

# PBL in practice

## Obtaining student voice

*“Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.”*

United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, Article 12

Listening to and learning from students improves relationships, communication and learning. This PBL in practice paper discusses the importance of student voice and suggest strategies to involve students in school implementation of PBL.

Student voice is a term used to cover several different aspects of student involvement, such as listening to students, student agency and student participation.

Student voice is not only about listening to students, but also about responding to what has been said in a respectful and inclusive way. Student agency is when students are engaged in making decisions about their learning. Student participation builds further on student agency by enabling students to share in decision-making and implementation.

### References

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# Ladder of participation

Researchers have suggested that student participation exists on a continuum, or ladder, from most to least adult-directed.



## Ways to obtain student voice

Schools can obtain student voice across many aspects of school functioning. It's important that schools look for ways to authentically include student voice in developing and reviewing school systems and practices, rather than limiting student participation to specific events or activities. The table below suggests some ways that schools can incorporate student perspectives and highlights considerations for schools seeking to support and extend active student participation.

Strategies	Considerations
<p>Use student surveys to get a better understanding of students' perspectives on PBL implementation, school climate, academic engagement, adult-student relationships, and other important components of their school experiences. Survey data can be further refined by having focus groups or follow-up interviews.</p>	<p>It's important that schools share with students how their survey data will be used. Let students know how they can help or be part of the planning process. The <a href="#">Student Perception of Behaviour and Discipline Survey</a> is a free tool used by many schools.</p>
<p>Consider having student members on the PBL team, or having a separate student team that provides input to the school team. It is especially important to hear from those who may feel disconnected from school, as their experiences can provide a critical perspective on how to continuously improve a learning environment that supports <i>all</i> students, not just those who are already thriving.</p>	<p>Work with staff to help them to receive student input in a way that is respectful and encouraging. This may be a challenge for some staff who are used to telling students how to do things and are not used to students expressing opinions that may be at odds with their own.</p>
<p>Encourage students to advocate for themselves and their peers. They may form committees or action groups on issues they feel strongly about. Help students find productive ways to exercise their voice, such as awareness campaigns or petitioning.</p>	<p>Provide students with opportunities to practise leadership skills such as public speaking and leading meetings, or marketing activities to organise and engage their peers.</p>
<p>Involve students in teaching expectations and social-emotional skills. Students may teach their peers or other grade levels. Students can also make short clips or present skits at assemblies.</p>	<p>Tie lesson delivery to the school-wide reinforcement system or consider incorporating into an aligned unit of work.</p>
<p>Look for ways for students to actively participate in their own learning. Seek feedback on lesson structure and activities from students.</p>	<p>Ask students to identify their strengths and where they would like more support. Use strategies such as exit tickets to get student feedback.</p>
<p>Consider changing the traditional format of parent-teacher evenings to allow students to lead the parent-teacher conference. The opportunity to prepare for and conduct their own conferences about academic, social, and emotional progress gives students a sense of ownership of the learning process and develops self-awareness.</p>	<p>Explain the rationale for the changed format to staff, students and families. Provide students with support in selecting what to share and in structuring the conference. Allow time for students to practise and receive feedback beforehand.</p>