

# RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

## WORKSHOP 3 FACILITATOR GUIDE

### *Workshop 3: Meaningful Student Participation*

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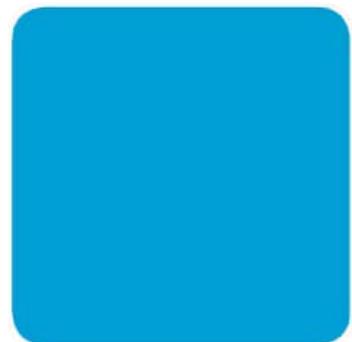
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**Every child.**

**Every opportunity.**

**No exceptions.**

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## WORKSHOP 3 FACILITATOR GUIDE

*Workshop 3:  
Meaningful Student  
Participation*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the network of local and national organizations across Canada that participates in the **Friends of Rights Respecting Schools (FRRS)**. This collaborative forum is responsible for the leadership and implementation of the Rights Respecting Schools initiative in Canadian schools. Read more about the members of FRRS at [rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://rightsrespectingschools.ca).

The Rights Respecting Schools initiative was originally initiated and developed by UNICEF Canada for Canadian schools. Thank you to all the staff at this organization that worked tirelessly to envision, develop, implement, test and monitor, and champion this innovative educational approach.

Special recognition goes to the UK Committee for UNICEF for its support and guidance on the development of Rights Respecting Schools in Canada. A number of the good practices highlighted in these guides come from the extensive experience of the schools in the United Kingdom participating in the Rights Respecting Schools Award.

A very special thanks to the staff and students at Cape Horn Elementary School, Coquitlam British Columbia for starting on this journey back in 2008, for being Canada's first Rights Respecting School, and for providing valuable input and feedback. Special recognition goes to the Principal of Cape Horn Elementary School, Bill McGovern and the teachers there, who have poured so much passion, time and energy into this initiative. Thank you to Coquitlam District School Board staff Sharon LeClair and Maureen Dockendorff for their support of Cape Horn Elementary and the Rights Respecting Schools initiative. And lastly, thank you to Kelly Quinlan, Global Classroom Manager for British Columbia, who worked with the students and staff at Cape Horn to pilot the first Canadian Rights Respecting School.

UNICEF Canada would like to extend special gratitude to all of the schools who have participated in the pilot phase of this initiative. The contributions and feedback of many students, staff and parents have informed the development of the resources and tools for this initiative.

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## ABOUT RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

Rights Respecting Schools is a whole school initiative that uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a basis for building an inclusive and respectful school culture. In these schools children's rights are adopted as guiding principles that inform a common set of values shared by all members of the school community. These common values create a sense of community and become the lens through which students, teachers, school administrators and parents make decisions, choose behaviour, and participate at their school.

Research on more than 1,600 UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA) schools in the United Kingdom demonstrates that participating students have improved self-esteem and are more engaged in their learning. Students have been shown to become engaged by learning how to voice their opinions, participating in decision-making, resolving conflict peacefully, and understanding global social justice issues. They are also found to have a positive attitude towards diversity, which has led to a reduction in prejudice and bullying.

The Rights Respecting Schools initiative was developed by UNICEF Canada for Canadian schools and is implemented by a network of local and national organizations, known as the *Friends of Rights Respecting Schools*.

For more information about the Rights Respecting Schools initiative, visit [rightsrespectingschools.ca](https://rightsrespectingschools.ca).

## ABOUT THE FRIENDS OF RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

The Rights Respecting Schools initiative in Canada is facilitated by a network of local and national organizations with mandates and expertise in social justice and human rights, children's rights education, student-centred learning and global citizenship. The collaborative forum for RRS-trained facilitators from these organizations is the *Friends of Rights Respecting Schools (FRRS)*. The Friends of Rights Respecting Schools are responsible for the leadership and implementation of the Rights Respecting Schools initiative in their jurisdiction (regional or provincial/territorial).

To find out more about the Friends of Rights Respecting Schools, visit [rightsrespectingschools.ca](https://rightsrespectingschools.ca).



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# WORKSHOP 3: MEANINGFUL STUDENT PARTICIPATION

## OVERVIEW

### Aim

This workshop explores **Meaningful Student Participation**. Participants examine their beliefs and assumptions regarding the participation of children. Discussion helps participants understand what makes student participation meaningful and groups review good practice examples for encouraging student participation and brainstorm potential ideas to achieve the RRS Building Block 3 Benchmarks.

### Guiding Questions

- What is meaningful student participation?
- What makes student participation *meaningful*?
- What are the benefits and challenges of encouraging students to participate more?
- How can we create more opportunity for meaningful student participation?

