**Positive Behaviour
for Learning** (PBL)

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.

Student-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Students develop and share their ideas with staff. Both students and staff come to a consensus on which ideas to implement. **Examples:** *Students form their own PBL team to meet twice a term to discuss ways to increase student engagement school-wide. They share ideas with the core PBL team and collectively decide what to implement school-wide.* *Students provide feedback on school policies and work with staff to make revisions.*
Student-initiated, student-led decision	Students develop and share their ideas with staff. Students make the decisions on what to share. **Examples:** *Students come up with a survey to find out student perceptions on bullying at school. Based on the responses, student leaders develop some suggestions for actions.* *Students introduce a system to acknowledge peers who demonstrate the school values.*
Adult-initiated, shared decisions with students	Staff develop and share ideas with students. Both students and staff come to a consensus on which ideas to implement. **Examples:** *After staff review the range of consequences for not meeting expected behaviours, they get student input and then agree upon a final list of possible consequences.* *Staff suggest ways for students to be involved in lesson delivery to the Student Council. Wider student input is sought and feedback is used to come up with two or three options for student lesson delivery.*
Adult-initiated, adult-led decision	Staff develop and share ideas with students. Both students and staff come to a consensus on which ideas to implement but student feedback may not always be used. **Examples:** *Students are surveyed to get their input on different types of rewards to include in the school-wide reinforcement menu.* *Student council is asked for ideas on what to do about emergent issues (e.g., litter) around the school.*
Adult-initiated, adult-led decision	Staff develop and share ideas. Students are assigned the task of putting the ideas into place. **Examples:** *Invite students to design posters of the school-wide expectations.* *Ask students to present a skit for the fortnightly focus on parade.*

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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
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.	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 Student Perception of Behaviour and Discipline Survey is a free tool used by many schools.
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 *all* students, not just those who are already thriving.	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.
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.	Provide students with opportunities to practise leadership skills such as public speaking and leading meetings, or marketing activities to organise and engage their peers.
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.	Tie lesson delivery to the school-wide reinforcement system or consider incorporating into an aligned unit of work.
Look for ways for students to actively participate in their own learning. Seek feedback on lesson structure and activities from students.	Ask students to identify their strengths and where they would like more support. Use strategies such as exit tickets to get student feedback.
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.	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.

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