Resource Guide

Meaningful Student Involvement

Adam Fletcher

"The work of Meaningful Student Involvement is not easy or instantly rewarding. It demands that the system of schooling change, and that the attitudes of students, educators, parents and community members change."

Adam Fletcher

Meaningful Student Involvement
RESOURCE GUIDE

Adam Fletcher

Presented by

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

Meaningful Student Involvement Resource Guide

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Introduction

Central to what Thomas Jefferson called the "grand experiment" of democracy in the United States is the school: a place where civic roles, government responsibility and social values are taught to young people. In many schools such education is still seen as preparatory; moreover, a form of readiness training on every citizen's theoretical roadmap to civic engagement. However, several factors indicate that such a seamless journey just isn't happening for young people today.

In response to this growing crisis, some educators are beginning to listen to "student voice" as an attempt to generate feedback from those they serve and to implant a democratic-type experience into the classroom. These teachers and administrators are taking necessary steps towards reforming schools into places that embrace, rather than ignore the necessity of student engagement in education leadership. However, there is another equally important aspect of this activity. Students themselves are working with adults and on their own to change learning experiences for themselves and future generations.

These efforts are part of a growing movement that is calling for the deliberate empowerment of the experiences, ideas and knowledge of students throughout education, called Meaningful Student Involvement. Meaningful Student Involvement is not just another classroom management method, or merely listening to "student voice." Rather, it is a revolutionary approach to teaching and learning that challenges progressive educators to be truly democratic by engaging students in critical reflection for school change. Meaningful Student Involvement happens when purposeful student autonomy meets recognized social interdependence in schools.

The work presented in this guide represents an intensive multi-year scan of practice, philosophy, action, research and literature about Meaningful Student Involvement from around the world. Instead of following another government mandate or popular social trend, what is revealed shows that this movement is emerging from the "trenches" of education: in the classrooms where intentions meet action, boardrooms where values meet policy, and hallways where purpose collides with perception.

Documentation of these efforts is slowly coming forth. The sources vary from peer-reviewed journals, organization websites, unpublished doctoral dissertations, student-written zines, and other sources. This guide explores a wide range of resources, carefully selected to support and promote students as researchers, planners, teachers, evaluators, decision-makers and advocates throughout education.

Criteria for inclusion in this Resource Guide included:

- **Support of Meaningful Student Involvement** – Authors sought to validate engaging students as learners, teachers, leaders and citizens.
- **Maintenance of Authentic Voice** – Authors speak for themselves as students or adults through their writing. Adults do not falsely attempt to represent students, and students don't haphazardly dismiss the potential contributions of adults.
- **Concern for School Change** – Authors genuinely react to the necessity of changing students' roles through school change.

This Resource Guide provides clear, concise summaries of some of the most indispensable resources available. Throughout the process of identifying the literature and organizations included here, some important pieces may have inadvertently been excluded. However, what is included here is nonetheless essential to the determined student, the activist educator, and the persevering administrator, each of whom is dedicated, and each of whom may be currently under-resourced. We offer these resources with the intention of encouraging all of these parties to sit down at the table together.

Renowned critical educator Paulo Freire maintained that there is no education without learning; one simply cannot exist without the other. Therein lies the challenge of schools today – to acknowledge the lessons students are learning in their experience of school, and to transform those lessons into hope, power, and freedom. The hope represented by **Meaningful Student Involvement** is that students are seen as necessary partners in positive school change, and that educators struggle to engage, embrace and empower young people in the process of rebuilding education and democracy today and in the future. This guide and the resources within it are offered towards that direction.

Adam Fletcher
Olympia, Washington
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Narratives and Reflections

*These publications offer examples of **Meaningful Student Involvement** in schools across the United States and Canada. By exploring various views of students and educators in many settings, the authors collectively illustrate the need for practitioners to examine their current school activities, particularly those conducted in the name of "listening to student voice." These works provide details about adults' and students' perspectives of **Meaningful Student Involvement**, and successfully portray the purpose, passion and experience many people feel about positive, inclusive school change today.*

Branscombe, A., Goswami, D., Schwartz, J. (1992). **Students Teaching, Teachers Learning.** Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

This variety of accounts examines students participating in classroom teaching and validates students as teachers by sharing both successes and challenges. Through their stories, authors examine what happens when students and teachers share authority in the classroom, and how educators react when they are not the sole experts in a particular topic. The book observes what happens when teachers engage students as co-inquirers and collaborators in classroom research. It tracks attitudinal, academic and social change, and examines each partner's response as students grow more responsible for *how* they want to learn as well as *what* they learn.

California Tomorrow in partnership with Californians for Justice. (2003). **The Need for Change is Now: Students Demand Justice in their Schools.** Oakland: California Tomorrow and Californians for Justice.

"In 2001, a group of multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual high school students in San Jose, California, worked together with Californians for Justice, and organized a successful campaign that made the East Side Union High School District change the way they deal with issues of race, culture and language." These words sum up this publication written by students that documents a student-led drive for educational equity in California. The publication raises issues, shares student-led research data, encourages peers to demand new policy commitments, details working with district officials to implement demands, and shares the exciting results of this campaign.

