technological literacy, along with knowledge, social experiences, and resources they need to build democracy. Today, more than ever before, students seek to enhance their own abilities as well as future generations' capacities to understand, comprehend, engage, and, when necessary, transform the world they live in. This teaching and learning is happening through Meaningful Student Involvement by engaging students in every facet of schooling for the purpose of strengthening their learning, their communities, and democracy.

This publication is not a guidebook or a toolkit, nor is it meant to gloss over the real problems schools face. Instead, it provides a glimpse into a diverse set of practices that offer hope for the future of schools. It provides a glimpse at Meaningful Student Involvement for students and educators alike. The broad range of experiences represented here are intended to serve as a testament to the purpose and effectiveness of Meaningful Student Involvement. However, application is the best test. Individually, the following stories illustrate the degrees of possibility for broadening the roles of students in schools; collectively, these vignettes entrust today's educator with the grand "conspiracy of hope" that Meaningful Student Involvement embodies. This hope, when activated, incorporated and infused into teaching and learning, is one that will change the very nature of schools, and society, for a long time to come.

Adam Fletcher
Olympia, Washington
January 2004



Overview

There's a radical – and wonderful – new idea here... that all children could and should be inventors of their own theories, critics of other people's ideas, analyzers of evidence, and makers of their own personal marks on the world. It's an idea with revolutionary implications. If we take it seriously.

- Deborah Meier (1995)



Whereas many educational programs offer seemingly “positive” goals for schools, few outwardly state what their underlying assumptions or beliefs are. For instance, a business teacher might be preoccupied with the belief that the students in her classes are inevitably going to work in fast food restaurants or in telemarketing jobs. Believing they would have no other avenues to learn the necessary occupational habits of work in the customer service industry, the teacher focuses on training her students with the skills she thinks they need, instead of discussing business theory and economic cycles. What is the likelihood of that educator ever explaining this belief to their students?

Meaningful Student Involvement challenges schools to transform learning activities by fostering accountability, transparency and interdependence between students and educators (Fletcher, 2003). The prospect of accountability between students and educators shifts the burden of school change from sitting solely upon educators' shoulders, and shares the responsibility of school improvement with students. Transparency is “the deliberate attempt to move from a secretive or opaque organization to one that encourages open access to information, participation, and decision making, which ultimately creates a higher level of trust among stakeholders” (Meyer, 2003). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. best summarized interdependence by saying, “All life is interrelated. We are all caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one affects all indirectly” (King, 1967).

Traditional “student leadership” has long been seen as a representative form of school governance. This approach can be alienating to students by promoting divisive perceptions of leadership and empowerment. Meaningful Student Involvement takes form in sustainable, broad-based and purposeful roles for *all* students in every school, compelling every young person to have voice. It is an approach that creates inclusive roles for students as equal partners in school

change. By engaging students as education planners, researchers, teachers, evaluators, decision-makers and advocates, schools can create those partnerships. Writing about the necessity of hope in schools, Paulo Freire (1998) described these roles,

“Hope is something shared between teachers and students... [when] we can learn together, teach together, be curiously impatient together, produce something together, and resist together the obstacles that prevent the flowering of our joy” (p36).

Many researchers have suggested that if education reform is going to be successful, a new course of action must guide the role of students in schools (Rubin and Silva, 2003; Ericson and Ellett, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2002; Wilson and Corbett, 2001). Meaningful Student Involvement provides a deliberate process that every school can use to engage students in every facet of the educational process for the purpose of strengthening schools, as well as strengthening students’ commitment to their education, community and democracy.

MEANINGFUL STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AIMS TO...

- ◆ ***Engage students at all grade levels and in all subjects as contributing stakeholders in teaching, learning, and leading in schools.*** There are no “across-the-board” limitations, such as race, gender, socio-economic status, school size, or subject matter, or developmental roadblocks, like age, academic performance or physical disabilities that prohibit Meaningful Student Involvement. Educators in all grade levels are equally charged with the responsibility of infusing hope into learning. Meaningful Student Involvement also extends across and integrates within all curricula, challenging the social studies teacher equally with the physical education teacher.
- ◆ ***Expand the common expectation of every student to become an active and equal partner in school improvement.*** Traditional roles for student participation in schools can be perceived as limiting in many ways. Meaningful Student Involvement acknowledges the central role students have in educational reform by building the capacity of schools for meaningful involvement.
- ◆ ***Instill a core commitment within all members of the school community to meaningfully involve students as learners, teachers and leaders throughout schools.*** This happens in collaborative, community-building classrooms, kindergarten through twelfth grade, where student/teacher

partnerships are valued as primary tools for teaching, learning and leading. From the earliest grades *all* students are taught critical thinking and active leadership, and are engaged as purposeful learners who embrace multiple, diverse perspectives.

- ◆ ***Provide students and educators with sustainable, responsive, and systemic approaches to engaging all students in school improvement.*** As our society constantly changes, so must schools. Meaningful Student Involvement transforms schools into places where students can make significant contributions alongside educators and administrators. This activity takes place within an educational context where adults and young people are equal contributors to a continuous learning process focusing on school change.
- ◆ ***Validate the experience, perspectives and knowledge of all students through sustainable, powerful and purposeful school-oriented roles.*** Instead of creating special, one-time opportunities where “student voice” can misrepresent the multiple perspectives of diverse student populations, Meaningful Student Involvement charges educators with the responsibility of engaging *all* students in dynamic roles with the on-going task of creating and fostering success in schools.
- ◆ ***Engage educators as allies and partners to students.*** School improvement programs can treat students as passive recipients of education, encouraging the perception of students as empty vessels that need to be filled with teachers’ knowledge. The same efforts that engage teachers as classroom experts and parents as community partners can also include students as meaningful contributors.
- ◆ ***Avoid filtering student perspectives, experiences or knowledge with adult interpretations.*** When considering students as allies to educators, adults maybe tempted to act as translators for the often misunderstood “student voice.” However, young people of all ages have the capacity, and, to varying extents, the ability, to speak for themselves. Often this capacity may be undermined by the disbelief of otherwise good-hearted adults who honestly believe they know what students think. Meaningful Student Involvement creates platforms for students’ experience, ideas and knowledge of schools, without filtering those words through adult lenses. Students can learn about the schools they attend, the topics they should learn, the methods

being tested on them, the roles of educators and administrators, and much more.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Meaningful Student Involvement does not happen everywhere. Opportunities that are considered by many educators to be “meaningful” may actually tokenize students. This takes form when students appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the outcome. Multiple barriers may exist, including those erected by systems, educators, and students themselves. Alfie Kohn (1993) presented three main types of barriers that affect Meaningful Student Involvement and are expanded on below.

1. **Structural impediments**, including administrative controls on individual classroom teachers, policies disallowing student roles in activities, and the lack of institutional support, which includes funding, training, and ongoing evaluation.
2. **Resistance by educators**, including reliance on traditional instructional methods and leadership models, personal satisfaction derived from controlling students, dependence on control through punishment and rewards.
3. **Student resistance**, including refusing to partake in activities with the proclamation that it’s the adult’s job to decide, testing by offering outrageous suggestions or responses to see if the teacher is really serious about the invitation to participate, and parroting by repeating what adults have said or probably want to hear (Kohn, 1993).

