

In *Connect 223* I started sharing some thoughts about the language we use in this work: our 'Terms and Intentions'. Since then, I've been talking with students, teachers and others about what student voice, agency and participation means - and about why and how we work in this area - and these ideas continue to develop. There was a diagram in *Connect 225* that connected these ideas for me, and this article expands further on that.

I'd be very interested in your comments or questions about this analysis. Is it useful in clarifying what we do? Does it help to identify both practices and also research questions?

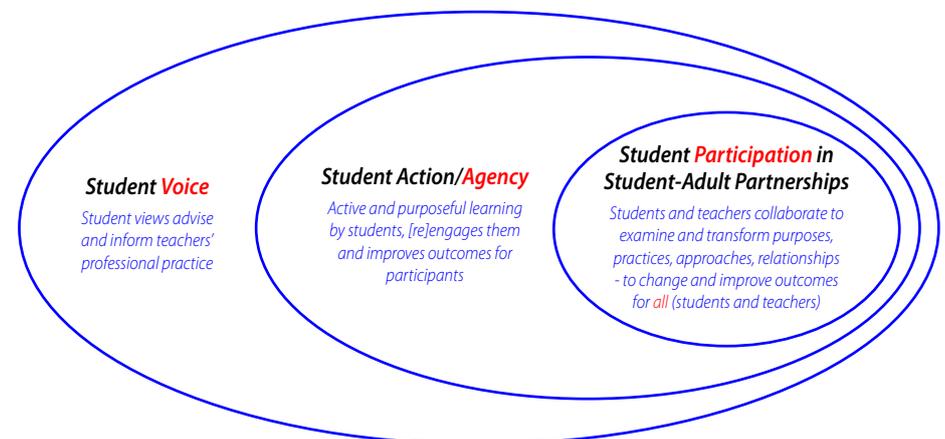
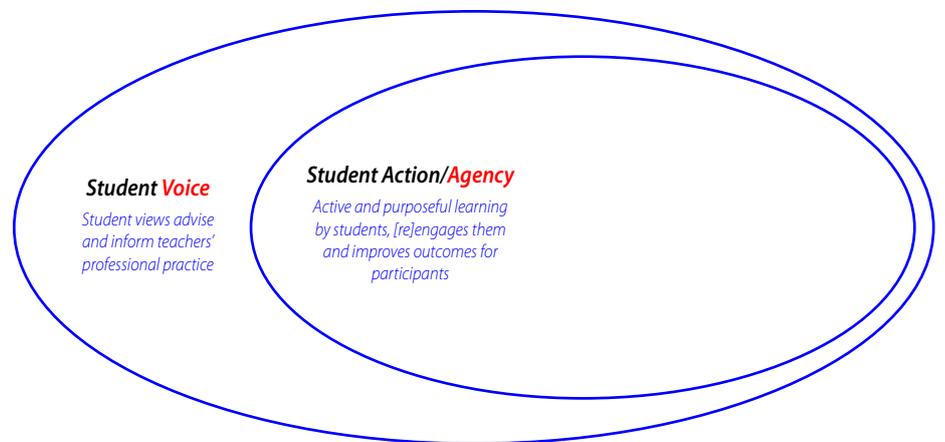
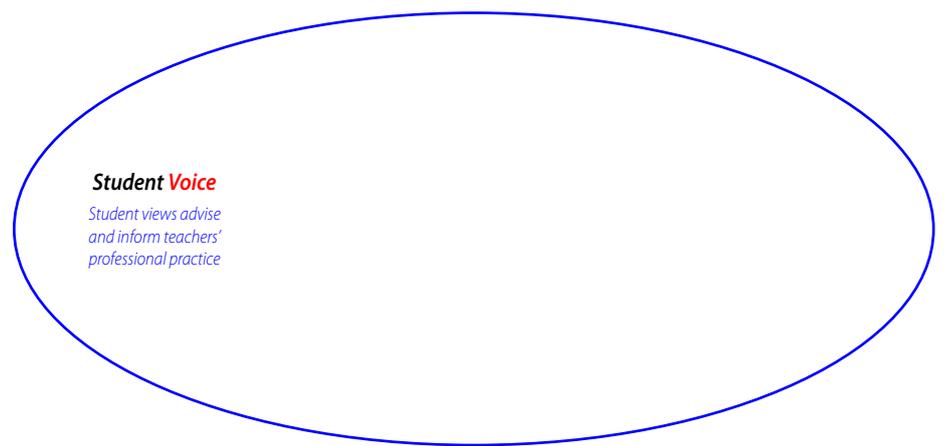
Student voice, agency, participation