Cushman, K. (2003). **Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students.** New York, NY: The New Press.

In several easy-to-read chapters, Cushman offers student perspectives on different ways to get to know students, how to demonstrate respect, trust, and fairness in the classroom, how to foster positive classroom behavior, and why a culture of success is needed in schools. Each chapter offers first-person accounts written by students that explore particular issues, such as how students perceive teachers, how well teachers engage students and the types of engagement, classroom behavior and more. There are several tools for teachers spread throughout the book, including methods for working with individuals and groups, ideas for getting and keeping students motivated, suggestions for working with English language learners, and recovering when something goes wrong. Ultimately, the authors have created an effective entry point for educators concerned with how students feel about school and perceive their learning; more importantly, they have given educators the valuable "next steps" needed to put those perceptions to work for school change.

Cushman, K. (1994). "**Empowering Students: Essential Schools' Missing Link.**" *Horace*. 11(1) 1-7. www.essentialschools.org/pubs/horace/11/v11n01.html

This short newsletter provides specific tools that cover areas including empowered student governance and self-assessments. Stories detail coaching, as well as the role of instruction and democratic learning in student empowerment. The newsletter ends with a reflection on the critical themes for supporting students as they network with peers and implement ideas and action plans in schools.

Grace, M. (1999). "**When Students Create the Curriculum.**" *Educational Leadership*, 57 (5) 71-74.

This article exposes the benefits of a curriculum focused on the interests and curiosities of students. Grace details examples and research supporting student-generated content and practice and offers ten "key considerations" when involving students in curriculum design.

Kordalewski, J. (1999). **Incorporating Student Voice into Teaching Practice.** Washington, DC: ERIC. www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed440049.html

This article explores the infusion of student involvement in classroom teaching practice. Kordalewski explores the cultural reasons for student exclusion and offers multiple justifications for student involvement. There is an examination of curriculum design in specific disciplines, as well as techniques to promote dialogue. Particular attention is given to multicultural education and the need to engage students' cultural identities.

Lee, L. (n.d.) **Passion, Action And A New Vision For Student Voice: Learnings from the Manitoba School Improvement Program Inc.** Winnipeg, Canada: MSIP. www.sunvalley.ca/msip/10_studentvoice/10_passion.html

This article provides an exciting narrative about one program's vision for student-centered education. Lee details different lessons from their program, including the need for higher purpose, continuous activity, and strong beliefs about student involvement. Also includes a unique "student voice continuum," which proposes that students can move in a linear fashion from "no involvement" to become "directive" learners.

Marques, E. (1999). **Youth Involvement in Policy-Making: Lessons from Ontario School Boards.** Toronto, ON: Canadian Institute on Governance. www.iog.ca/publications/policybrief5.pdf

The necessity of student involvement in education decision-making is the central focus of this policy brief. It offers a comprehensive summary of findings in regards to student participation, as well as a critical analysis of recent legislative reforms in Ontario, Canada aimed at permitting greater student input into education policy-making. Marques presents candid, practical suggestions to strengthen both the policy and practice of student involvement in education decision-making.

Nelson, J.R. & Frederick, L. (1994). "**Can Kids Design Curriculum? Yes!**" *Education Digest*, 59 (8) 42-43.

This short article details activities done in the Learner-Centered Curriculum-Making Project, which views student-designed curriculum as a road to better learning, particularly in elementary grades. This project was developed to test the thesis that student-created curriculum would provide insight on how to design meaningful learning experiences. A major portion of the article details a multi-step process for students to work through to design curriculum.

Nishida, N. & Fletcher, A. (2002). "**Meaningful Involvement Benefits All Students: Meaningful Student Involvement in Service Learning.**" ServiceLine (12)3. www.k12.wa.us/integratedcurr/LearnServe/ServiceLine/SL%20summer%2002.pdf

This newsletter share stories from across the nation that detail the infusion of meaningful student involvement in schools using service learning. The authors highlight a dozen cross-curricular examples where change has occurred in many areas, including classroom planning, community research and teacher evaluation. The newsletter also provides multiple resources and suggested reading.

Olson, L. (Ed). (2002). "**Do Students Care About Learning?**" *Educational Leadership* (60)1, September '02. www.ascd.org/frameedlead.html

Several articles in this comprehensive magazine explore topics including engaging students as valued contributors in the classroom, the necessity of relevancy to learning, applications for place-based learning, motivating young people to master challenges, self-identified study topics for young students, and using multimedia presentations to effectively infuse learning with relevance. The online version includes a study guide that helps educators assess whether or not their particular school invites students to learn and whether their students believe they are "good teachers".

Rubin, B. & Silva, E. (Eds.) (2003). **Critical Voices in School Reform: Students Living Through Change.** New York & London: RoutledgeFalmer.