However, these barriers shouldn’t be viewed as insurmountable; rather, they are challenges that schools should address as they adopt practices of Meaningful Student Involvement. Kohn quotes Selma Wassermann,

“I have heard teachers give it up after a single attempt, saying, ‘Children cannot behave responsibly,’ then remove all further opportunity for students to practice and grow in their responsible behavior. I have also heard teachers say, ‘Children cannot think for themselves,’ and proceed thereafter to do children’s thinking for them. But these same teachers would *never* say, ‘These children cannot read by themselves,’ and thereafter remove any opportunity for them to learn to read” (p18).

FILLING A VOID

Without claiming to be a “cure-all” for every problem education faces, Meaningful Student Involvement can serve as a cornerstone in the foundation of every school. It is vital for students to understand the utter necessity of their involvement in school change efforts, just as it is essential for educators to take steps towards building the capacity of students to be involved.

This publication provides examples of several roles that uplift the aims of Meaningful Student Involvement. They include students as education planners, students as education researchers, students as classroom teachers, students as school evaluators, students as education decision-makers, and students as education advocates. Each example includes a description of the role, examples of students in action, and resources for readers to learn more. In the final section, various examples are explored. For more information on anything found in this booklet, please visit the accompanying website, “SoundOut!”, located online at www.soundout.org.

CR

Students as Education Planners

Students should not only be trained to live in a democracy when they grow up; they should have the chance to live in one today.

– Alfie Kohn (1993)



Education planning happens in many different avenues, with several different considerations. Whether selecting textbooks, determining classroom behavior guidelines, or participating in the physical design process for a new building, students can have a role in planning throughout education. There are two forms of Meaningful Student Involvement in education planning. The first form is *individualized* education planning, or planning that affects only the student who is involved. The second form is *institutionalized* education planning, or planning that affects large numbers of students or the entire student body.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLANNING

Imagine if you will, before the beginning of the school year, every educator receives a file. The student, their previous teachers, and their parents all participated equally in creating this file. In it is a description of the child, learning goals and objectives for the year, particular learning needs and focus areas, and past evaluations of the student's learning, completed by the student, their previous teacher, and their parents. This "Individual Education Plan" (IEP) is developed with every student, regardless of age, grade, ability, or achievement, focusing on the student as a partner in his or her own education.

While there are currently few schools developing IEPs for every student, the effectiveness of this approach to education planning has been echoed for many years. Students with disabilities have been using these tools successfully in many schools, with large increases in students' focus and motivation, more support for students in mainstream classrooms, and more (Wehmeyer, 1998). The responsibility of a student's progress is not just on the shoulders of the adults, but shared with the student. The student becomes eager to track his progress in specific IEP objectives, such as reading speed and accuracy, sentence writing and paragraph skills, math fact fluency, self-control behaviors and self-advocacy (Koegel & Kern-Koegel, 1995).

- ♦ **Successes of Planning** - (Potomac, Maryland) One student chronicled her own story in a recent book on the subject. She recounted her elementary education and being shut-out of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. “They discussed my program for the next year and then told me what to do. I did not like it. I felt like I was not important. I also had no interest in school.” In middle school she attended IEP meetings for the first time. After spending several months in boring meetings packed with unfamiliar language, the adults in the room asked the student if she wanted to go to a school with her peers. She remarked that, “This was the first time I had a say in what was going to happen to me in school. After this experience she went on to have a highly successful high school career, including several learning experiences from the IEP process. Her transition from high school to college was marked by several independent decisions. However, in reflection this student explains that this first breakthrough meeting where she decided where to go to school was the point that, “changed my whole life” (Pauley, 1996).

A growing number of schools are providing “regular” students with the opportunity to be involved in individualized education planning after recognizing the effectiveness of the approach. In these situations, student-designed learning practices require flexible goals students can take ownership in.

- ♦ **Learning through Service** – (Spokane, Washington) Lewis and Clark High School offers a course called Practicum in Community Involvement that engages students in developing their own year-long learning project. Students must incorporate certain elements into their project, including research, action and reflection, and identify a community mentor to guide them in their learning. Students’ responses to their experiences grow increasingly sophisticated and powerful, with students regularly exclaiming, “This is the only reason I made it through my senior year” (Fletcher, 2002).

INSTITUTIONALIZED EDUCATION PLANNING

Educators and students alike face a variety of barriers to student involvement in institutionalized education planning. Educators often exclaim that students have the “wrong” attitudes, are immature, and ill equipped for the responsibility of large-scale school planning. Students say that educators act intimidated by students, or do not value their experience. The following examples offer hopeful glimpses into classrooms and schools where those barriers have been addressed and overcome.

- ◆ **First Grade Planners** – (Cheney, Washington) First-grade students here participated in the “Learning-Centered Curriculum-Making Project”. In this program, students developed a curriculum that they could use as part of their classroom assignments. The teachers assumed that if students helped to create the curriculum, the classroom dialogue about this process would shed light on how to make learning experiences more cohesive and purposeful. All of the activities met state learning standards. The project progressed by teaching students about a subject, and then having students reinvent the lesson plan. They highlighted language and thinking skills related to various subject disciplines. The students used dialog, coaching, modeling, questioning, and reinforcing techniques. Students helped select target themes, establish guiding questions, and design classroom instructional activities (Nelson & Frederick, 1994).

- ◆ **Working with Teachers** – (Orange, California) A program that engaged middle school students as researchers in their school took the research to the next step by inviting the students to participate in school planning meetings. Students spent time with several teachers planning and constructing learning units based on the research they conducted. They also met with the school principal, pressing pressed her for changes in school rules and militaristic physical education practices. A discipline committee made up of teachers, student researchers and administrators re-examined and reconceptualized the school merit system. The principal also formed a student-teacher task force to visit other schools in the area to begin re-examining the physical education program. As one student wrote, “When I first joined the [student/teacher planning group], I thought it was a waste of time. I thought a bunch of kids wouldn’t be able to make anything change; obviously I was wrong” (SooHoo, 1993).

- ◆ **Involved from the Ground Up** – (Puyallup, Washington) High school students here co-created the mission, guiding principles, and co-wrote the school constitution for a new high school. The result is a student-inclusive decision-making process beginning with every student participating in a leadership class daily. Students also participated in the architectural design process for the school, with much of their input being incorporated into the building. Today, large open spaces and advanced technology courses stand as a testament to the effectiveness of student participation in education planning (Fletcher, 2002).

- ◆ **Education Planning as Activism –** (Bronx, New York) One student group is taking Meaningful Student Involvement in education planning to the next level. Sistas and Brothas United, or SBU, is working with school district officials to create a small school focused on educating students for social justice. SBU has worked to improve their own schools for several years. They've rallied and researched, and as one student said, "[We] got a lot of stuff fixed... that gives me a sense of power." The students are flexing their power in another direction now. They have begun working with the local school district and a coalition of organizations to start a new high school called the Leadership Institute for Social Justice. As the student-written mission statement says, "A focus on social justice will help students clarify their values, understand their rights, and relate these to the broader world around them." According to SBU, the school will center around democratic leadership practices and focus on community impacts. There will be community space and place-based learning, as well as student-adult partnerships throughout the curriculum design and grading. The students do not foster illusions of achieving their goals tomorrow. According to one student, "In the work we do, you can't be selfish... It's about us standing up for what we believe in and making change for [our sons and daughters]" (What Kids Can Do, 2003b).