The terms 'student voice', 'student agency' and 'student participation' are all sometimes used interchangeably. All these terms can be 'stretched' to cover many meanings, but there is value in being more precise about the intentions of their usage.

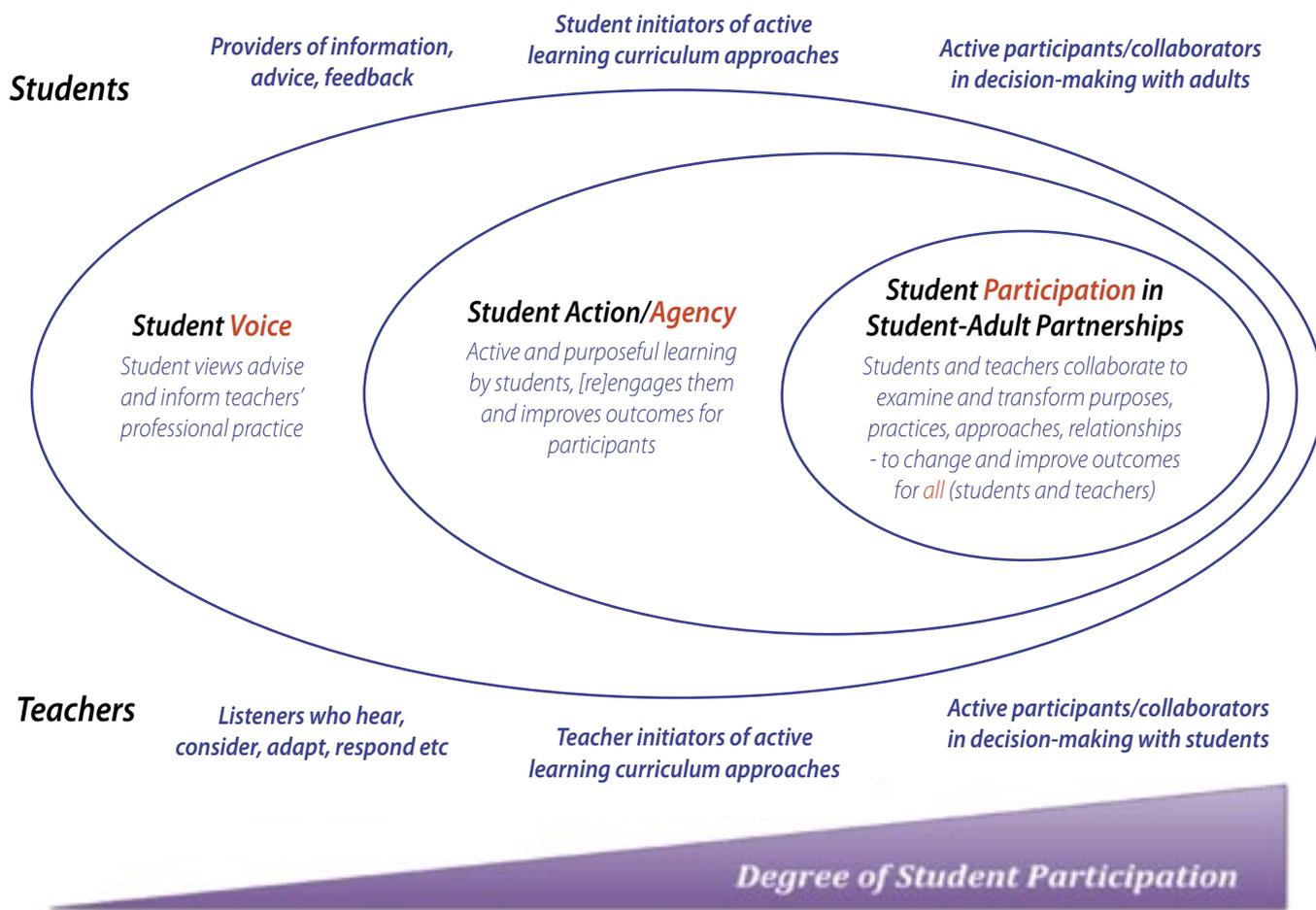
The idea of 'student voice' – students 'having a say' ie expressing views, providing information, advice or feedback – underlies all these concepts. **Student voice** intends to change and improve teachers' professional practice (diagram 1).