### Activities / Timing

#### Explore

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| • Activity 1: Five-Minute Reflection                    | 10 minutes |
| • Activity 2: Defining Meaningful Student Participation | 20 minutes |

#### Respond

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| • Activity 3: Debate It! A Little or A Lot?                 | 25 minutes |
| • Activity 4: Tools to Gauge and Plan Student Participation | 30 minutes |

#### Take Action

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| • Activity 5: Good Practices for Meaningful Student Participation | 35 minutes |
|---|------------|

#### Total

**2 hours**

## CHECKLIST TO PREPARE FOR WORKSHOP 3

✓	ACTIVITY	RESOURCES
○	<p>1. <b>Send an email to your contact at the school with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ The <b>Overview of Workshop 3</b> and a request to forward it to all workshop participants</li> <li>❑ A reminder to have workshop participants bring their binder to hold handouts</li> <li>❑ A request to arrange for a flipchart and markers, multimedia projector, screen, and a laptop.</li> </ul>	<p>All resources are available for download from: <a href="http://rightsrespectingschools.ca">rightsrespectingschools.ca</a></p> <p><b>Overview of Workshop 3</b> (saved in Step 4 folder of Dropbox under <i>Workshop 3</i>)</p>
○	<p>2. <b>Prepare the following handouts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Handout 1:</b> Five-Minute Reflection</li> <li>❑ <b>Handout 2:</b> Elements of Meaningful Student Participation</li> <li>❑ <b>Handout 3:</b> Student Participation: A Little or A Lot?</li> <li>❑ <b>Handout 4:</b> Levels of Child Participation</li> <li>❑ <b>Handout 6:</b> Pathways to Participation</li> <li>❑ <b>Handout 7:</b> Characteristics of Meaningful Child Participation</li> <li>❑ <b>Building Block Chart:</b> Student Participation (filled in)</li> <li>❑ <b>Take-Away Resource 1:</b> 50 Ways Adults Can Support Student Voice</li> </ul>	<p><b>Handout 1</b> Page 8 (one per participant)</p> <p><b>Handout 2</b> Page 10 (one per participant)</p> <p><b>Handout 3</b> Page 12 (one per participant)</p> <p><b>Handout 4</b> Page 16 (one per participant)</p> <p><b>Handout 6</b> Page 18 (one per participant)</p> <p><b>Handout 7</b> Page 19 (one per participant)</p> <p><b>Building Block Chart: Student Participation</b> (filled in) – (5 copies)</p> <p><b>Take-Away Resource</b> Pages 22-24 (one per participant)</p>
○	<p>3. <b>Prepare the following resources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Download the <b>RRS Workshop 3 Presentation</b></li> <li>❑ <b>Handout 5:</b> Student Participation Scenarios</li> <li>❑ <b>Good Practices for Meaningful Student Participation Guide</b></li> <li>❑ <b>Take-Away Resource:</b> Student Councils in Elementary Schools</li> <li>❑ <b>Take-Away Resource:</b> Student Participation Assessments</li> </ul>	<p><b>RRS Workshop 2 Presentation</b></p> <p><b>Handout 5</b> Page 17 - one set of cards per group of three to four participants</p> <p><b>Good Practices for Meaningful Student Participation</b></p> <p><b>Take-Away Resource 2</b></p> <p><b>Take-Away Resource 3</b></p>

## EXPLORE

10 minutes

### ACTIVITY 1: FIVE-MINUTE REFLECTION

#### Objectives

- To reflect on current practices to encourage student participation.

#### Materials

- Projector, screen, computer
- **RRS Workshop 3 Presentation** – Microsoft PowerPoint® (download at [rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://rightsrespectingschools.ca))
- One copy of the handout **Five-Minute Reflection – Workshop 3** (page 8) per participant.

#### Activity

1. **Before participants arrive:** Cue the *RRS Workshop 3 Presentation* to **slide 3** (this slide has instructions regarding the *Five-Minute Reflection*). Place copies of the handout *Five-Minute Reflection – Workshop 3* on the tables.
2. Begin the workshop when all participants have arrived and had a chance to complete their reflection. Welcome the participants and explain that Workshop 3 is on the topic of **Meaningful Student Participation** which is RRS Building Block 2. Use **slide 4** to review the workshop agenda.
3. Using the discussion questions below, encourage participants to share their thoughts on the reflection.

#### Discussion

- What were some of your overall thoughts as you completed the reflection?
- Which statements did you find challenging to answer? Why?
- Which statements best reflect your approach to providing opportunities for child participation?
- Which statements reflect areas where you felt you could improve your approach?
- Any other thoughts?

**FIVE-MINUTE REFLECTION – WORKSHOP 3**

Read the statements below and circle the number on the opinion scale that best represents how you feel about the statement. Consider both your relationships with children at school and outside of school (i.e. your own children, family members, friends, etc.).

OPINION SCALE					
Statements	Never my approach	Seldom my approach	Sometimes my approach	Often my approach	Always my approach
	1	2	3	4	5
I listen to the suggestions of children.	1	2	3	4	5
I take the ideas of children seriously.	1	2	3	4	5
I accept and nurture meaningful child participation.	1	2	3	4	5
I encourage children to come up with their own ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not interrupt people of any age.	1	2	3	4	5
I encourage children to participate because I believe it offers valuable learning opportunities for them.	1	2	3	4	5
I encourage children to participate because I value their opinion.	1	2	3	4	5
I incorporate and account for the opinions of children in my decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
I include children in important decision-making processes.	1	2	3	4	5
I provide support to child-led initiatives.	1	2	3	4	5
I collaborate with children.	1	2	3	4	5

## ACTIVITY 2: DEFINING MEANINGFUL STUDENT PARTICIPATION

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS:  
WORKSHOP 3

20 minutes

### Objectives

- To understand the concept of meaningful student participation
- To examine what makes student participation meaningful.

### Materials

- Projector, screen, computer
- **RRS Workshop 3 Presentation** – Microsoft PowerPoint® (download at [rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://rightsrespectingschools.ca))
- One copy of the handout **Elements of Meaningful Student Participation** (page 10) per participant.