The editors distinctly portray the validity of student involvement by offering ten vignettes of school reform activities that consider the experiences, knowledge and ideas of students. Authors describe and analyze the tension between school change that ignores or suppresses students' input, and look at initiatives that uplift and embrace students with the intention of improving student engagement in learning. Their findings provide needed evidence supporting changing the relationships of students and educators. Rubin and Silva's contributions suggest that students often let educators know what they need to succeed, and that there are positive trends being established for successful student-centered, equity based reforms.

Shultz, J. & Cook-Sather, A. (Eds). (2001). **In Our Own Words: Students' Perspectives on School.** Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

This collection of student writings offers an unparalleled glimpse into the roles of equity and quality in students' classroom experiences by sharing a detailed examination of the relationships between students and adults in schools from various students' perspectives. The authors are young people in middle, high school, and college who have written very poignant, focused reflections on their school experiences. Their stories are multifaceted: as well providing specific feedback to educators, they also detail innovative ways to encourage and engage student authors in the writing tasks by providing offer a variety of useful models for co-authorship with students. Throughout the book readers learn about many of the obstacles student-adult partnerships face when working together for school change.

SooHoo, S. (1993). "**Students as Partners in Research and Restructuring Schools.**" *The Educational Forum*. 57. 386-393.

This article explores SooHoo's experience with equity and quality in student involvement as she engaged students as researchers and advocates in their education. It documents a process where middle school students conducting research on their school were led to partner with educators to become advocates for their interests in learning and school leadership. Special attention is given to detailing the process that

the students followed, as well as the effects it had on both students and educators in their school. The story offers a clear illustration of students who identified how they wanted to be taught as well as who was supported to become facilitators in teachers' professional development courses.

Tolman, J., Ford, P. & Irby, M. (2003). What Works in Education Reform: Putting Young People at the Center. Washington, DC: Forum for Youth Investment. www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/papers/whatworksedref.pdf

This publication seeks to define a common starting point for varied routes to real educational change. Tolman, et al. share a roadmap of this common starting point and these varied routes by telling the stories of programs in a dozen countries. Using these experiences as a concrete starting point and a consistent themes, the publication also shares and explores some of the core themes of student-centered reform.

What Kids Can Do. (2003). **The Schools We Need: Creating Small High Schools That Work For Us.** Providence, RI: Author. www.whatkidscando.org/bronxbooklet.pdf

Two dozens students in Bronx, New York talk about their experiences attending small schools. They explain students learn more, have better lives at school, and go on to better futures when they don't get lost in the crowd. The students pose riveting questions about small schools and end the book with a compelling story about a student activist group that is working with the public school system to develop a small school that will focus on social justice.

What Kids Can Do. (2003). **Moving to the Head of the Class.** Providence, RI: Author. www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/movingtothehead.pdf.

This document examines the infusion and quality of meaningful student involvement in teaching. What Kids Can Do highlights high-school aged student teachers in Providence, Rhode Island's Summerbridge program, in the civil rights-oriented Algebra Project, and at a summer camp in Warren, North Carolina where students as teachers provide powerful role models for younger kids. They also expound on the possibilities of this approach, stating that these students could serve as a potential teacher corps.

Research and Evaluation

*The studies in this area paint a compelling picture of schools that both want and need to meaningfully involve students. Individually, each work cited examines a critical element of student empowerment and engagement in learning; collectively, these resources present a clear image of what is possible, practical, and necessary in **Meaningful Student Involvement**. Through case studies, reports and research summaries these publications explore issues central to **Meaningful Student Involvement**, including the purpose, practice and efficacy of involving students. Topics include student-adult partnerships, education reform, authenticity and validity, social justice and racial equity. Finally, this section hints at the prospects for future research, and the need for continued focus and cooperation among students, educators and researchers in the future.*

Cervone, B. (2002). **Taking Democracy In Hand: Youth Action For Educational Change in the San Francisco Bay Area.** Providence, RI: What Kids Can Do & The Forum for Youth Investment. www.whatkidscando.org/takingdemocracy.pdf.

This report offers highlights of student-led education reform efforts in California's Bay Area. Cervone details the accomplishments and growing wisdom of ten Bay Area youth organizing groups, exposing deep learning goals: first, how their work builds, step by step in the capital and capacity among participants; second, why student-adult partnerships are important, and last; where dots are being connected (between issues, between strategies, across races) and where they need connection (between student and adult school reformers). The barriers faced by student activists complete the story by offering a well-rounded glimpse into one city's movement for student-led education organizing.

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). "**Authorizing Students' Perspectives: Toward Trust, Dialogue, and Change in Education.**" *Educational Researcher*. www.aera.net/pubs/er/pdf/vol31_04/AERA310402.pdf

Cook-Sather argues for validating to the perspectives of those most directly affected by, but least often consulted about, educational policy and practice: the students. According to the article, advocating for student involvement runs counter to most popular U.S. reform efforts, which have been solely based on adults' ideas about the conceptualization and practice of education. Cook-Sather outlines and critiques a variety of recent attempts to listen to students in popular research projects. She

suggests that all of these attempts continue to unfold within and reinforce adults' frames of reference. Ultimately, the article contextualizes what the author argues are the twin challenges of authorizing student perspectives: a change in mindset and changes in the structures in educational relationships and institutions.

