INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

In Empower: What Happens When Students Own Their Learning, A.J. Juliani perhaps said it best: “Authority. Many different words are used to describe authority and sometimes the same words are used to describe different concepts. That said, by looking across researchers, practitioners, and other thought leaders, common elements arise that begin to suggest a consensus.” From these sources, the quote seems to settle on a concept of “student agency” that involves four distinct factors. The first three are temporally linked covering future, present, and past:

➢ Setting advantageous goals
➢ Initiating action toward those goals
➢ Promoting a growth mindset through revision and reflection

The fourth component is what Freire (1970/2008) referred to as “metacognitive practices.”

WHAT IS STUDENT AGENCY?

First, I should say, there is no broad consensus on the definition of student agency. Many different words are used to describe authority and sometimes the same words are used to describe different concepts. The first three are temporally linked covering future, present, and past:

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➢ Initiating action toward those goals
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Four components of student agency

HAMDONF & FREIRE: LEARNED HELPLESSNESS AND THE NEUROSCIENCE OF LEARNING

To make inclusion function as it should, teachers must be willing to empower their students and each other in the classroom. Without this, students may not be able to achieve their goals. To achieve this, both teachers and students must work as a team. To accomplish this, teachers must have a humanistic, whole person view of our students. The consensus of so many of our developments in pedagogy is that supporting student agency is vital to our students achieving high expectations and then helping students meet them. One of the foundations of my inquiry is an expansive definition of inclusion that considers all students traditionally excluded from consideration in educational design, not only the “SPED” kids. To this end, I prefer to center on Paulo Freire’s definition of inclusion: “Inclusive teaching is an explicit intellectual and affective inclusion of all students into our fields and disciplines, through course content, assessment, and/or pedagogy.”

INTEGRATING APPROACHES

Building student agency in the classroom, the teacher requires the teacher to relinquish control but not consideration or structure. It requires the teacher to become more than just a teacher but also a mentor, role model, and a humanistic, whole person view of our students. The consensus of so many of our developments in pedagogy is that supporting student agency is vital to our students achieving high expectations and then helping students meet them. One of the foundations of my inquiry is an expansive definition of inclusion that considers all students traditionally excluded from consideration in educational design, not only the “SPED” kids. To this end, I prefer to center on Paulo Freire’s definition of inclusion: “Inclusive teaching is an explicit intellectual and affective inclusion of all students into our fields and disciplines, through course content, assessment, and/or pedagogy.”

Building student agency in the classroom, the teacher requires the teacher to relinquish control but not consideration or structure. It requires the teacher to center on growing agency in students, with a humanistic, whole person view of our students. The consensus of so many of our developments in pedagogy is that supporting student agency is vital to our students achieving high expectations and then helping students meet them. One of the foundations of my inquiry is an expansive definition of inclusion that considers all students traditionally excluded from consideration in educational design, not only the “SPED” kids. To this end, I prefer to center on Paulo Freire’s definition of inclusion: “Inclusive teaching is an explicit intellectual and affective inclusion of all students into our fields and disciplines, through course content, assessment, and/or pedagogy.”

TOOLS

➢ Portfolios
➢ Self-Assessment: “As a component of a variety of assessment practices, self-assessment is an essential evaluation and inclusion in choices about their own learning.” By strengthening students’ sense of identity and belonging through self-assessment, it is possible to counter the impact of assessment practices that might normally serve to exclude and marginalise them” (Bisoutou & Merits, 2013, p. 854).
➢ Goals: Students identify and set their own goals, measuring their own progress toward achieving them.
➢ Choice Menus: Students must be able to independently shape: the nature of time, allows students to make the most important connections and decisions themselves. Students must be able to independently shape: the nature of time, allows students to make the most important connections and decisions themselves.

FOUR COMPONENTS OF STUDENT AGENCY

ACTION PLAN & SUPPORTING THEORIES

➢ Relinquish control: give students as much choice as possible in their learning, from materials to assessment.
➢ Plan with UDL in mind, ensuring all materials are accessible and all goals are achievable.
➢ Choose culturally relevant topics and materials. Share diverse perspectives and validate diverse ways of learning.
➢ Solicit regular feedback from students about their learning.
➢ Use trauma-informed practices.

REFERENCES

Garcia, Mariott, McDermott, and O’Byrne (2021) acknowledge teacher concerns that student-centered learning “conflicts with the hierarchical nature of schooling, where teachers are routinely evaluated on how well they get their students to comply. It involves risk, mistakes, and failure. But it also creates a classroom environment that sustains the curiosity and engagement of both the students and the teacher.” As John Spencer has pointed out, “we need to move from entertaining our students ("The kids love this activity") to engaging" them by connecting ideas that matter and then go further to empowering them to seek out the learning for themselves instead of waiting for it to be "delivered" (Terborg, 2017). This is how we start countering learned helplessness. This is how we create lifelong learners.

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For more information about the implementation of special education, please visit our district, Campus of the Humanities. For more information about our school, please visit our website: campus.edu.