### Activity

1. Cue the **RRS Workshop Series Presentation** to **slide 5** (which displays the words ‘meaningful student participation’). Ask participants to brainstorm aloud phrases and words that come to mind when they read this term. Help initiate discussion by asking:
  - What do you think we mean by meaningful student participation?
  - What makes the participation meaningful?

2. Share **slide 6** which offers a definition from the organization SoundOut. Emphasize the term ‘partner’ in the definition. Point out SoundOut as a helpful organization that focuses on promoting student voice in schools. The organization has a number of resources for schools on their Web site at: [soundout.org](http://soundout.org).

***Meaningful Student Participation** is engaging students as partners in educational planning, research, teaching, evaluating, decision-making, advocacy and more.*

- SoundOut: Promoting Student Voice in School

3. To build upon the discussion, distribute one copy of the handout **Elements of Meaningful Student Participation** to each participant. Review the handout aloud together. Emphasize the examples of meaningful student participation. Point out that the main article from the Convention regarding child participation is Article 12. Use the handout to discuss what this article is saying about child participation and what it is not saying.
4. Ask participants to work with a partner to identify the other articles of the Convention that are relevant to meaningful student participation at a school. Have participants refer to their copy of the Convention (stored in their binder). When participants are finished, have them share their ideas and then show **slides 7 - 8** to summarize the articles from the Convention that pertain to meaningful student participation.
5. Examine how the Rights Respecting Schools initiative recommends that schools create opportunities for meaningful student participation by reviewing the benchmarks of RRS Building Block 2: Student Participation. Show **slides 9 - 13**.
6. Encourage participants to share questions or comments.

## ELEMENTS OF MEANINGFUL STUDENT PARTICIPATION

'Meaningful student participation' occurs when students are engaged as partners in educational planning, research, teaching, evaluating, decision-making, advocacy, etc.

*Simply labelling something as "meaningful" does not make it so.*

### When is student participation meaningful?

- When students and adults are partners and collaborators.
- When all students, including socially excluded children, children with 'challenging' behaviour and children who have been discriminated against have equal space to be heard.
- When students feel confident that their views will be heard, validated and (if appropriate) acted upon.
- When students are partners in deciding how they are heard.
- When the participatory process accounts for the best interests and personal development of the child.
- When students have the training and authority to initiate and create real solutions to challenges.
- When schools, including educators and administrators, are accountable to the direct consumers of education – the students themselves.

### When is student participation not meaningful?

- When students are regarded as passive recipients in schools, or as empty vessels to be filled with teachers' knowledge.
- When the contributions of students are minimized or 'tokenized' by adults; when students are asked to 'rubber stamp' ideas already developed by adults; or when students are invited to sit on committees without real power or responsibility.
- When student perspectives, experiences or knowledge are filtered through adult interpretations, or when students are limited in how they can express their opinions (by adult-imposed structures and systems).
- When students are given problems to solve without adult support or adequate training; or when students are trained in leadership skills without opportunities to take on real leadership roles in their school.

Source: This handout has been adapted with permission from: Fletcher, A. *Meaningful Student Involvement: Guide to Students as Partners in School Change*, SoundOut.org (2005).

### A Child's Right to Participate

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to participate as full members of society. This includes the right to voice their opinions, participate in decision-making and influence outcomes. The Convention articulates every child's right to participate in a number of articles either explicitly or implicitly. Article 12 explicitly states this right as:

***States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.***

#### What Article 12 Says

It states that all children:

- Are capable of expressing a view
- Have the right to express their views freely
- Have the right to be heard in all matters affecting them
- Have the right to have their views taken seriously
- Have views that, when considered, should take into account their age and maturity.

#### What Article 12 Does Not Say

It does not:

- Give children autonomy
- Give children the right to make decisions regardless of their implications either for themselves or others
- Give children the right to disrespect or ignore the rights of their parents and family.

Source: Lansdown, G., *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making*, UNICEF (2001). Available at: [unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight6.pdf](http://unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight6.pdf).

## ACTIVITY 3: DEBATE IT - A LITTLE OR A LOT?

### Objectives

- To explore the benefits of meaningful student participation
- To examine ways to overcome barriers to meaningful student participation.

25 minutes

Optional Activity

### Materials

- Projector, screen, computer
- **RRS Workshop 3 Presentation** – Microsoft PowerPoint® (download at [rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://rightsrespectingschools.ca))
- One copy of **Student Participation: A Little or A Lot?** (page 12) per participant
- Refer to **Debate It – Sample Response Key** (page 13).

### Activity

1. Divide the participants into two groups (or more, depending on size). Ask each group to respond to the following question, and assign each group a particular point of view towards arguing for either more, or less student participation schools.

*To what extent should students have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes concerning both curricular programming (formal, informal, extra) and administrative programming (budget allocations, assessment and evaluation, staff meetings, etc.) in schools?*

2. Assign one group the role of brainstorming the reasons why opportunities for meaningful student participation should be created to a significant extent. Assign the other group the role of brainstorming the reasons why opportunities for meaningful student participation should be minimal and limited. Ask groups to record their ideas on the handout **Student Participation: A Little or A Lot?**
3. Once the participants have discussed their ideas and made notes detailing their primary arguments, facilitate a deliberative discussion by inviting them to make their arguments (one at a time) and to respond to the arguments made by the other group. Chart the responses (see **Debate It – Sample Response Key**). *Please note: if you have a large number of participants, you may wish to divide them into multiple deliberative discussion pairs and ask one person per pair to facilitate the discussion and chart the responses.*
4. Debrief the discussion using the questions below.