Critchley, S. (2003). "**The Nature and Extent of Student Involvement in Educational Policy-Making in Canadian School Systems.**" *Educational Management & Administration 31* (1) p. 97-106.

This article summarizes the results from a study conducted at school, district and provincial education departments across Canada. Critchley identifies what provisions are 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 Canadian school systems.

Fielding, M. (Ed.) (Summer 2001). **Student Voice.** *Forum 43* (2). www.triangle.co.uk/for/content/pdfs/43/issue43_2.asp

This journal provides the most comprehensive summary of the assumptions, practice, and analysis of student involvement in schools available to date. Several authors from the U.K., the U.S. and Australia offer challenging reflections and suggestions about students' power, engagement and advocacy in school change. Authors include high school students and renowned professors. The topics cover a range of issues central to student involvement, including democratic practices in school, the validity and authenticity of "student voice," and the multiplicity of experiences, ideas and knowledge of students in school. Individual articles challenge educators to change the role of students "from data source to significant voice," as well as pondering how to "learn from voices we don't want to hear."

Groundwater-Smith, S. & Downes, T. (1999). **Students: From Informants to Co-Researchers.** Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference. Melbourne, November. www.aare.edu.au/99pap/gro99031.htm

This paper proposes a new standard of participation for students in education research by critically examining several recent studies. Three levels of traditional research activity that focus on students are identified: knowing about students' perspectives, acting on behalf of students, and working with students. Examples across the spectrum are examined, with special attention paid to identifying the barriers facing increased agency for students. In proposing a forth level – acting with students – Groundwater-Smith and Downes advocate increased authenticity by prescribing methods to validate students, including negotiating both the process of research and application of research outcomes.

Kaba, M. (Dec/Jan 2001). "**They Listen to Me, but They Don't Act on It: Contradictory Consciousness and Student Participation in Decision-Making.**" *High School Journal.* 21-35.

This article describes a research project that explored the effects of the district-level Chicago's Student Local School Council (LSC) program on the students, adults, and schools where students have a voice in school decision-making. Kaba found that while this participation fostered a sense of equality and ownership among LSC student representatives, students are not given a corresponding opportunity to substantively affect policy and other changes in their local schools, especially in comparison to adults. Kaba then proposes that the reason for this ultimately lies in structure of the board. For example, the students are not able to represent themselves through voting, and that the students are overwhelming outnumbered by adults on the board.

Kushman, J. & Shanessey, J. (Eds). (1997). **Look Who's Talking Now: Student Views of Restructuring Schools.** Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory.

This research examines students' perspectives about the learning process, teaching practices, and the school culture and climate. After exploring seven different projects across the United States, Kushman and

Shanessey also give tips on how this can be done in other schools. One chapter, in particular, is specifically devoted to a student-led research project that led to specific school improvements, providing valuable evidence supporting the effectiveness of students as education researchers. The researchers found that this practice encouraged students to examine the depth and purpose of education.

Patmor, G. & McIntyre, J. (May 1999). "**Involving Students in School Decision-Making.**" *NASSP Bulletin 83*(607) 74-78. http://campus.murraystate.edu/academic/faculty/george.patmor/DISSABSTRACT.html

This article inspects the infusion, quality, and evidence of meaningful student involvement in schools across Kentucky. The author presents the outcomes of a statewide survey to students, educators, and parents concerning student participation in teacher hiring, curriculum choices, and more.

Reed, C. (1997). **Student Leadership and Restructuring: A Case Study.** Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services.

This study took place in an urban school where students dialogued with teachers and administrators about school reform. Reed offers insights into this experience by examining the implications of how student involvement can influence key stakeholders. This research examines the roles students had as researchers; who the students were and why they tended to get involved; what was being done to build capacity for student involvement; and how students, teachers and administrators viewed this involvement.

REAL HARD. (2003). **Student Voices Count: A Student-Led Evaluation of High Schools in Oakland.** Oakland, CA.: Kids First. www.kidsfirstoakland.org/kidsfirsreport.pdf

This report was written by Kids First's REAL HARD, which stands for Representing Educated Active Leaders – Having A Righteous Dream. Student researchers surveyed almost 1,000 students at high schools across Oakland to find their perspectives on several topics, including classes, counselors, principals, teaching, student leadership, facilities, student relations, and more. They also conducted student forums to engage a broader group of their peers and then prioritized student

recommendations based on the results of the survey. This document is one of the most comprehensive & authentic response by students to school change available in print today.

Wilson, B. & Dickson Corbett, H. (2001). **Listening to Urban Kids: School Reform and the Teachers They Want**. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

With the premise that, "[Students'] accounts of what they and their teachers do in class should serve as indications of whether the reform has penetrated to the classroom level" (p2), this book offers useful insights into the role of students in education reform. Wilson and Corbett examine the Philadelphia public schools, and students' opinions of education. They immediately acknowledge the current disempowered position of students' input, and challenge it in an entire chapter dedicated to exposing the value of students as constructive critics of education. In a summative statement, the authors validate students' concerns and call for schools to embrace and empower students in school transformation efforts.