But student voice can mean more than this: it also means students making decisions, and taking action (by themselves and with other students) to make changes in their education. It also means students being actively engaged in learning that builds their capacity to take action. This builds on the basic idea of student voice and is also called **student agency**. Student voice/agency intends to change and improve students' roles, ownership and engagement and hence improve student outcomes (diagram 2).

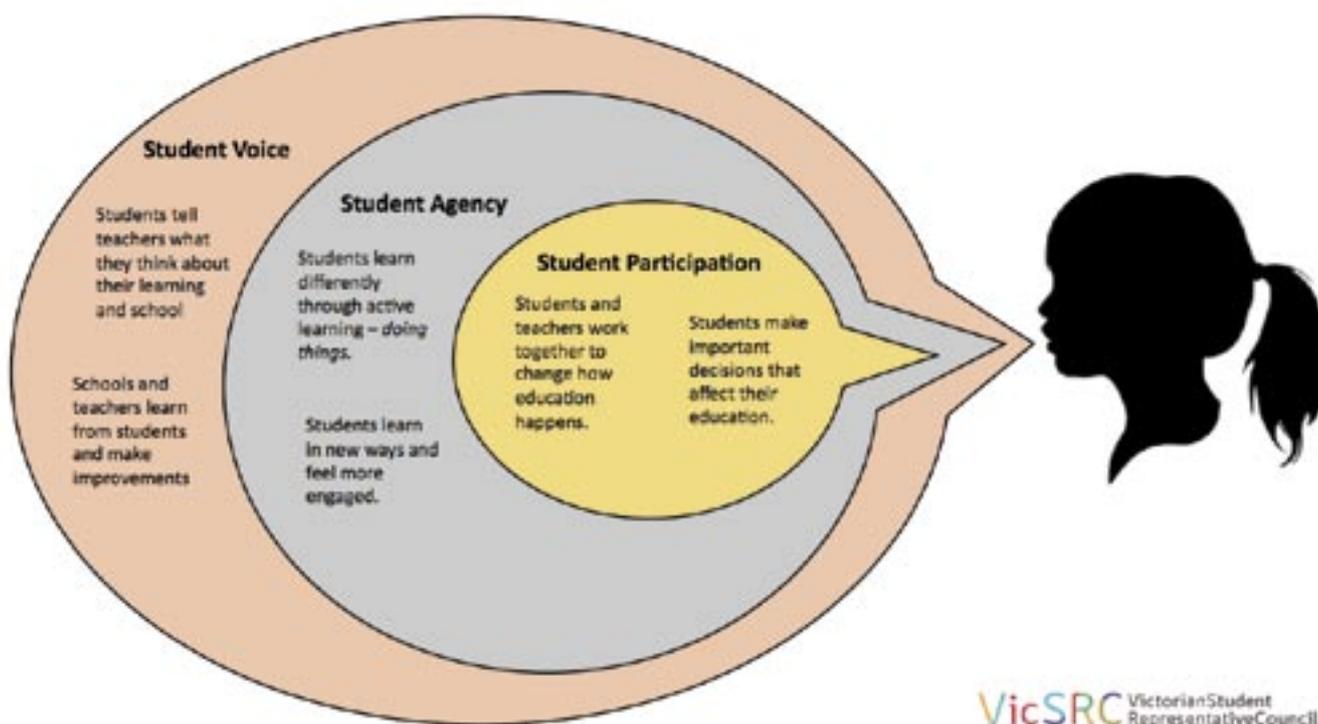
And beyond that, student voice also involves students working with others (teachers, principals, parents etc) to improve the ways in which schools and education happens – how schools operate, how we work with each other, and how we learn together – so that we change and improve outcomes for all (students and teachers). This builds on both student voice and agency and is also called **student participation** (diagram 3).