### Discussion

- What assumptions underlie the arguments for more or less meaningful student participation in schools? (*Examples include childhood as innocence; teachers as 'all-knowers'; children as agents, 'knowers', and contributors; children's opinions as deserving of respect, teachers' loss of control etc.*)
- Can anyone share any experiences in which children had the opportunity for meaningful participation? What factors do you think contributed to enabling those opportunities for children in that case? What challenges, if any, were confronted?
- What strategies would help you mitigate some of the barriers to creating meaningful student participation in schools? (*Look to the arguments against more student participation for examples of specific barriers*)

Source: This activity has been adapted from the activity 'Meaningful Student Participation' in *Children's Rights in Education: Applying a Rights-Based Approach to Education – A Resource Guide and Activity Toolkit*, UNICEF Canada, 2012.

## STUDENT PARTICIPATION: A LITTLE OR A LOT?

Use this chart to record arguments for and against increased student participation in schools.

Arguments for Limited Student Participation	Arguments for Significant Student Participation

**DEBATE IT – SAMPLE RESPONSE KEY**

Supplement the debate ‘*Student Participation: A little or a lot?*’ with these arguments.

**Arguments for Limited Student Participation**

- Children lack competence and will make decisions for the wrong reasons and take advantage of the opportunity to participate (e.g. arguing for more opportunity for play, for less importance placed on marks, etc.).
- Potential exists to create environments of disrespect towards adults – the power differential should be maintained or classroom management will be impossible.
- Teachers’ professional integrity and own educational experience will be compromised – they know better than students.
- Respecting children’s rights to meaningful participation will create a burden for children and will compromise their childhood. Children should not have to think about making decisions at such a young age.
- Children must learn to take responsibility gradually before they can begin to have a say in matters that affect them.

**Arguments for Significant Student Participation**

- Children are individuals who have opinions, values, needs, beliefs, and interests, and these can and should be accounted for. Traditionally, when children’s interests and views are accounted for by adults, they are too often assumed to be for children by adults rather than articulated by children to adults. Instead, opportunities should be created for children to express their opinions, values, needs, beliefs, and interests, and to engage in a discussion about these with adults.
- The right of participation is tied to the ‘evolving capacity of the child’, which requires guidance by caregivers, parents, (and teachers). Meaningful participation is not assigning ‘free rein’ to children, but involves including and accounting for children’s perspectives and opinions in decision-making.
- From their unique vantage point, children are capable of identifying creative solutions and ideas which may not otherwise be considered by adults.
- Children’s views and opinions can be given varying weight in accordance with their age and maturity, as well as the particular circumstance or context at hand. Meaningful student participation need not be regarded in an absolute manner in the sense that it is ‘all or nothing.’
- Freedom of expression does not mean condoning disrespect toward peers, parents, teachers, or other adults.
- Meaningful student participation has the potential for children to learn to respect the rights of others, and to learn what it means to be accountable in decision-making to a community that extends beyond self-interest. In this way, such opportunities have the potential to strengthen students’ understanding of and commitment to democracy and community.
- Meaningful student participation also has the potential to increase students’ interest in schooling (curricular and informal curricular components), as well strengthen students’ sense of self-efficacy.
- Increasing meaningful opportunities for students to participate at school addresses provincial and territorial curricular and policy and Ministry initiatives (e.g. *Student Voice – Speak Up* in Ontario).

## ACTIVITY 4: TOOLS TO GAUGE AND PLAN STUDENT PARTICIPATION

30 minutes

### Objectives

- To examine opportunities for meaningful student participation
- To explore tools for understanding the various levels of participation.

### Materials

- Projector, screen, computer
- **RRS Workshop 3 Presentation** – Microsoft PowerPoint® (download at [rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://rightsrespectingschools.ca))
- One copy of the handout **Levels of Child Participation** (page 16) per participant
- One set of **Student Participation Scenarios** (page 17) per group of three to four participants
- One copy of **Pathways to Participation** (page 18) per participant
- One copy of **Characteristics of Meaningful Child Participation** (page 19) per participant.

### Activity

1. This activity gives participants an opportunity to think about examples of student participation and the varying degrees to which they can be meaningful and effective. Participants will use three tools – Roger Hart's *Ladder of Participation*, Harry Shier's *Pathways to Participation* and *Characteristics of Meaningful Child Participation* to examine ways to create meaningful opportunities for children to participate. *Note that the models refer to 'child participation' and this term can be interchangeable for the purposes of these workshops with 'student participation'.*
2. Organize the participants into small groups of three to four. Ask the groups to discuss examples of meaningful student participation from their school while you hand out the materials for the activity.
3. Hand out one set of **Student Participation Scenarios**, one copy of **Levels of Child Participation** and one copy of **Pathways to Participation** to each group. Have groups write down one of their school's examples on the blank scenario card.
4. Show **slide 15**. Explain that this Ladder of Participation is designed to serve as a beginning typology for thinking about children's participation. This ladder was developed by Roger Hart and explains a model of participation through 8 levels, starting from manipulation and non-participation (non-effective participation) and moving up towards equal participation of adults and children (effective participation). This is one of the first models to analyze the levels and quality of children's participation.