Webb, Z. (2002). **National Assessment of Student Involvement in School Policy-Making.** Kentucky Education Department: Lexington, KY. www.soundout.org/webbreport.htm

This unparalleled study explores student involvement in state-level education decision-making across the United States. Webb provides a state-by-state summary students' ability to influence state-level school policy-making and analyzes various practices and outcomes. The outcomes illustrate a growing concern for students' input that exists beyond the current capacity of education agencies to support these voices.

Implementation Tools

None of the following booklets, toolkits or videos offer immediate solutions or miracle cures to the problems plaguing our schools and society. Instead they challenge each individual practitioner to examine their assumptions, explore their experiences and reflect on what is offered here in order to move their school change efforts forward. Ideally, educators will produce ideas and accumulate evidence that substantiates and articulates the links among ***Meaningful Student Involvement****, academic achievement, school climate, and effective leadership.*

Berg, M.J. & Owens, D.C. (2000). **Empowered Voices: A Participatory Action Research Curriculum for Girls.** Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

This toolkit examines gender equity in schools by engaging female students as researchers. It focuses on girls' development, improving and maintaining high self-esteem, strengthening the relationships among female students and between students and women in schools, and building critical thinking and problem solving skills along the way.

California State PTA. (2002). **Student Involvement Handbook.** Los Angeles, CA: Author. www.capta.org/State_PTA/student_involv/students6_98.html.

By thoroughly examining the roles of students, this PTA document offers effective guidance for any school considering enriching student involvement. A range of information includes rationale of why students should be involved, as well as examples of students participation. One notable section covers recruitment and retention of students, as well as another providing anecdotal evidence supporting students' roles.

Fletcher, A., Nishida, N. & Williamson, G. (2001). **Meaningful Student Involvement – An Idea Guide for Schools.** *Olympia*, WA: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. www.k12.wa.us/integratedcurr/yes/pubilcations/studentinvolvement.pdf.

This exploration surveys a variety of activities that form the premise for meaningful student involvement. Fletcher, et al. provide a picture of infusion by outlining several potential roles for students, including steps for

the individual student, classroom teachers, school leaders, and district administration. Includes a variety of websites and publications.

Goldman, G. (1990). **Quality Student Leadership: A Strategy for Transforming Our Schools and Communities through Direct Student Involvement.** Chicago, IL: Quality Improvement Associates, Inc.

This guide details a comprehensive plan to promote infusing student involvement into school decision-making. Goldman outlines a method for student engagement that focusing on skills-based training and systemic participation. Includes worksheets, flowchart, particular activity details, and information that integrates student-adult leadership teams in a continuous quality improvement model.

Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University. (2001). **Youth Engaged in Leadership & Learning (Y.E.L.L.) Curriculum.** Stanford, CA: Author. http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/resources/handbook/index.shtml

The Gardner Center offers a comprehensive manual that can help educators train students to become active contributors in decision-making processes in their school. The lessons introduce students to different research methods, analytical tools and presentation skills. They lessons can be adapted to meet the needs and interests of different students, and can be facilitated by educators in several grade levels.

MacBeath, J., Demetriou, H., Rudduck, J., & Myers, K. (2003). **Consulting Pupils: A Toolkit for Teachers.** Cambridge, U.K.: Pearson Publishing.

This toolkit explores the initial steps of engaging students in meaningful dialogue about school change in several comprehensive sections. MacBeath, et al. offer a clear reasoning for student input, provide ideas for classroom discussion, and examine the process of listening to students from multiple perspectives. They offer a comprehensive set of activities that can challenge even the most seasoned practitioner.

McEwan, B. (2000). **The Art of Classroom Management: Effective Practices for Building Equitable Learning Communities.** New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

In this book, McEwan offers a comprehensive survey of democratic classrooms, encouraging the reader to envision applicable practices in their own setting. Examples throughout the book offer thorough details of putting theory into practice, offering both strategic and analytical footnotes to encourage practical implementation. Highlights include sections on democratic consequences, the nature of and struggle for power between students and teachers, and the issues surrounding highly visible and invisible students.

Pittman, K. & Tolman, J. (2002). **New Directions In School Reform: Youth Focused-Strategies vs. Youth-Centered Reform.** Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment. www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/workingpapers/newdirections.pdf

Pittman and Tolman chart a student-centered path to high school reform in this book by pulling out key themes from what we know about youth development and student engagement, and beginning to translate these themes into the language of schools and school reform. One of the defining themes is that students become central actors in school reform efforts.