CHANGING SCHOOLS TOGETHER

As many schools grapple with the need for effective school reform practices, few are actually asking their primary constituency: the students. Later, you'll read about the closely related topic of Meaningful Student Involvement in education decision-making, including students on school boards and school site councils. However, the future of Meaningful Student Involvement in education planning includes student participation on school improvement teams and in state, district, and local school program planning processes. These opportunities will ensure the sustainable and effective influence of students in schools into the future by creating important avenues for students to impact the school classes, programs, and other activities that affect them the most.

OR

Students as Education Researchers

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world within words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.

– John Berger (1972)

OR

Meaningful Student Involvement in education research inherently turns the microphone around, making the student the examiner as well as the examined, and the feedback loop an engine for school change. This approach, called participatory action research, or PAR, is a method of research where students collaborate with educators to conduct research through critical examination of students and schools by students. The PAR model enables students to take an active role in designing and conducting their research as a group.

TOPICS FOR ACTION

The topics of student-led research have varied according to particular settings and purposes for the studies. According to one publication (MacBeath, 2003), the following are a variety of past subjects covered:

School-Wide Issues - Students have researched school-wide issues, including:

- ◆ Revising the school mission statement
- ◆ Exploring the system of rewards
- ◆ Revising the content and presentation of school rules
- ◆ Strategies for minimizing bullying
- ◆ Qualities needed in a new principal
- ◆ School uniforms
- ◆ Getting the student council to work well.

Learning in Class - Students have researched the process of learning, including:

- ◆ Factors that encourage learning
- ◆ Barriers that prevent learning
- ◆ How to deal with noise in the classroom
- ◆ What they would like more and less of in lessons
- ◆ Different ways of grouping students
- ◆ Peer support in learning
- ◆ Best ways of starting and ending the lesson
- ◆ Ways of catching up if students do not understand or if they miss work.

As education researchers, students become critical thinkers and engaged participants in learning. The following examples focus on students engaged in research design, execution, analysis, and writing about schools, environments, the teaching and learning process, and more. Their work represents a critical step towards Meaningful Student Involvement. All of these examples underscore the depth, perspective and purpose of increased student autonomy and student engagement across education.

STUDENT-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

One of the most important keys for Meaningful Student Involvement is the consistent support and willingness of adults to integrate students in all aspects of schooling, including teaching, learning, and decision-making. The role of student-teacher partnerships is central to involving student as education researchers. The following stories illustrate how supportive learning environments can foster deepened academic understanding, and therefore achievement, for all students.

- ◆ **Students Searching for Success** – (Bear Valley, California) A high school principal here wanted to explore students' views of learning, so she started a student-research program. The group focused on the questions, "Do our school restructuring activities really make fundamental changes in the learning process? Does all of our work have an impact in the classroom?" As part of the yearlong study, the student researchers participated in a twice-weekly course that focused on their work, and consequently, the students became the driving force in the data collection and analyses. Students conceived the methods used and led the data collection work. In their study, the student researchers collected data from 200 of the school's 1,600 students. They worked with 27 classes, and conducted focus group discussions with 150 students. Ultimately, the students presented their

findings to professional researchers from across the country. The findings showed that students define success in school many different ways, with a strong theme focusing on students' diligence and balance. Students recognized the importance of motivation, good study habits, a balance between school and work, involvement in school life, being organized, and simply putting forth the effort to succeed. The student researchers also explored learning outside of school, how students learn best, and the school's impacts on students learning. The project coordinators state that "the lessons of this project occurred on two levels: what the students, staff, and parents learned from the data, and what we all (adults) learned about engaging students as researchers in a topic that is relevant to them" (Shaunessey, 1998).

- ◆ **Infusing Research into Class** – (Hartford, Connecticut) Four school districts are participating in a student action research program as part of the Education and Advocacy Project, coordinated by the Youth Action Research Institute. This program is a model program that engages students in identifying and researching issues that affect the quality of education in their schools and elsewhere in the state. The program, for fifth and sixth graders, has nine teachers participating who are integrating student driven action research into their classrooms using cooperative learning methods into core curricular activities. The project's methods and goals include assessing the effects of PAR on students, educators, and the overall school communities involved (Institute for Community Research, 2003).
- ◆ **Financial Futures** – (Poughkeepsie, New York) In one particularly compelling example, students conducted research on their district's budget crisis as part of a government class. After designing a 57-question survey that solicited opinions from fellow students on what should be included in next year's school district budget, the students hand-tabulated and analyzed data from 596 completed surveys - over half the student body. When district board members came to their regular budget meeting, a surprise was waiting: student-created data from that survey highlighted exactly what students thought should be included in next year's school district budget. Board members gave their approval in one of the report's final comments: "Student input should be solicited and gathered periodically so that students can always be a part of the process. Students want to be involved!" In late May, when the Poughkeepsie Board of Education passed its budget for the coming school year, they introduced an unprecedented line item: \$25,000 for "student initiatives" (What Kids Can Do, 2003b).

IDENTIFYING PURPOSE

With the recent national debate on scientific research in education, Participatory Action Research can provide educators with a refreshing approach to classroom research. PAR is designed to allow the perspective of students to constantly inform and help navigate the goals of schools, and better inform educators' practices consequently. Perhaps this is better for schools than traditional forms of scientific research. By listening to the experiences, opinions, ideas and knowledge of students, PAR provides a responsive, urgent analysis of schools, as well as a validating avenue for Meaningful Student Involvement. Meaningful Student Involvement in education research can be the opportunity many students need to speak on behalf of their own learning and education as a whole.

☞

Students as Teachers

To teach is to learn twice.

– Joseph Joubert (1782)



Several out-of-school youth-serving programs have engaged young people as teachers for more than 100 years. Organizations including 4-H, the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts have long relied on the merits of youth-led classes to teach young women and men of all ages significant life lessons and invaluable skills. This approach has been valued for generations, witnessed by the many indigenous communities who have entrusted young people with teaching their peers for thousands of years and been supplemented by the American colonists whose first schools employed young teachers, who in turn gave the responsibility of teaching to their younger charges. Famed pioneer teacher Laura Ingalls Wilder was 15 when she began teaching. While young people teaching generally ceased in schools with the advent of advanced teacher education in the early 1900s, pockets of activity continued. The 1960s “free school” movement recognized the value of students teaching students, and many instituted the practice as everyday experiences for young people. Throughout the past 30 years the concept of students as teachers has gained momentum as more professional educators are beginning to see its effects.

AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

Meaningful Student Involvement recognizes the importance of acknowledging the knowledge of students, and charges them with the responsibility of educating their peers, younger students or adults. Students teaching students is not meant to undermine the influence or ability of adult educators: instead, it uplifts the role of educators by making their knowledge and abilities accessible to more students. A growing body of practice and research from the education arena reinforces the seemingly radical belief that students can teach students effectively, given appropriate support from their adult teachers. The following examples show students serving as teaching assistants, partnering with teachers or peers to deliver curriculum, teaching peers or students on their own, or teaching adults in a variety of settings.