Then discuss the concept of 'evolving capacities of children'. Explain that it is recognized that the level of child participation depends largely on the capacity of the children involved – which is related to the development of the child. Involving children in meaningful participation is often about structuring choices that are within the capacity of a child to make the right decision. It is a balance between providing for the rights of children to participate and ensuring that decisions are made that are in the best interest of the child.

5. Explain that Roger Hart's Levels of Participation are outlined in the handout **Levels of Child Participation**. Point out that 'child participation' and 'student participation' can be interchangeable.

*Activity continued on next page*

## ACTIVITY 4: TOOLS TO GAUGE AND PLAN STUDENT PARTICIPATION (CONTINUED)

### Activity (continued)

12. Ask groups/pairs to read over the scenarios and categorize each one on the **Levels of Child Participation**, then categorize their own school's example.
13. Next have each group examine Harry Shier's *Pathways to Participation* and the *Characteristics of Meaningful Child Participation*. Have them choose one scenario and discuss how they could increase the level of meaningful student participation in that example by using information and ideas they glean from these two tools.
14. Bring the groups back together and facilitate a discussion using the questions below.

### Discussion

- What issues or discussion points arose as you categorized the examples?
- How do you feel about the *Levels of Child Participation*?
- What issues arise for a school wanting to create opportunities at the higher levels?
- How might schools overcome such challenges?
- What resources and opportunities exist in your school to help increase meaningful student participation?

## LEVELS OF CHILD PARTICIPATION

There are many different types of participation. The levels of child participation<sup>1</sup> (below) become increasingly meaningful and genuine as you move from level one up to eight. The first three levels cannot be considered participatory. They are common misunderstandings or misinterpretations of what 'participation' is about. Each of the subsequent five levels is appropriate for children based on the activity being engaged in and on the degree to which their participatory and decision-making skills have evolved.

### 8 CHILD-INITIATED, SHARED DECISIONS WITH ADULTS

- Children initiate projects themselves, while the decision-making is shared with adults. Children have the power to make positive changes based upon their own views and ideas, while drawing upon the expertise and assistance of adults. Adults do not impose their views or try to direct the project, rather they listen, observe and act as sounding boards for the ideas and plans of young people.

### 7 CHILD-INITIATED AND DIRECTED

- Children initiate and direct the project themselves, with adults playing only a supportive role. Adults provide children with the tools, resources and information they need to bring the views and ideas into fruition, but the decision-making happens solely among the children.

### 6 ADULT-INITIATED, SHARED DECISIONS WITH CHILDREN

- Adults initiate actions but share decision-making powers with children. While the initial idea might come from adults, children are involved with the planning, design and implementation of a particular project.

### 5 CONSULTED AND INFORMED

- Children give advice on projects that are run by adults. Children are not involved in the decision-making, but are asked to share ideas that will inform the decisions of adults. Children need to be informed about how their advice will be used and made aware of the outcomes of decisions made by adults.

### 4 ASSIGNED BUT INFORMED

- Children are assigned a specific role in a project by adults. Children understand the intentions of the project, and who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why. Children are given a meaningful role, for which they volunteer only after they have a clear understanding of the objectives.

### 3 TOKENISM (INEFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION)

- Children are asked to speak or participate in a project run by adults without fully understanding the issues, the rationale behind the project or what their contribution adds to the project. They appear to be given a voice, but in reality they have few choices for how to participate. For example, children might be asked to sit on a panel with no explanation as to how they were selected and with little time to prepare.

### 2 DECORATION (INEFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION)

- Children are used to bolster a cause led by adults by dressing, acting or performing in a certain way. They do not contribute to the organizing or planning of the event, rather their participation is used mainly to elicit an emotional response from specific stakeholders or audiences (for example wearing adult-designed t-shirts for a photo-shoot).

### 1 MANIPULATION (INEFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION)

- Adults use children to promote a cause and pretend that the cause is inspired or supported by children, while they have no understanding of the cause. If children have no understanding of the issues or how their actions can contribute, their participation can be viewed as manipulation.

<sup>1</sup> The Levels of Child Participation were adapted from Roger A Hart, *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* (Florence: UNICEF, 1992).

## STUDENT PARTICIPATION SCENARIOS

**Facilitator Instructions:** Copy and cut out one set of these scenario cards for each small group of three to four participants. Note: These scenarios are fictional.

### Reviewing the School Code of Conduct

The staff at Percy Street School decided to undertake a review of key school policies. For the review of the School Code of Conduct, interested parents attended a Town Hall meeting to discuss and review the current policy and give ideas for going forward. Classes were invited to hold a democratic election in order to choose one person from each class to participate in student discussions of school rules and behaviour expectations. The elected students became a part of a working group of staff and students with the purpose of collecting feedback on the current School Code of Conduct and visioning what it could look like going forward. Student representatives were encouraged to seek out further ideas from their classmates and report back to the working group. The working group drafted the new School Code of Conduct and shared it with the rest of the school for feedback before finalizing it.

