

The Meaningful Student Involvement Handbook - A Review of the 'Student Voice Revolution'

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When I first read the *Student Voice Revolution*, I knew immediately that I wanted to share this book with the wider students-as-partners and student engagement community. Why? Because I felt Adam Fletcher's handbook added, in meaningful ways, to an already rich array of theoretical arguments and practical guides produced by scholars and practitioners in Canada (Fullan, 1991; Levin, 1994, 2000), the United Kingdom (Fielding, 2004; Rudduck and Demetriou, 2003), and the United States (Cook-Sather, 2009; Mitra, 2006, 2007) – scholarship focused on recognizing and valuing student voice. In building on his extensive experience in schools, youth action, and more recently, higher education, Fletcher draws on existing literature to offer structures and approaches for supporting meaningful student involvement that can illuminate students-as-partners efforts. While there is a substantial body of work on student voice across all education levels (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018; Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Lansdown, 2011), I would argue this book offers an up-to-date and comprehensive analysis of key issues crucial for successful partnership work in higher education.

Published in 2017, Fletcher has reiterated from the outset the clarion call of countless student voice scholars – to ensure students have access to the opportunities, circumstances, and environments which enable dialogue, they must be able to speak about their educational experiences and be heard in the process. Having acknowledged this general scholarly consensus, he then moved to broadly define student voice as an “expression of any student in any forum about learning, schools, and education” (Fletcher, 2017, 58). Using this definition, Fletcher throughout the handbook has then provided an array of “how to’s” and key principles in chaptered sections focused on integrating student voice into educational settings for the purposes of engaging in transformative learning, building community, breaking down accessibility barriers, and nurturing good citizenship.

I appreciated in particular how Fletcher offered practical steps about what we can do ourselves to enable students to express their views. By focusing on students and staff, and their need to simply speak about education first, might more complex practices be developed? This is particularly important in our global higher education environment where the focus on student voice has been supercharged, particularly in the UK, where our National Student Satisfaction Survey is placing pressure on universities to engage in student voice practices (Morris, 2018). Indeed, if students do not have the ability and space to speak about their education, how can we expect students to equally work with us as partners?

The publication importantly speaks about creating the environments and circumstances where students can freely speak about their experiences of education. Instead of focusing on the mechanics of students-as-partners projects, quality assurance student opportunities, or student councils, Fletcher provides critical but empowering examples of more process-orientated issues and their possible solutions. For instance, for those engaging in partnership work, there are challenges arising in relation to whole class or whole school engagement, which Fletcher explores through

endorsing holistic conversations and reflecting on the ecology of larger bodies of students and staff (Fletcher, 2017, 219). For others engaging students on representative bodies, difficulties (both moral and ethical) abound insofar as the 'tokenistic student' and notions of power are concerned. Fletcher challenges these circumstances which occur frequently across our institutions by advocating the setting of student-staff equity targets in our meeting-based student engagement activities (Fletcher, 2017, 94). Finally, for faculty and instructors in teaching positions aspiring to ignite a student voice ethos in the classroom as the norm, Fletcher highlights a student voice ethos (similar to a partnership ethos) aspiring towards meaningful involvement and students as partners across education (Fletcher, 2017, 201).

The most impactful element of this work is Fletcher's aspiration for the genuine student involvement in voice or partnership activities, which he defines as "Meaningful Student Involvement". Meaningful Student Involvement is a concept where all partners see the relevance and power of their part in the conversation or project, where all are not only valued and given a seat at the proverbial table but are also an integral part of the work. Fletcher's (2017, 29) pathways for Meaningful Student Voice are summarised below:

1. Acknowledgement;
2. Commitment;
3. Promotion and visibility;
4. Empowerment (students and staff);
5. Expanding conversations.

Fletcher gives this concept a lot of air time in the book, drawing back to the concept continuously by highlighting the issues of the tokenised student on a committee, the select student at an open day, and the selectively listened to student in class. These perspectives are outlined through numerous powerful visuals which would be useful for teams and whole universities to use to reflect on their placing of students. I recommend this text to any students-as-partners innovator, to reflect on your practice using Fletcher's models, and to ensure that we focus on students' voice to further enhance education now and in the future. Fletcher's holistic work offers something for all, but importantly by offering case studies and reflections across all education levels, our sometimes silos of practice can be expanded through reading about student voice across different educational levels to our own.

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