Project 540 (2002). **Students Turn for a Change.** Providence, RI: Author. www.project540.org/lead/SFG_fullguide.pdf

This guide describes in detail the process through which students in the Project 540 program dialogue with each other about issues important to them, including schools. It provides a blue-print for students to facilitate the entire student dialogue, including a step-by-step description of student-led, student-focused dialogue, talking points and key questions students can use to guide and encourage conversations, and guidelines and tips for facilitating and brainstorming.

The School Change Collaborative. (2001). **Listening to Student Voices: Self-study Toolkit.** Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices

This toolkit employs a variety of approaches to promoting student involvement in school improvement efforts, including video, dialoguing, surveys and more. It describes four simple approaches to listening to student voices, all of which depend upon strong partnerships between students and adults. The tools offer methods on how to gather "Data in a Day," as well as creating student-led focus groups, and how to analyze surveys with students.

Sydlo, S.J., et al. (2000). **Participatory Action Research Curriculum for Empowering Youth.** Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

By engaging students as partners, this curriculum focuses on equity, partnership, and quality in meaningful student involvement. It promotes learning and change by actively engaging students in discovering and collecting information and taking action on issues that directly affect them and their schools. It includes information on building research relationships, participatory action research (PAR), developing a research strategy, collecting and analyzing data, and more.

Wehmeyer, M & Sands, D. (Eds). (1998). **Making it Happen: Student Involvement In Educational Planning.** Baltimore, MD: Paul H Brookes Pub Co.

Wehmeyer and Sands offer telling accounts and activities that promote student involvement in decision-making in schools. This overview of new information supports the positive effects of student-directed learning on motivation, achievement, self-determination, and educational outcomes. The authors also describe procedures for overcoming barriers and achieving student participation, and offer personal testimony from students who have been actively involved in educational planning that emphasizes the long-term benefits of these efforts.

Theory and Analysis

Meaningful student involvement situates learning within the context of the process of education; that is, planning, research, teaching, evaluating, decision-making and advocacy. It recognizes both the learner and the educator as sources of solutions to the complex problems in schools, and encourages students and teachers to work together to confront the real problems facing our schools. Thus, the theoretical literature surrounding meaningful student involvement seeks to more deeply expose the nature of power in schools, as well as the necessity of democracy in learning. The following works begin to frame this discussion by offering the historical and modern foundations for this movement.

Apple, M.W. & Beane, J.A. (1995). **Democratic Schools.** Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Apple and Beane examine practical applications of democracy in curriculum, teaching, and decision-making in schools. They provide a roadmap for educators who want to face the challenge of raising new "democrats" and stop the cynicism and apathy facing many classrooms. Anecdotes covering problem solving, participation, and consensus are clearly illustrated as everyday practice in diverse education settings, providing a particular type of hope absent from many school change efforts.

Counts, G. (1982). **Dare the School Build a New Social Order?** Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Counts provides a foundation for classroom teachers to become truly progressive educators through a timely critique of racism, rote education and unchecked capitalism in education. His solution-oriented perspective challenges teachers with the role of leading social change, not following popular trends. This definitive vision ultimately charges schools with defining purpose in their practice; rather than chaos, community; rather than anarchy, democracy.

Fletcher, A. (2003). **Meaningful Student Involvement: An Inclusive Strategy for School Change.** Olympia, WA: The Freechild Project & HumanLinks Foundation. www.soundout.org

Provides a broad introduction of meaningful student involvement with a succinct examination of student-inclusive school change. Fletcher explores a variety of models for assessment, including the Ladder of Student Involvement in Schools, and details several examples of student involvement throughout education. Includes a comprehensive resource section.

Freire, P. (1992). **Pedagogy of the Oppressed.** New York: Continuum.

Several of Freire's books should be included in this bibliography, as they provide a vital voice of dissent and critical reflection on education. In this seminal work, Freire explores why the oppressed – those without inherent power in our society - must be taught in a meaningful, empowering way. He examines the role of dialogue in learning, and what the possibilities are for a socially just, relevant and purposeful education. Freire examines traditional education practices, focusing on the contrasts between education practices that treat students as objects rather than subjects. He also explores education as a cultural action that can strengthen or destroy social fabric.

Giroux, H. (2003). **The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear.** New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

In this analysis of modern social constructions affecting young people, Giroux offers a thorough examination of the U.S. education system, proposing that it is being re-tooled as an engine to promote consumerism and individualism at the expense of community and democracy. In several chapters, Giroux explores the ongoing destruction of the federal funding base for education and unmasks an underlying agenda that promotes the corporatization of America's schools. Finally, he speaks directly to student activists, offering a challenge for young people to connect with larger movements for social justice and the fight for a radical, inclusive democracy.

Kohn, A. (1993) **Choices For Children: Why And How To Let Students Decide.** *Phi Delta Kappan* 75(1), 9-20. www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/cfc.htm

By exploring practical situations, historical roots and modern considerations for student involvement, Kohn provides compelling arguments for student involvement. His research illustrates particular techniques to support empowered student decision-making, including social and academic benefits. Five distinct reasons to involving students and an overview of the barriers student involvement faces are detailed.