### International Education Campaign

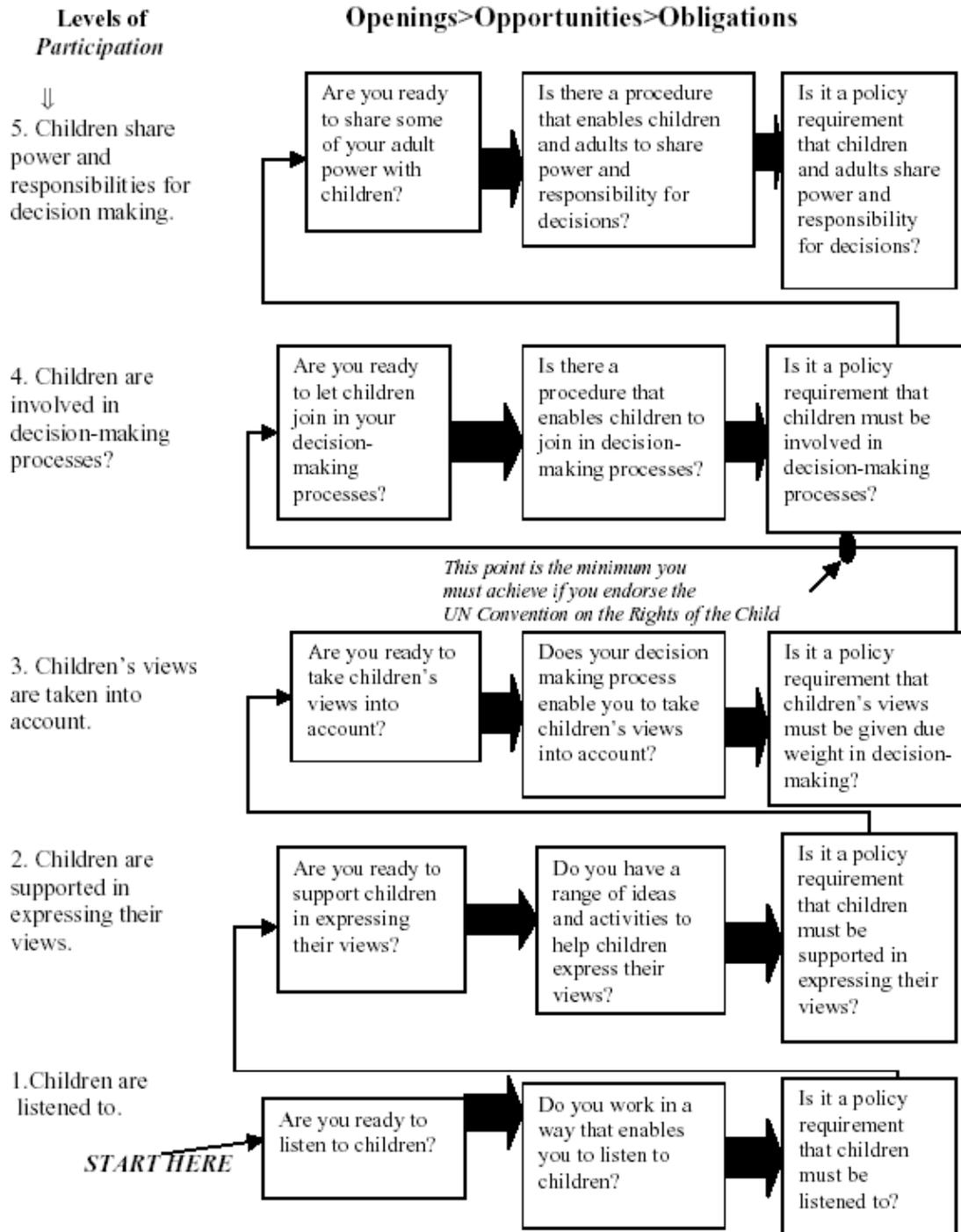
A passionate parent at Parkdale Elementary School brought the issue of increasing access to primary school for children around the world to a parent council meeting. He asked that classes participate in an international advocacy campaign to ask Ministers of Education in countries around the world to give more priority to primary education for *all* children. As a result teachers were asked to have their students create digital postcards and send them electronically to education ministers in selected countries around the world. Teachers delivered a short explanation of the advocacy campaign and talked about the importance for all children to have access to primary education. The students completed their postcard as a classroom activity and emailed it to the advocacy organization. At the end of the campaign the students learned how many postcards were sent.

### Vermicomposter Campaign

After learning about composting and soil in their Grade 3 science class, two students became interested in vermi-composting. They built a vermicomposter for a demonstration to their class and then the class expressed their desire to use it at their school. Their teacher encouraged their idea and suggested they work with the Environment Club to explore how they could start composting lunch foods at the school. The two students took the idea to the Environment Club and the initiative grew from there. With support from the staff advisor of the Environment Club, the students met with custodial and administrative staff to understand the issues with bringing in composting. They created a group of interested staff and students who would care for the worms and for the composter, who would deal with any issues that arose, and they designed an education presentation to teach the students at the school to use the composter.

### Example from Your School

## PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION



Source: This diagram is from: Shier, H. *Pathways to Participation: Openings, opportunities, and obligations – a new model for enhancing children's participation in decision-making, in line with article 12.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. *Children & Society*, 15(2), 107 – 117.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF MEANINGFUL CHILD PARTICIPATION

Use the following checklist when planning and supporting meaningful opportunities for children to participate and take action.