Roles for students and teachers are then defined through this model:



These basic ideas can be portrayed in various ways. For example, the VicSRC recently adapted this representation for their work with primary schools:



VicSRC Victorian Student Representative Council
From a powerpoint by Melanie Gaylard

These **core ideas** can be represented in the following chart:

	Voice	Agency	Participation
Intention:	Change/improve teacher practice.	Change/improve individual student roles, ownership and engagement.	Change/improve structures, purposes, practices and processes of learning.
Descriptor:	<p>Student information and voices influence and improve teacher practices.</p> <p>Such approaches largely maintain current practices, processes, and relationships (ie they preserve current power relationships and still involve doing education to students) ... but they do it better.</p>	<p>Students are active and engaged learners, making decisions about their own learning, and learning in ways that provide them with real roles of value ie they do purposeful, productive things and learn through reflection on these.</p> <p>Such approaches basically maintain many current power relationships and purposes of learning, but change some practices and approaches (so that education is done by students).</p>	<p>Students and others work collaboratively to examine and change how schools operate, how we work with each other, and how we learn together – to change and improve outcomes for all (students and teachers).</p> <p>Such approaches structurally change many power relationships between students and teachers – regarding both as co-learners (doing education with students and teachers in collaboration).</p>
Other terms used for this:	<p>Students as data sources.</p> <p>Students as information providers.</p>	<p>Students as active learners.</p> <p>Authentic learning.</p> <p>Student leadership.</p>	<p>Students as partners.</p>
Long-term outcomes:	Better learning outcomes for all students .	Better outcomes for participating students .	Better outcomes for schools – and all students and all teachers.
Specific shorter-term outcomes:	<p>Increased teacher confidence, and awareness of and response to student needs.</p> <p>Increased teacher knowledge and skills, which are applied to benefit the learning of all students.</p>	<p>Directly improved student outcomes including engagement, confidence, commitment, self-esteem/regard etc.</p> <p>Increased student skills including communication, team-work, leadership etc.</p>	<p>Increased collaboration between students and teachers/others.</p> <p>Increased mutual regard/respect.</p> <p>Willingness to collaboratively address uncertainty, and unknown and risky issues.</p> <p>Better structures and approaches that meet the educational needs of all – students and teachers.</p>

These core ideas about *student voice, agency and participation* then have implications for the **roles of students, teachers and others:**

	Voice	Agency	Participation
Student roles:	<p>Providers of information, advice, feedback.</p> <p>Collectors, collators and contributors of student voice/s.</p>	<p>Student initiators of and active participants in active learning curriculum approaches.</p>	<p>Active participants/collaborators in decision-making with adults.</p> <p>Active listeners, collectors and contributors of student views and voice/s.</p>
Teacher/adult roles:	<p>Listeners who hear, consider, adapt, respond etc.</p> <p>Intellectual leaders; primarily content/skills focused.</p>	<p>Teacher initiators of active learning curriculum approaches.</p> <p>Advisers, proposers and intellectual leaders; primarily process focused.</p>	<p>Active participants/collaborators in decision-making with students.</p> <p>Co-leaders, focused both on content and process.</p> <p>Challenging respectfully, particularly around mutuality, respect and inclusion.</p>