Kurth-Schai, R. (Winter 1988). **The Roles of Youth in Society: A Reconceptualization.** Educational Forum. 52(2) 113-132.

By broadly re-evaluating the purpose and process through which young people are educated, Kurth-Schai examines the roles of learning and partnership in meaningful student involvement. Her analysis identifies current roles for young people as negative and disempowering. She uses this as the main point to explore new models for students' education. These roles revolve around students as influential, active, and vital members of larger communities where their power extends outward with purpose and relevance for a new generation.

Levin, B. (1999). **Putting Students at the Centre in Education Reform.** Paper submitted to the International Journal of Educational Change. www.msip.ca/5_change/5_reform.html

This paper develops a set of arguments for a sustained and meaningful role for students in defining, shaping, managing and implementing reform, and outlines some ways in which such involvement might occur. Levin argues for both organizational and educational changes, and proposes strategies for increasing the role of students in the school improvement process.

Oldfather, P. (1995). "**Learning from Student Voices.**" *Theory Into Practice 34.* (2).

Offering research-oriented explorations into establishing student-adult dialogues, student exclusion in school change discussions, encouraging dissent as an education method, and understanding student perspectives this journal offers foundational arguments for meaningful student involvement. A diverse group of authors explore a diverse body of

experience and practice, ultimately suggesting the student voice is central to academic success in all schools. The last article offers a frank discussion between students and researchers about making student voices heard in schools.

Shor, I. (1996). **When Students have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

While telling the story of a quarter in a college classroom, Shor provides a motivating picture of what happens when meaningful student involvement is infused in learning. This is the story of one class in which the author tried to fully share with his students control of the curriculum and of the classroom. After twenty years of teaching, he unexpectedly found himself faced with a student uprising that threatened the very possibility of learning. How the author resolves these problems, while remaining true to his commitment to power-sharing and radical pedagogy, is the crux of the book.

Organizations and Websites

Listed here are several different organizations and websites that may be of use to anyone interested in meaningful student involvement and its component parts. Included are education-focused organizations, as well as groups promoting community youth involvement. Readers will also find radio interviews, television shows and other useful media.

Activism 2000 Project
PO Box E, Kensington, MD 20895
Phone: 1-800-KID-POWER
Web: www.youthactivism.com

Offers books, training, and consulting on youth participation as well as free materials and assistance to young people on how to move their ideas into action.

At the Table
Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development
6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 502, Takoma Park, MD 20912
Phone: 301-270-1700
Fax: 301-270-5900
Web: www.atthetable.org

Promotes youth involvement through a youth voice database, resource catalog, handouts and links, discussion boards, a calendar of events and the latest news.

Big Picture Company
275 Westminster St., Suite 500, Providence, Rhode Island 02903
Phone: 401-456-0600
Fax: 401-456-0606
Web: www.bigpicture.org

Works across the United States promoting a student-centered approach to education reform where students are the drivers and evaluators of learning.

Breakthrough Collaborative
40 First Street, Fifth Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105
Phone: 415-442-0600
Fax: 415-442-0609
Web: www.breakthroughcollaborative.org

Hires approximately 1,000 high school-age teachers every year nationwide to teach underserved middle school students academic and social skills.

Center for Youth as Resources
1000 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 1300, Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-261-4131
Web: www.cyar.org

Provides small grants to youth and supports them as they design and implement issue-related projects. Past youth participants help provide training.

Coalition for Essential Schools
1814 Franklin Street, Suite 700, Oakland, CA 94612
Phone: 510-433-1451
Fax: 510-433-1455
Web: www.essentialschools.org

Creates democratic and equitable school policies and practices nationwide. Resources include publications and training for teachers and students.

Consulting Pupils About Teaching and Learning
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Homerton Site, Hills Road, Cambridge, United Kingdom CB2 2BH
Phone: +44-01223-742010
Fax: +44-01223-742013
Web: www.consultingpupils.co.uk

Aims to integrate pupil consultation and participation with teaching and learning, and ensure that practice is grounded in worthwhile principles and practices.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
407 South Dearborn Street, Suite 1500, Chicago, IL 60605
Phone: 312-322-4880
Fax: 312-322-4885
Web: www.crosscity.org

Developed a national program called the Youth Leadership Development Initiative to sustain student activism for school change in local communities.

ERASE - Expose Racism and Advance School Excellence
The Applied Research Center, 3781 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94611
Phone: 510-653-3415
Fax: 510-653-3427
Web: www.arc.org/erase/index.html

A national program that promotes racial justice for all students through trainings, research, media advocacy, local organizing, policy development and publications.

Forum for Youth Investment
The Cady-Lee House, 7064 Eastern Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20012
Phone: 202-207-3333
Fax: 202-207-3329
Web: www.forumforyouthinvestment.org
Web: www.ytyt.org

Provides planning, research, advocacy and policy development across the allied youth fields, including education.

The Freechild Project
PO Box 6185, Olympia, WA 98507
Phone: 360.753.2686
Web: www.freechild.org
Web: www.yp3.org

A youth-driven training ground, think tank, resource agency, and advocacy group offering training, consultation, and a massive resource website.