- ◆ **Pedagogy for Peers** – (Basking Ridge, New Jersey) After teaching her ninth grade students the basics of composition, English teacher Kathleen Shaw had the class teach each other about grammar devices, with the question in mind, “Can they explain grammar to someone else?” She wrote, “Best of all, the students learned important lessons through the assignment. They clarified some grammatical points their classmates might have been confused about, they had the thrill of creating something new, they compromised with their partners and they experienced speaking before a large group. Maybe they even gained a little more respect for their teachers” (Shaw, 1997).

- ◆ **Technology in the Trenches** – (Olympia, Washington) Generation YES, an international nonprofit organization promoting the role of technology in education, engages students as expert trainers to teachers in elementary, middle and senior high schools. The students learn complex computer skills, as well as how to design lesson plans and deliver training. Educators, in turn, learn about students’ capacities for technology and teaching. The Generation YES model claims to be the only model of professional development that involves students as equal partners in their own learning (Generation YES, 2003).

- ◆ **Serving Up Learning** – (Vashon Island, Washington) Students from StudentLink, an alternative learning program in the local high school, conducted multiple teacher in-service trainings on service learning. The student/teachers, ages 12-18, taught teachers, school administrators, city officials and other community members about service learning for two three-hour sessions. The student/teachers incorporated multiple teaching styles, attempting to appeal to the diverse learning styles participants came with. Lively dialogue, initiative activities, small group facilitation, brainstorming and action planning were all included in the student-planned, student-led trainings (Fletcher, 2001).

- ◆ **Raising Educational Stars** – (San Francisco, California) The Breakthrough Collaborative, a highly successful after-school program for students of color, believes so strongly in students teaching that their tagline is “Students Teaching Students.” The organization shares the following anecdote: “During one of the first summers, several high school students who were acting as teaching assistants took over the classroom for a math teacher who had fallen ill. When the teacher returned, she observed that her students were working harder for the older students than they had for her. By coincidence, this ‘experimental’ teaching model sparked the interest of the younger students

who loved having the high school students as their teachers and mentors. Suddenly, seventh and eighth grade students who never believed it was cool to be smart were reciting Shakespeare, learning the Pythagorean Theorem and studying the laws of physics. [Breakthrough] was a booming success” (Breakthrough Collaborative, 2003).

LEARNING THROUGH TEACHING

While a growing number of educators recognize the validity of students’ thoughts about schools, few see students actually being players in addressing those concerns. Engaging students in teaching fills a three-fold gap in student learning: it develops empathy between students and teachers, making students more understanding of teachers’ jobs while making teachers more aware of students learning needs; it makes learning more tangible and relevant for students, particularly for students without the ability to access other “real-world” learning opportunities; and finally, it empowers students to approach the problems they identify in their classrooms through critical analysis and applicable solutions. Engaging students as teachers is more than simply teaching new tricks to an old dog. It challenges the old dog to teach others, and to allow the younger pups to teach themselves.

CR

Students as Evaluators

It is tempting to think that if you just pay attention to students' voices, you will hear what you already know. Secretly, adults – outside schools as well as in – generally believe that they know best.

– Barbara Cervone & Kathleen Cushman (2002)

OR

On one level, teachers are always listening to students' opinions, checking for comprehension, and whether they have accomplished a task. Another level is reflected in the barrage of student surveys conducted, and the myriad education books that tokenize students' opinions with quotes from students on their covers. Meaningful Student Involvement calls for something more, something that is deliberate, empowering, far-reaching and sustainable. Engaging students as evaluators calls for educators to develop practical, applicable feedback opportunities where students are encouraged to be honest, open and solution-oriented. Students find particular investment in evaluation when they can see tangible outcomes, and have some measure of accountability from the systems, educators, or situations they are evaluating. Over the course of a school year, teachers might want a variety of evaluations from students, including:

- ◆ An occasional large-scale forum where the opinions of students in one or all grade levels are canvassed;
- ◆ Creating a regular pattern of evaluative feedback in lessons;
- ◆ Facilitating a series of one-to-one or small group discussions, how members of a particular sub-group of students (the disengaged, the high-achievers, young women, young men, Hispanics, African Americans, for example) are feeling about their learning experiences; or,
- ◆ Shaping a new initiative in the classroom or school.

By involving students as evaluators, schools can develop purposeful, impacting, and authentic assessments of classes, schools, teachers, and enact accountability and ownership for all participants in the learning process. Effective evaluations may include student evaluations of classes and schools; student evaluations of teachers; student evaluations of self, and; student-led parent-teacher conferences, where students present their learning as partners with teachers and parents, instead of as passive recipients of teaching done “to” them.

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

When this kind of evaluation is new to a school, teachers may feel apprehensive about talking with students in a way that changes traditional power relationships within the school (MacBeath, 2003). Teachers may feel challenged by empowering students for many reasons, including feeling disempowered to make decisions in their own classrooms (Kohn, 1993). In response to what is perceived as some schools' inadequate understanding of the experiences and opinions of students, community groups and education organizations across the nation are engaging students as evaluators. Adults work with students in these programs to design evaluations, conduct surveys, analyze data and create reports to share with fellow students and educators.

- ◆ **Real Reasons** – (Oakland, California) In 2003, students in REAL HARD (Representing Educated Active Leaders - Having A Righteous Dream), a community youth leadership organization, designed and collected 1,000 report card surveys evaluating teaching, counseling, school safety and facilities at three Oakland high schools. The students compiled their findings, analyzed the results, and made concrete recommendations to improve the schools in this exciting, comprehensive report. The introduction to the report states, "There are 48,000 youth in Oakland's schools that are experts – who are in class every day and who have a lot to say about how the schools are run and how to improve our education. Whenever something happens in the schools, everyone wants to hear from the teachers and parents - but what about the students? Who asks our opinion? Why do we feel shut out, like no one cares what we think?" (REAL HARD, 2003).
- ◆ **Interviewing Friends, Analyzing Purpose** – (New York, New York) Seven middle and high school students participated in a student evaluator program for the Teens as School Volunteer Tutors Project. Together with an adult evaluation facilitator, they decided to interview two groups of subjects: an adult group made up of school professionals and the tutors' own parents and a student group made up of both tutors and their tutees. The student evaluators devised interview forms, agreed on interview assignments, and drew up a time line for completion. The students completed 57 interviews, and analyzed them with the adult facilitator. During the analysis period the students reflected on their experiences and what they learned, and assessed their data. The student evaluators then made several recommendations that have since been integrated into the program. In reflection, the adult facilitator wrote that the use of student evaluators was ideal, resulting in usable data,

stronger leadership skills, and greater school awareness of the tutoring program itself (Campbell, et al, 1994).

- ♦ **More than Listening** – (San Francisco, California) A range of students participated in a recent Bay Area School Reform Collaborative project. One school invited students to share their views on what needed to be changed, and how to accomplish those changes. The students then joined teachers to analyze the data gathered. They found that there were five main concerns students raised, including better communication between staff and students, higher quality teaching, and better counseling and support. The students then presented these findings to their teachers during an after-school meeting. The reform leadership at the school was amazed by the way the student evaluators maneuvered the concerns of other students, carefully making sure adults understood what each concern truly was. The students learned about how to conduct research on an important issue in their school and how to present that information to teachers. Many students reported that participating in the evaluation process improved their self-opinions and provided opportunities to develop meaningful interactions with adults at school (Mitra, 2001).