We can map these intentions onto how they appear at various levels
(individual classrooms, whole schools and systems):

	Voice	Agency	Participation
Classrooms:	<p>Student results, behaviours, views, voices etc explicitly influence teacher practice including teacher lesson planning (students as data sources in the classroom).</p> <p>Students provide formal feedback to their teacher, either initiated by the teacher or initiated by students.</p>	<p>Students learn in engaging and practical ways that provide valuable/ useful things for them to do as part of their learning.</p> <p>Students reflect on and evaluate their learning.</p> <p>Students make decisions (with teachers and other students) about their own learning.</p>	<p>Students and teachers work together to investigate classroom issues.</p> <p>Students and teachers negotiate and co-construct learning approaches.</p> <p>Students and teachers together address issues such as class rules, relationships and structures, and make decisions on these.</p>
Schools:	<p>Examples of student work, student attitude surveys etc are shared across the school and considered seriously.</p> <p>Student views (through student attitude surveys, student presentations and other means) inform whole school discussions and practices.</p>	<p>Student groups and teams are involved in active learning approaches eg Students as Researchers, Student Action Teams.</p> <p>Student teams research and act on whole school issues (eg Students as Researchers).</p> <p>A student representative organisation exists and is effective in leading action.</p>	<p>Students lead whole school discussions around matters of learning and teaching, relationships etc (eg <i>Teach the Teacher</i>).</p> <p>Students are represented on school decision-making bodies (and other committees).</p> <p>Students are members of staff selection/appointment panels.</p>
Systems:	<p>Student information and views are conveyed to and heard at system level (Department, Minister etc).</p> <p>Students advocate directly around issues of concern at a system level.</p> <p>Student concerns and views help shape system policy and practices.</p>	<p>Students are members of investigative and action initiatives across schools (eg within clusters, local networks, state level).</p> <p>Students attend state-level workshops and conferences for discussions, debate and decision-making – as well as skill development.</p> <p>Students have a representative organisation at a system level.</p>	<p>Students take part in system-level investigations with adults about important education issues.</p> <p>Students are represented in system-level forums and on decision-making bodies.</p>

Priority Directions for initiatives and work:

	Voice	Agency	Participation
Critical challenges:	<p>Increasing/amplifying student capacity to express and present views and ideas.</p> <p>Increasing capacity of teachers to listen and respond.</p> <p>Building inclusivity of voices.</p>	<p>Integrating such approaches within externally controlled curriculum (for both students and teachers).</p> <p>Identifying relevant good practice initiatives.</p> <p>Building inclusivity of action (ie not 'just' the 'good'/'bad' students etc).</p>	<p>Increasing student representativeness.</p> <p>Building mutual respect for contributions (taking all seriously).</p> <p>Sharing and addressing challenges especially in contentious areas.</p> <p>Building inclusivity.</p>
Possible program priority directions:	<p>Building understanding of all parties about student voice, agency and participation.</p> <p>Workshops for students to build communication and teamwork skills and confidence.</p> <p>Workshops for teachers to build listening skills.</p> <p>Development of resources: eg quizzes, pro-formas, challenges etc.</p>	<p>Building the presence and role of student groups in schools.</p> <p>Development and provision of SRC/JSC models and constitutions for schools.</p> <p>Provision of case studies and stories about student-led and participatory curriculum approaches at classroom and school levels.</p> <p>Set up networks of students and teachers to work and learn together.</p>	<p>Provision of case studies about various 'students as partners' approaches eg co-planning of curriculum, students and school governance, student-staff research teams, joint reflection on and investigation of student attitude surveys.</p> <p>Development and dissemination of guidelines for good practice in shared governance.</p>

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