Funder's Collaborative on Youth Organizing
Jewish Fund for Justice, 260 5th Avenue, Suite 701, New York, NY 10001
Phone: (212) 213-2113
Web: www.fcyo.org

A collective of grantmakers and practitioners dedicated to advancing youth organizing through grant making, outreach and education.

Generation YES - Youth and Educators Succeeding
711 Capitol Way S., Suite 702, Olympia, WA 98501
Phone: 888-941-4369
Fax: 360-528-2350
Web: www.genyes.org

An international program that supports student-centered programs that improve learning through technology by providing support for schools.

Highlander Center
1959 Highlander Way, New Market, TN 37820
Phone: 865-933-3443
Fax: 865-933-3424
Web: www.hrec.org

Gathers grassroots leaders, community organizers and educators of all ages to address the most pressing social problems facing the people of the South.

In the Mix: Student Power
Web: www.pbs.org/inthemix/shows/show_school_reform_yia.html

Chronicles the struggles and accomplishments of student-run organizations who are making school reform happen in their communities.

Manitoba School Improvement Program
Web: www.sunvalley.ca/msip/10_studentvoice/10_voice.html

Students in this program piloted education and research workshops for students, presented research to school boards and hosted a major student conference.

National Youth Leadership Council
1667 Snelling Avenue North, St. Paul, MN 55108
Phone: 651-631-3672
Fax: 651-631-2955
Web: www.nylc.org

Promotes service learning in school reform through training related to youth leadership and service-learning, as well as annual national conference.

New Horizons for Learning
Web: www.newhorizons.org/voices/front_voices.html

Asks how students can share their insights about what works and what doesn't work for them in school and other environments for learning.

Project 540
Providence College, FAC 407, Providence, RI 02918
Phone: 401-865-2787
Web: www.project540.org

Facilitates students nationwide in face-to-face and online dialogues where they explore and make recommendations to transform high schools.

Re-Inventing Schools Coalition
Phone: 907-522-3132
Fax: 907-522-3399
Web: www.reinventingschools.org

Assists districts in building a shared vision between educators, communities, and students. Students are involved in education planning, teaching and evaluation.

Rethinking Schools
1001 E. Keefe Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53212
Phone: 800-669-4192,
Fax: 414-964-7220
Web: www.rethinkingschools.org

Promotes students as essential to building a movement for a better future by advocating reform with a strong emphasis on issues of equity and social justice.

r.u.MAD?
The Education Foundation, 4th Floor, 252 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000, Australia
Email: rumad@educationfoundation.org.au
Web: www.rumad.org.au/

A program that empowers students to make change in their schools working in primary and secondary schools.

Self-Education Foundation
PO Box 30790, Philadelphia, PA 19104
Phone: 215-386-6081
Email: info@selfeducation.org
Web: www.selfeducation.org

A young person-led nonprofit organization committed to supporting individual and community empowerment including student-led education organizing.

Sound Out: Promoting meaningful student involvement in school change
The Freechild Project, PO Box 6185, Olympia, WA 98507
Phone: 360-753-2686
Email: info@soundout.org
Web: www.soundout.org

The online resource center for meaningful student involvement. Includes stories, publications, bibliographies, articles, research, forums, links and a newsletter.

WGBH 89.7 Student Voices 2002
Web: www.eyeoneducation.tv/students/

"Classroom Voices: Teen and Teacher Radio Diaries" explores the first-hand experiences of Boston public school students in the midst of education reform.

What Kids Can Do
PO Box 603252, Providence, RI 02906

Phone: 401-247-7665
Web: www.whatkidscando.org

Documents the value of young people working with teachers and other adults on projects that combine powerful learning with public purpose.

Youth Leadership & Service Team
Superintendent of Public Instruction, PO Box 47200, Olympia, WA 98504
Phone: 360-725-6105
Web: www.k12.wa.us/TitleVpartA/YES/

Provides training, consultation and technical assistance to schools throughout Washington State to promote student engagement throughout education.

Youth Speak Out on Education
Web: www.pbs.org/merrow/listenup/projects/education

Youth producers are creating two television programs answering, "What makes school worth going to?" and "What makes teachers worth paying attention to?"

Youth Action
PO Box 12372, Albuquerque, NM 87195
Phone: 505-873-3345
Fax: 505-873-3245
Web: www.youthaction.net

Nurtures youth organizing by assisting youth and adult allies through trainings, events, and networking to strengthen activism and create change in schools.

Youth Leadership Institute
246 First Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, CA 94105
Phone: 415-836-9160
Fax: 415-836-0071
Web: www.yli.org

Offers the Student Action Fund program, where young people provide grants to student-adult partnerships to positively change schools.

Youth on Board
58 Day Street, 3rd fl., PO Box 440322, Somerville, MA 02144
Phone: 617.623.9900 x1242
Web: www.youthonboard.org

Works extensively with schools and education agencies to promote student involvement and leadership through training and technical assistance.

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.

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.