SQUEAKY WHEELS OR LOOSE CANONS?

Meaningful Student Involvement is tantamount to putting mutual respect and communication in motion between students and educators in schools. Meaningful Student Involvement also requires the investment from educators and students. Many “student voice” programs have simply thrown the job of sounding out at students, without showing students the degrees of possibility for the input and action of young people. Some neglect the necessity of two-way dialogue, of collaborative student/teacher problem solving, and of truly student inclusive, interdependent school change. Meaningful Student Involvement in education evaluation gives students and educators the impetus to establish *constructive, critical* dialogues that place common purpose and interdependence at the center of the discussion. When dissent is encountered, appropriate avenues for resolution are identified. When inconsistencies and prejudice are revealed, intentional exposure and practical understanding is sought. When educators strive to engage the hope students have for schools, they can foster students’ growth as effective evaluators who actually impact the processes of learning, teaching and leading. In turn, students will offer vital lessons for educators and the education system as a whole.



Students as Decision-Makers

Schools are compulsory for about ten years of a person's life. They are, perhaps, the only compulsory institutions for all citizens, although those with full membership in schools are not yet treated as full citizens of our society...

– Marie Brennan (1996)

OR

Perhaps the irony to the above quote is that students recognize the situation immediately and consequently offer reluctance to Meaningful Student Involvement. When presented with opportunities to make significant decisions in their schools, students have been known to *parrot* educators, saying only what they think adults want to hear; students *test* educators by offering the most outlandish possibilities; and in the most dramatic cases, they simply *refuse* to make decisions that they have been taught to believe should be made for them (Kohn, 1993).

The challenges students pose in decision-making are coupled with oft-cited barriers in the form of systemic roadblocks in schools and the patronizing attitudes of adult educators. However, research has proven that when young people are able to make decisions about education and their experience, knowledge, ideas and opinions are empowered, motivation, reasoning skills, and confidence flourish (Zeldin, et al, 2000). Meaningful Student Involvement engages students as decision-makers who partner with educators to make decisions throughout schools, in areas that affect their individual learning as well as the entire school community. It is the later of these areas that this section focuses on, including students as decision-makers in curricula selection, calendar year planning, school building design, and many broader school-focused issues. In addition to being involved on boards of education at the local, district, and state levels, students are engaged in education decision-making, such as grant-making, school assessment, and more. Students are also learning by establishing and enforcing codes of conduct, and making decisions about teacher and administrator hiring and firing.

HISTORY IN ACTION

John Dewey, the father of modern progressive education, delineated a course of learning that is easily adaptable for student involvement in education decision-making (1916). The following points are modified from Dewey's original course.

Pathway for Meaningful Student Involvement in Decision-Making

1. All students should have validating, sustainable, opportunities that they are interested in to make decisions about their own learning and education as a whole.
2. Decision-making opportunities should engage students in solving genuine problems and making substantial decisions that will promote critical thinking skills.
3. Students should possess the knowledge and ability needed to make informed decisions.
4. Students and educators should be responsible and accountable for developing responsible, creative action plans to implement decisions.
5. Students should apply these plans, reflect on the decisions and outcomes, and be charged with continually examining, applying, and challenging this learning.

Rather than belaboring the necessity of engaging students in education decision-making, the following vignettes start with exemplary models, and are followed by research summaries from across the United States. These stories offer a glimpse into the increasingly well-defined role of students as school decision-makers.

- ◆ **Infusing Involvement** – (Anne Arundel County, Maryland) Students here have participated as voting members of the district board of education for more than 25 years. The student member, a high school senior, votes on all issues, including all areas of the school budget, discipline, and fiscal issues. In addition, every advisory, curriculum, and study committee, along with special task forces in the district includes students, working on everything from grading policies to alternative learning. Students are also members of every local School Improvement Team in the district, with as many as five students on a ten member team. In local schools throughout the district, students conduct forums on school initiatives of all kinds with support from teachers and administration (Fletcher, 2003).
- ◆ **Developing Democracy** – (Stuart, Ohio) Federal Hocking High School, located in rural Ohio, gives students an equal place at the table when faculty hiring decisions are made, when curriculum is chosen, and when class offerings are determined. Students are also given long periods of self-guided learning time during the school day to explore issues important to them. Innovative principal George Wood has said, “Students often find themselves

preached to about values instead of practicing them. That's why our efforts have been to focus on practice rather than exhortation. Everything we do, including classroom teaching practices, school governance, students' experience both inside and out of school, assessment, even the organization of the school day, is done with an eye toward developing democratic community" (Rural School and Community Trust, 1999).

- ◆ **Positive Possibilities for Practice** – (Frankfort, Kentucky) A recent report for the Kentucky Department of Education was subtitled "Proficiency, Achievement Gaps, and the Potential of Student Involvement". The researcher conducted a national survey of student involvement in state-level decision-making, and found that 20 states engage students in their boards of education in some way. However, the truth is in the details. The study found that only five states give students voting rights on the state Board of Education, and only seven states include a group of more than two student advisors. The rest of these positions are non-voting, and most of the positions across the nation are appointed by adults without student involvement. Recommendations to the Kentucky Department of Education included establishing a statewide advisory board with diverse student representation from middle and senior high schools, as well as college students. The report closed with the line, "Reaching proficiency and closing the achievement gaps both require the participation of students, in leadership, advisory, and decision-making roles. The Kentucky Department of Education must follow the lead of numerous other states by including students in statewide decision-making" (Webb, 2002).
- ◆ **International Attention** – (Nova Scotia, Canada) Results from a Canadian study conducted at school, school district and departmental levels across Canada indicate a growing interest in student involvement in education decision-making. The study explores the provisions made for student involvement in policy-making at each level in education, the nature of that involvement, the mechanisms used for recruiting student involvement in policy-making, the perceptions of stakeholders on student involvement, and the constraints to be overcome in the Canadian school system (Critchley, 2003).
- ◆ **Students *Want* Purposeful Learning** – (Murray, Kentucky) The attitude of students is beginning to change, evidenced by the students who responded to a Tennessee survey that detailed what kinds and how much responsibility students wanted in school decision-making. The survey asked students

about their desire to be involved in fourteen potential areas, including selecting textbooks and instructional materials, selecting a new principal when there is a vacancy, consulting with the principal when other vacancies are filled, deciding what is to be taught, deciding which teaching methods will be used, deciding how time will be used during the day, and determining how available funds are to be spent. Survey results found that students want to be included in several areas, including decisions about extracurricular activities, which classes students are offered, the way time is used during the day and what textbooks should be used (Patmor, 1999).

ADULTS AGITATING

There is a plethora of negative stereotypes preventing student involvement in school decision-making, as well as structural, cultural, and attitudinal barriers. While the structural and cultural barriers might be obvious, the attitudes might not be. The following example details what attitudinal barriers to Meaningful Student Involvement sound like.