### The Project



- Issue is of real relevance to children \_\_\_\_\_
- Issue/focus was chosen by children or they were consulted in the process \_\_\_\_\_
- Linked to children's direct day-to-day experience \_\_\_\_\_
- Adequate time and resources made available \_\_\_\_\_
- Realistic expectations of children \_\_\_\_\_
- Clear goals and targets agreed with children \_\_\_\_\_
- Addresses the promotion or protection of children's rights \_\_\_\_\_

### Values

- Honesty from adults about the project and the process \_\_\_\_\_
- Inclusive – equal opportunity for participation by all groups of interested children \_\_\_\_\_
- Equal respect for children of all ages, abilities, ethnicity, social backgrounds \_\_\_\_\_
- Information is shared with the children to enable them to make real choices \_\_\_\_\_
- Children's views are taken seriously \_\_\_\_\_
- Voluntary nature of children's involvement \_\_\_\_\_
- Decision-making is shared \_\_\_\_\_

### Methodology

- Clarity of purpose \_\_\_\_\_
- Child-friendly meeting places, language and structures \_\_\_\_\_
- Involvement of children from the earliest possible stages \_\_\_\_\_
- Training provided to help children acquire necessary skills \_\_\_\_\_
- Methods of involvement developed in collaboration with children \_\_\_\_\_
- Adult support provided where needed \_\_\_\_\_
- Strategies developed for sustainability \_\_\_\_\_

Source: Lansdown, G., *Characteristics of Effective and Genuine Participation*, Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making, UNICEF (2001). Available at: [unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight6.pdf](http://unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight6.pdf)

## ACTIVITY 5: GOOD PRACTICES FOR MEANINGFUL STUDENT PARTICIPATION

**35 minutes**

### Objectives

- To examine good practice ideas for meeting the RRS Building Block 2 Benchmarks.

### Materials

- Projector, screen, computer, chart paper, markers
- RRS Workshop 3 Presentation** – Microsoft PowerPoint® (download at [rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://rightsrespectingschools.ca))
- Prepare copies of the **Building Block Chart: Student Participation** that was filled in during the **Meeting to Review the Results of the Initial Rights Assessment** (see pages 17-18 in the Facilitator Guide for that meeting) – 5 copies (one per Benchmark group).
- Prepare copies of the good practices by Benchmark in the **Good Practices for Creating Meaningful Student Participation** (download at [rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://rightsrespectingschools.ca))
- Prepare one copy each of the **Take-Away Resources: Student Councils in Elementary Schools** and **Student Participation Assessments** (download at [rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://rightsrespectingschools.ca)).

### Activity

- Show **slide 16** to explain that:  
*In Workshop 2 we examined the results of the Initial Rights Assessment. Today we will remind ourselves what that assessment showed we were already doing well under Building Block 2: Student Participation.*  
  
*This last activity is going to give us an opportunity to look more closely at each Building Block 2 Benchmark and some good practice ideas for meeting them. We will work in small groups to determine our next steps under each benchmark and continue the development of ideas for our RRS Action Plan.*  
  
*After we finish the Workshop Series, the Children’s Rights Team will finesse the ideas we develop today and put them into the RRS Action Plan Template.*  
  
*When that plan is complete and has been shared with our school community we will have a roadmap to guide us towards becoming a Rights Respecting School. Each year this roadmap will look different as we focus our efforts on different aspects of the initiative.*
- Organize the participants into five small groups/pairs. Assign each group one of the five Student Participation Benchmarks. Distribute chart paper, markers, one copy of the **Building Block Chart: Student Participation**, and one copy of the pages from the **Good Practices for Creating Meaningful Student Participation** guide (and accompanying resources) that are relevant for each group’s assigned Benchmark.
- Show **slide 17**. Have the participants create a 3-column chart on their chart paper with the column headings: Strategy; Resources; Timeline. They should write the Benchmark number at the top of the page. (These are the three columns that the CRT will need to fill in on the RRS Action Plan.)

**Benchmark 9: The school has an active student council that is democratically elected.**

Strategy	Resources	Timeline
Activities the school will undertake.	People resource, budget and materials needed to undertake activities.	Timing of year, duration of time needed to accomplish the activities.

## ACTIVITY 7: GOOD PRACTICES FOR MEANINGFUL STUDENT PARTICIPATION (CONTINUED)

### Activity (continued)

4. Explain the resources that each group has been given:
  - The results on the ***Building Block Chart: Student Participation*** show them where their school is currently at and any ideas that the Children's Rights Team has had about where to head.
  - The ***Good Practices for Creating Meaningful Student Participation*** will provide inspiration as they brainstorm.
5. Then give each group 15 minutes to explore the good practice ideas and fill in their chart with strategies to meet their assigned Benchmark.
6. After 15 minutes, have groups stand up and rotate to a different table. Then give them 7 minutes to add to the previous group's ideas.
7. Then after 7 minutes, have groups leave their tables and move about the room however they wish, to see what other groups had developed. Encourage them to add ideas to the charts as they move about.
8. The charts are collected and given to the Children's Rights Team to use when they develop the RRS Action Plan.

### FINAL WRAP UP

- Use **slides 18-21** of the ***RRS Workshop 3 Presentation*** to discuss the take-away resources.
- Distribute one copy of the take-away resource ***50 Ways Adults Can Support Student Voice*** to each participant. Challenge participants to commit to try at least one strategy before Workshop 4.
- Pass around the two printed copies of the take-away resources: ***Student Councils in Elementary Schools*** and ***Student Participation Assessments*** for participants to flip through. Explain that they can download and print their own copy from [rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://rightsrespectingschools.ca).
- Ensure all participants have your contact information on **slide 22** of the presentation.
- Make sure you have a couple of minutes at the end for questions or comments.
- Explain that there will be an evaluation of the effectiveness and usefulness of the RRS Workshop Series at the end of Workshop 5.

