
YOUTH VOICE METER

Student voice is a crucial ingredient of effective civic education. One way to identify the strength of student voice in civic education and service-learning is to consider the degree to which each of the following components are present in classroom learning and projects.

Instructions: Rate each of the following ten variables of student voice with 0 to 3 check marks.

___ = Not Present ✓ = Present ✓✓ = Strong ✓✓✓ = Very Strong

1. ___ Students are asked to offer suggestions for topics and activities.
2. ___ Students have significant responsibility for selecting the project.
3. ___ Students are engaged in research on related issues and alternatives and present results to the class and/or other stakeholders.
4. ___ Students and adults develop implementation plans together and jointly identify roles and responsibilities.
5. ___ Students are involved in selecting and developing community partnerships.
6. ___ Students participate in solving problems as they develop in a project.
7. ___ Students collaborate with adults on the assessment design of the project.
8. ___ Students collaborate with advisors to collect and evaluate assessment data.
9. ___ Students collaborate with adults on the design and facilitation of reflection.
10. ___ Students are responsible for a public presentation of the project, such as a press release, a Board presentation or school/community event.

Total Checks _____

A Place for Us

Service Learning/Civic Education Project

A Place for Us begins when the teacher, Miss Perez, in a second grade classroom asks, "Is there anything about our school and school grounds that you think might be improved?" Hands shoot up from all corners of the room. "I think the playground is dirty!" "I am scared to play kick ball any more because of all the stuff on the cement." "I wish the school could be a little pretty." "My friends at church tease me that our school is designed for pigs – you can tell because of all the mud." Miss Perez asks two of her students to write all of the comments on the blackboard. She then passes out five dots to each of the 31 students in her class and says, "For homework today, I want you to take some time to walk around the school and think about how you feel about it. Tomorrow, I will begin class by asking you to put your dots next to the statement that you think are most important – that talk about something that you would like to try to change."

Most students place their dots on statements that talk about the mud that covers the playground. Miss Perez asks, "Do you think there is anything we can do to get rid of the mud?" The students respond, "What do you think, Miss Perez?" She replies, "I don't know, but I would like to work with you to find out. How do you think we should begin?" Miss Perez then says, "Let's remember that this semester we are emphasizing group work skills, science, math and, of course, reading and writing. Our project should help us learn in all these areas. Let's begin by thinking about possible topics and tasks for different groups."

Without any prompting, the students come up with a slew of suggestions that they gradually narrow down to five:

- Science Committee A – What causes the mud to mess up the playground so badly?
- Science Committee B – How can we get rid of the mud?
- Outside Speaker Invitations – Principal, custodian, nursery owner
- Parent Communications Committee- Letter to parents to ask for help
- Art/Math Committee – create an accurate picture of "new playground"

Miss Perez is amazed at what happens. By the advent of spring, her students, led by the two Science Committees, put their understanding of erosion to work by planting the hillside above the playground with native plant seeds. Students, parents and the custodian volunteer to dig a run-off trench suggested by the nursery owner to help contain the hillside. The Art/Math Committee creates a beautiful playground mural that is drawn to scale and display photographs in every classroom titled, "A Place for Us."

Best of all, student reflective journals are a joy.

"My seeds sprouted! I love school now."

"I think science is both fun and important."

"I told my parents about erosion."