- ◆ **Current Board Members Question Necessity** – In a recent article in the *American School Board Journal*, a wide survey of district boards of education revealed a growing, but cautious, interest in student involvement in school decision-making around the nation. The survey found that students had varying amounts of power, ranging from full voting rights to students participating in special advisory committees. Stories from Maryland, Vermont, Tennessee, and Alaska offer rationale, outcomes, and more details about student representation, as well as the specific challenges student school board members face. The barriers of student involvement were identified in a follow-up comment section from current adult school board members across the nation. The responses ranged from constructive to derogatory, and included the following:

"We can't serve in Congress or as president until we pass age requirements; why should local government forgo the wisdom of this? Students need to learn respect and have life experience before taking a community office."

"If students knew how to run the school system, we wouldn't need an administration," wrote an Indiana board member. "Teachers and principals don't sit on the board, and neither should students. Only those elected to make school policy should do so" (Joiner, 2003).

The evidence that education systems across the United States are devoid of student involvement in decision-making is obvious to any young person or adult who considers themselves an ally of youth. As displayed above, the belief that students cannot make decisions for themselves is as much a hindrance as the belief that students cannot make decisions for schools at large.

ADULTS ADVOCATING

There is evidence that the historic tide of *adultism* in schools may be receding. One of the respondents in the above series validated Meaningful Student Involvement, saying, "The student board member should be elected by the whole student body, with no interference from administrators, teachers, or others. This is the only way the board can really find out what is really happening in the schools and what students really want" (Joiner, 2003). Coupled with the following recent quote from Wisconsin State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster, there may be new interest for Meaningful Student Involvement in education decision-making.

"Including students as representatives on boards and committees takes classroom learning into the community and opens the door for many more students to become involved in the policies and practices that shape their schools... Student board representatives play a valuable role in helping locally elected school boards understand how their decisions affect the [students] they serve and provide our young people with an opportunity to learn about the important debate and compromise that shape school policy" (Wisconsin State Office of Superintendent, 2003).

Given the necessity of Meaningful Student Involvement in creating a positive future for schools, as well as the growing call from both students and educators for students to be included as decision-makers, schools must change. This change should begin in the earliest grades with the youngest students, evolving and changing as students grow in their ability, and as educators grow in their capacity to engage young people.

CR

Students as Education Advocates

The evidence increasingly points to an innate disposition [in students] to be responsive to the plight of other people... Creating people who are socially responsive does not totally depend on parents and teachers. Such socializing agents have an ally within the child.

– Martin Hoffman (1967)

OR

The failure of many traditional attempts by schools to engage students in leadership or “democratic” education lies in the mixed messages of many communities’ agenda for public education. When educators have asked students to represent their peers, they often seek out the most academically gifted or popular, thereby narrowing the validity and ability of students to be valid democratic representatives. When schools offer courses to teach leadership, they can be steeped in traditional leadership models and teaching styles that alienates many students and limits important connections. Ironically, these classes are often offered at the expense of creating courses that could teach students about their own culture and heritage, which effectively negates the potential influence student leaders can have on everyday community life. Meaningful Student Involvement embraces every student as their own self, but also as the son or daughter of a family; as a member of a larger community; and as a partner in transforming schools. Understanding power, an essential component of Meaningful Student Involvement, begins in discovering and acknowledging who students are, and what education stand for (Institute for Community Leadership, 2001).

BROADER CONCERNS

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once presented us with the challenge of advocacy by saying, “An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Meaningful Student Involvement in education advocacy happens when students are engaged as advocates for the schools they learn in; for the education system the next generation will inherit; and for the needs of the larger community surrounding the school. Students can be engaged in many ways: as members of committees, demonstrators in protests, on special panels, and in functions that help raise awareness or interest in education issues. All of the roles delineated in previous

sections of this document are essentially different forms of students advocating for education. However, the following examples stand apart as uniquely specific models of students as education advocates.

- ◆ **Funding the Future of Schools** – (San Francisco, California) The Student Action Fund, or SAF, was developed by the Youth Leadership Institute in San Francisco, California to amplify the voices of students in schools. SAF provides cash grants to teams of students and teachers to take on challenges including increasing attendance rates, building better relationships between teachers and students, and improving the ways students are taught, as well as the kinds of things they are learning. Students, working with adults in their school, can apply for up to \$5000 to help jump-start their own project ideas. Applications that students complete are reviewed by a group of young people and adults. The SAF does not just give students the lead in planning and carrying out their project ideas, but also in deciding which ideas get funded. For those groups of students and adults that receive funding there are structured opportunities to come together with peers to share successes and challenges of their projects, and identify ways to improve their work (Youth Leadership Institute, 2003).

- ◆ **No Age Limits** – (Salt Lake City, Utah) Fifth grade students at Jackson Elementary have been credited with a variety of successes in their advocacy. They helped repopulate a neglected area with native vegetation, lobbied the US Congress for neighborhood improvement funds, and were directly responsible for an amendment to a national law, the America the Beautiful Act of 1990. However, a highlight came in 1994 when they helped their elementary school reconstruct its library. By the time the students were finished researching, brainstorming, fundraising, giving speeches, lobbying, writing proposals and receiving local, state and federal support, their school had brand-new research classes, flexible scheduling for increased library use, and a comprehensive technology system including a computer center and computers in every classroom (Lewis & Woolley, 1994).

- ◆ **Transportation for Education** – (Portland, Oregon) With the ongoing absence of public school buses, the student activist organization Sisters in Action for Power developed a three-year campaign advocating for free student bus rides to and from schools for students around the city. The campaign is the driving force behind the city's public transit company's recent decision to allow free rides to high school students who qualify for free or reduced school lunches. The group, whose campaign has been covered in

numerous Portland newspapers, shows how advocating for one issue can create positive social change for a large group of people. The Sisters' hard work is paying off in a big way for low-income high school students. But even though they have achieved some success, the Sisters aren't stopping there - they plan to keep battling for the option of free service for all Portland high school students (Haley, 2003).

- ◆ **Nationwide Movement Created** – (National) A new kind of youth organization is springing up across the nation, in which issue-based organizing combines with youth leadership development, cultural enrichment, and academic and personal support. It often starts with a campaign to change school-related problems. But as participants learn the ropes, they go on to tackle community issues, create new partnerships with adults, and profoundly change how they view the political process. Two student organizing initiatives, Youth Organizing Communities in Los Angeles and Sistars and Brothas United in the Bronx, NY, are profiled as powerful models of student-led advocacy for education (What Kids Can Do, 2003c).

ROADBLOCKS TO PROGRESS

However, these student advocates are not without challenges. While this publication has documented various barriers to many forms of Meaningful Student Involvement, none has stood in such stark contrast to the principals of democracy and empowerment that the following story emanates.

- ◆ **Working For or Against Schools?** – (Washington, DC) High school students here planned for months to stage a noon walkout as part of a protest for increased school funding in October 2003. They planned to join teachers, parents, residents, workers, and activists to protest the on-going deep funding cuts that are lowering the level of education and to demand increased funding for schools. The *Washington Times* reported, "Based on accounts by several organizers and students, principals at several high schools took extraordinary steps to prevent students from leaving the buildings by barring and locking doors, placing security officers around the perimeters and making announcements threatening students with 25-day suspensions, detentions and even incarceration." Several students reported that they were suspended, and students at Wilson used their cell phones to report that they could not get out of the building. A teacher active with the Washington Teachers Union mobilization committee rejected the prison-like atmosphere created, saying students should not be subjected to "lockdowns." The students and teachers

are continuing their efforts to defend the right to education and oppose the criminalization of dissent (Washington, 2003).