## 50 WAYS ADULTS CAN SUPPORT STUDENT VOICE

By Adam Fletcher for SoundOut ([soundout.org](http://soundout.org))

The following are everyday activities that adults can do to support, empower, and involve students throughout the education system.

1. **Have a real conversation** with a student. Ask a student what they want to do and find out how you can help make that happen.
2. **Actively support student-led action** however possible, including working with students out-of-school to accomplish their goals in education.
3. **Start a resource library** at your school that will inspire students to make change. Include books, websites, and organizations working on democracy, social change, school improvement, and youth power.
4. **Use active learning methods** to teach students about education, including service learning and constructivism. Build on what they already know.
5. **Develop a student-adult partnership** program in your school where students and educators can actually discuss school together.
6. **Create a student action center** in your school for students to become involved in changing their school and communities.
7. **Use participatory action research** in your classroom for students to take action in your school.
8. **Be an advocate for students** at school meetings. Make sure students are at the table whenever your school is making choices about students.
9. **Create classroom lesson plans** that actively engage students in critical thinking about education and action that changes schools.
10. **Make students concerns visible** in your school by posting them in your classroom and sharing them at meetings where adults are.
11. **Sponsor a letter with students** to the administration about student issues.
12. **Respect students** as you do adults. Don't expect more from students than you do adults and don't interpret for students what they can say for themselves.
13. **Co-design a lesson plan** with students about education reform and student involvement.
14. **Listen specifically to students** whose voices are seldom heard in schools, including students who are minority, low-income, have low grades, or don't interact with their peers.
15. **Host an activity** for students and educators to encourage student-adult partnerships.
16. **Engage students as classroom consultants**, interns, apprentices, and activities staff.
17. **Be consistent and clear** about your expectations of students in your classroom.

**50 WAYS ADULTS CAN SUPPORT STUDENT VOICE (CONT'D)**

18. Team up with students to **have a town meeting** or school forum for everyone at your school.
19. Identify and **network with students** in your school who are concerned about their school.
20. **Connect with other adult allies** who want to involve students meaningfully, both in your school and others, and around the community.
21. **Include students in hiring** adults at your school, including staff, teachers, and administrators.
22. **Arrange resources for students** who would not otherwise be able to participate in school activities, including transportation, permission, and childcare.
23. **Support political candidates** for local, provincial, and federal office who make listening and working with young people a priority.
24. **Arrange for a radio station** to sponsor a call-in show led by students that allows them to talk about their concerns about school.
25. **Arrange a meeting with the principal** for students to highlight the concerns and recommendations they have for school.
26. **Create a school-wide vision** for student involvement and voice that includes adults and students.
27. **Serve on an advisory board** for a student-led effort.
28. **Refuse to attend meetings** where students are not invited or where you cannot bring students with you.
29. **Be a real, active, and engaged friend to students.**
30. **Discourage unfair opportunities** for students based on academic performance, attendance, race, gender, etc.
31. **Create student-led experiences** in your classroom and throughout your school.
32. **Make your classroom a comfortable, safe, and affirming place** so students can “hang-out.”
33. **Help students create a newsletter**, or work with your school newspaper, to share students' concerns about their school and education.
34. **Help students create a listing** of all opportunities for their involvement in your school and community.
35. **Call for your school** to have regular student evaluations of themselves, teachers, administrators, and classes that influence performance evaluations, contracts, and hiring.
36. **Ask a student for help.** If they know about computers, ask them to assist you. If they understand diversity, ask them to teach you.

**50 WAYS ADULTS CAN SUPPORT STUDENT VOICE (CONT'D)**

37. **Sponsor a support group for students** who face particular difficulties such as parents' divorce, violence, etc.
38. **Raise funds for a student-led organization** focusing on school issues.
39. **Actively support youth-led organizations** in your community, and encourage them to address education reform.
40. **Join (or form) with students a community task force** to address youth issues and coordinate responses in schools.
41. **Prepare students for multiple roles in your school**, including learner, teacher, and leader.
42. **Ask students' advice** on school issues you are wrestling with.
43. **Be an advocate for student involvement** and student/adult partnerships throughout the education system.
44. **Start an adult support group** to share ideas, concerns, and ways to listen better to students.
45. **Recognize student involvement.** Don't assume that just because someone is a student that they enjoy school. Help them appreciate it by giving class credit or through other meaningful recognition.
46. **Include students on committees** in professional education organizations.
47. **Hold students accountable** for their mistakes and challenges. Be honest and forthright with young people, and support their efforts to improve.
48. **Treat students as individuals.** One student cannot represent all students, and must learn how to represent themselves. Teach them.
49. **Speak to students with respect**, and avoid interrupting students.
50. **Involve students from the beginning of class** by having them create classroom expectations through to the end by having them conduct self, class, and teacher evaluations.

Source: *50 Ways Adults Can Support Student Voice* by Adam Fletcher of *SoundOut* ([www.soundout.org](http://www.soundout.org)) was reprinted with permission.