IF NOT STUDENTS, THEN WHO?

A recent report on student activism for education equity stated, “Whatever the risks, there is no shortage of reasons for teachers and others to support young peoples’ [education advocacy] work... It may be uncomfortable when young people begin to ‘speak when not spoken to’... but their voices are too powerful, and their words too true, to be silenced for long” (Tolman, 2003).

This report underlines the necessity of not only listening to students, not only engaging students, but actually giving students the platform to create, inform, and advocate for positive school transformation. Meaningful Student Involvement is not a complete process without this important focus on advocacy.



Conclusion

From my experience of hundreds of children, I know that they have perhaps a finer sense of honour than you or I have. The greatest lessons in life, if we would but stoop and humble ourselves, we would learn not from grown-up learned men, but from the so-called ignorant children.

– Mahatma Gandhi (1931)

☞

There are countless instrumental and practical reasons for Meaningful Student Involvement; reasons that provide concrete current and future benefits for students, educators, and education systems (Fletcher, 2003b). Alfie Kohn (1995) believes that students should have a classroom of their choosing, where educators recognize that “children are not just adults-in-the-making. They are people whose current needs and rights and experiences must be taken seriously.” Students should be able to make choices because people of any age should be able to make choices (Chanoff, 1981). However, the purpose for education is not just for students to have choices, but also for students to act on their knowledge, to create solutions and to change and transform existing structures so that the world is a better place for everybody (Westheimer & Kahne, 1998). ***Meaningful Student Involvement proposes that students focus their energy on the most immediate of their surroundings: schools.***

This publication features stories that detail how students work with educators to infuse depth, perspective, and power into the everyday experiences of *all* students. These are not exceptional students, revered as “gifted” or seen as traditional leaders. They are the students who occupy the “borderlands” of student engagement: they are socially, physically and academically in between the highly significant and the particularly ignored populations in schools, attending schools because they *have to*. Henry Giroux observes that these students are, “an entire generation forced to sell themselves in a world with no hope... [living] in a world in which chance and randomness, rather than struggle, community and solidarity, drive their fate” (2000). ***Meaningful Student Involvement provides students with the possibility of hope, shared purpose and a social investment that will be inherited by each succeeding generation.***

Meaningful Student Involvement is very different than encouraging participation in traditional student leadership programs, precisely because it focuses on involving *all* students. Where before, educators set the agenda and expected students to follow, now, students are partners and facilitators. Where student leadership once represented student bodies with fixed, homogenized, and uncomplicated terms (Silva & Rubin, 2003), Meaningful Student Involvement now offers a dynamic, complex, and interdependent strategy that is essential to school transformation. When students are equal partners in schools, a new relationship emerges. Respect is given and power is shared from students to educators, and from educators to students. ***Meaningful Student Involvement is intended to prevent the oversimplification of “student voice” for students today, as well as future generations.***

The stories in this document are real. They began in various education settings across the nation, and will serve as longstanding portraits of schools where students and educators challenge, explore, validate and empower their collective ideals about education and democracy. Meaningful Student Involvement encompasses the ideals those stories represent, as well as their main theme: students and educators working together to create an education system that will have equal opportunities for all students and recognize each person in schools for their unique characteristics and contributions. By taking the next step and applying these ideals through classroom practice, educators can create a sense of purpose and hope long missing from schools. Likewise, students can identify and explore their own hope for education. ***This is Meaningful Student Involvement.***

OR

References

- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC/Penguin Books.
- Breakthrough Collaborative. (2003). *Our History*.
www.breakthroughcollaborative.org/national.html
- Brennan, M. (1996). "Schools as public institutions: students & citizenship," *Youth Studies Australia* 15(1): 24-27.
- California Tomorrow. (2001). *The Need for Change is Now: Students Demand Justice in Their Schools*. Oakland, CA: Author.
- Campbell, P., Edgar, S., Halsted, A.L. (1994). "Students as evaluators: a model for program evaluation," *Phi Delta Kappan*. October: 160-165.
- Chanoff, D. (1981). "Democratic schooling: Means or end? Resolving the ambiguity," *High School Journal* 64: 170-175.
- Counts, G. (1932). *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press.
- Counts, G. (1941). *The Education of Free Men in American Democracy*. Washington, DC: American Association of School Administrators and the National Education Association.
- Critchley, S. (2003). The Nature and Extent of Student Involvement in Educational Policy-Making in Canadian School Systems. *Educational Management & Administration* 31 (1): 97-106.
- Cushman, K. (2003). *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students*. New York: The New Press.
- Davis, O. (2003). "Does democracy in education still live?" *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 19(1): 1-4. www.ascd.org/publications/jcs/2003fall/davis.html
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. (1966 edn.), New York: Free Press.
- Ericson, D.P. & Ellett, F.S. (2002). "The question of the student in educational reform," *Education Policy and Analysis Archives*, 10(31).
<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n31/>
- Fletcher, A. (2001). *Meaningful Student Involvement: An Idea Guide*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.
www.k12.wa.us/TitleVpartA/YES/pubdocs/studentinvolvement.pdf
- Fletcher, A. & Nishida, N. (2002). "Meaningful Student Involvement in Service Learning," *ServiceLine Newsletter* 12(3). Summer.
www.k12.wa.us/TitleVpartA/LearnServe/ServiceLine/SL%20summer%2002.pdf
- Fletcher, A. (2003). *Meaningful Student Involvement: Guide to Inclusive School Change*. HumanLinks Foundation, Freechild Project.
<http://www.soundout.org/MSIGuide.pdf>

- Fletcher, A. (2003b). *Meaningful Student Involvement Research Summary*. HumanLinks Foundation, Freechild Project. www.soundout.org/MSIResearch.pdf
- Fletcher, A. (2003c). *Total Infusion: District Scores 100% on Student Involvement in Decision-Making*. www.soundout.org/features/annearundel.htm
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of Freedom: Hope, Democracy and Civic Courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Generation YES. (2003). *About Us*. www.genyes.org/products/geny/genywhatis
- Gewertz, C. (2001). "The breakup: suburbs try smaller high schools," *Education Week*, 20(33): 1, 16, 18-19.
- Giroux, H. A. (2000). "Postmodern education and disposable youth," in P. P. Trifonas (Ed.), *Revolutionary Pedagogies*. New York and London: Routledge/Falmer: 174-195.
- Giroux, H. A. (2003). *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan: 73.
- Haley, K. (2003). "Sisters acting up: meet the sisters in action for power," *Wiretap Magazine*. www.wiretapmag.org/print.html?StoryID=9753&wiretap=yes
- Hoffman, M.L. & Saltzstein, H.D. (1967). "Parent discipline and the child's moral development," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 5: 45-57.
- Institute for Community Leadership. (2001). *Culture and Development*. Author: Seattle, WA.
- Institute for Community Research. (2003). *Education and Advocacy Project*, www.incommunityresearch.org/research/educationadvocacy.htm
- Joiner, L. (2003). "The student's voice," *American School Board Journal* 190(1). www.asbj.com/2003/01/0103coverstory.html
- King, M. L., Jr. (1967). *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* New York: Harper & Row.
- Koegel, R. & Kern-Koegel, L. (Eds.) (1995). *Teaching Children With Autism: Strategies For Initiating Positive Interactions And Improving Learning Opportunities*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
- Kohn, A. (1993). "Choices for children: why and how to let students decide." *Phi Delta Kappan*. September: 8-20. www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/cfc.htm
- Kohn, A. (1996). *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Curriculum and Supervision.
- Kushman, J., Shanessey, J. (1997). "Chapter three: research in the hands of students," in *Look Who's Talking Now: Student Views of Restructuring Schools*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

- Lewis, B. & Woolley, J. (1994). "Social action saves the day (or, how student activism helped transform a 1950's school library into a media center of the future)," *School Library Journal* 40(1): 33-35.
- MacBeath, J., et al (2003). *Consulting Pupils: A Toolkit for Teachers*. London: Pearson.
- Marques, E. (1999). *IOG Policy Brief No. 5: Youth Involvement in Policy-Making: Lessons from Ontario School Boards*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Institute on Governance. www.iog.ca/publications/policybrief5.pdf
- Meier, Deborah. 1995. *The Power of Their Ideas*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- Meyer, P. (2003) "The truth about transparency," *Executive Update*. The Center for Association Leadership. www.centeronline.org/knowledge/article.cfm?ID=2495
- Mitra, D. (2001). "Opening the floodgates: giving students a voice in school reform," *Forum, (Special Issue on Student Voice)*. United Kingdom. September.
- Nelson, J.R., Frederick, L. (April 1994). "Can kids design curriculum? yes!" *Education Digest*, 59 (8): 42-43.
- O'Loughlin, M. (1995). "Daring the imagination: unlocking voices of dissent and possibility in teaching." *Theory Into Practice* 24(2): 107-116.
- Oerlemans, K. and Jenkins, H. (1998). "Their voice: student perceptions of the sources of alienation in secondary school." Proceedings Western Australian Institute for Educational Research Forum 1998. <http://education.curtin.edu.au/waier/forums/1998/oerlemans.html>
- Pauley, C. (1996). "The view from the student's side of the table." in D. Sands & M. Wehmeyer (Eds.), *Making It Happen: Student Involvement in Planning, Decision-Making, and Evaluation*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes: 123-128.
- Patmor, G., McIntyre, J. (1999). "Involving students in school decision-making," *NASSP Bulletin* 83(607). May: 74-78.
- REAL HARD. (2003). *Student voices count: a student-led evaluation of high schools in Oakland*. Oakland, CA.: Kids First. www.kidsfirstoakland.org/kidsfirsreport.pdf
- Rubin, B. & Silva, E. (Eds.) (2003). *Critical Voices in School Reform: Students Living Through Change*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Rural School and Community Trust. (1999). "Ohio students tell West Virginia that 'kids can.'" www.ruraledu.org/rpm/rpm109a.htm
- Schlosser, E. (2001). *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin: 51-57.
- Shaw, K. (1997). "Students Teaching Grammar." www.sunynassau.edu/users/cohenl1/Teaching/STUDENTS%20TEACHING%20GRAMMAR.htm
- SooHoo, S. (Summer 1993). "Students as partners in research and restructuring schools," *Educational Forum* 57.

- Tolman, J. (2003). *If Not Us, Then Who? Young People on the Frontlines of Educational Equity*. Unpublished paper.
- Washington, A. (2003). "Mayor told to butt out of dc school system," *The Washington Times*. October 3. <http://washingtontimes.com/metro/20031002-094717-9936r.htm>
- Webb, Z. (2002). *National Assessment of Student Involvement in School Policy-Making - Meeting Kentucky's Educational Needs: Proficiency, Achievement Gaps, and the Potential of Student Involvement*. Kentucky Education Department: Lexington, KY. www.soundout.org/webbreport.htm
- Wehmeyer, M. & Sands, D. (1998). *Making It Happen: Student Involvement in Education Planning, Decision-Making and Instruction*. Baltimore: Brookes.
- Westheimer, J. & Kahne, J. (1998). As quoted in "Education for action: preparing youth for participatory democracy." in Ayers, et al. (Eds). (1998). *Teaching for Social Justice*. New York: New Press.
- What Kids Can Do. (2003a). "Students submit budget recommendations." www.whatkidscando.org/studentwork/schoolfundingpoughkeepsie.html
- What Kids Can Do. (2003b). *The Schools We Need: Creating Small Schools that Work for Us*. whatkidscando.org/portfoliosmallschools/portfoliohome.html
- What Kids Can Do. (2003c). "Young Organizers Mobilize to Change Their World, Starting with School." www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/youthorganizing.html
- Wisconsin State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2003). *Burmester Offers Support for Student Members on School Boards*. Author: Madison, WI www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dltcl/eis/pdf/dpi2003_05.pdf
- Wilson, B. and Corbett, H. D. (2001). *Listening to Urban Kids: School Reform and the Teachers They Want*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Youth Leadership Institute. (2003). "The student action fund: improving schools through youth-led projects." www.yli.org/programs_SRPP.htm
- Zeldin, S., Kusgen McDaniel, A., Topitzes, D., & Calvert, M. (2000). *Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations*. Madison: National 4-H Council. www.theinnovationcenter.org/images/products/01240215104234_YouthinDecisionMakingReportRevised9-01.pdf

Notes

About the Author

Adam Fletcher is the founder and director of The Freechild Project, a youth-driven think tank that offers training, research and consultation to schools and community-based organizations across the United States and Canada. Mr. Fletcher's work has included several years in community-based youth organizing and development, as well as working for the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to promote meaningful student involvement throughout the education system.

Supporting Organizations

The Freechild Project partnered with the HumanLinks Foundation to create this publication and its accompanying website, www.SoundOut.org - promoting meaningful student involvement in school change.

The Freechild Project

PO Box 6185
Olympia, WA 98507
Phone: 360.753.2686
Web: www.freechild.org

Freechild was founded in 2000 as a youth-driven training ground, think tank, resource agency, and advocacy group for young people seeking to play a larger role in their schools and communities. Freechild offers training and consultation in many areas, including school improvement, program development, and community building. Our website is a worldwide resource center for social change by and with young people that includes a diverse listing of information around youth empowerment, including everything from activist learning to youth suffrage, and several free publications on youth leadership, cooperative games and more.

HumanLinks Foundation

6016 N.E. Bothell Way # 160
Kenmore, Washington 98028
Phone: 425-882-5177
Web: www.humanlinksfoundation.org

The HumanLinks Foundation was established in 1999 to help communities in Washington State make systemic improvements in Education, Health Care and Sustainable Agriculture. HumanLinks strives to strengthen voices and connections to make these essential systems more effective and responsible. HumanLinks develops partnerships that leverage resources in new ways to blend values, ideas, information and best practices.

Supported by



www.SoundOut.org
promoting meaningful student involvement in school change

www.SoundOut.org encourages students and adults to work together to transform education and to validate student voice throughout education, from the classroom to the boardroom.

The website is a national online resource center that posts success stories of student-led efforts to improve schools, including those where students participate in researching, planning, evaluating, and advocating for schools.

Hundreds of online publications also make available bibliographies, articles, and research reports about meaningful student involvement.

www.SoundOut.org also provides online discussion forums, links to other resources, and a monthly newsletter.