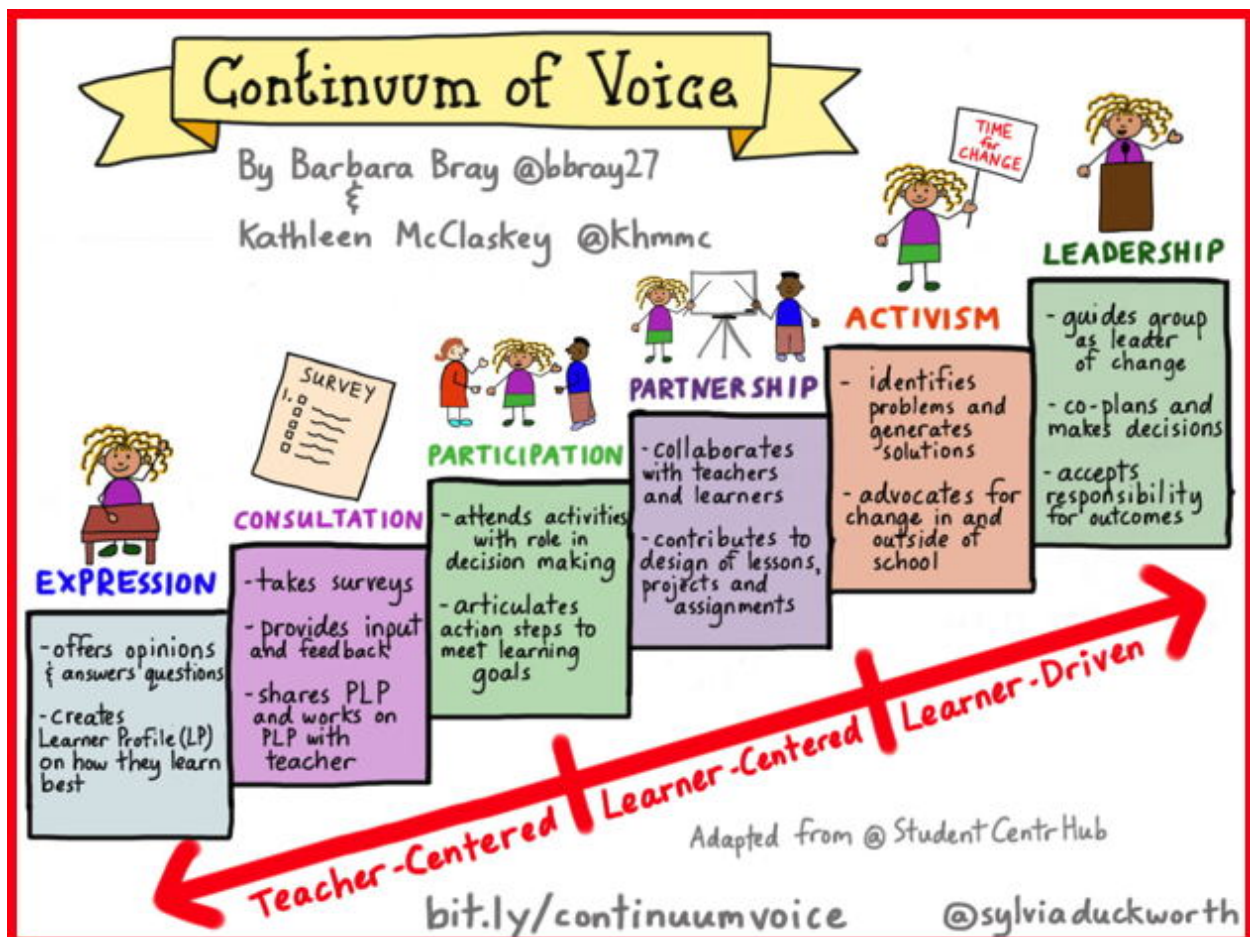# Continuum of Voice:
What it Means for the Learner

Barbara Bray & Kathleen McClaskey, January 2016

Voice gives learners a chance to share their opinions about something they believe in. The learning environment changes as you encourage voice and can see learners taking more control of their learning. There are so many aspects of "school" where learners have not been given the opportunity to be active participants in their learning. Some learners, especially those that are concerned about extrinsic factors like grades, may not feel comfortable expressing their own opinions. Giving learners voice encourages them to participate in learning, to own and drive their learning, and eventually to discover their purpose for learning.

> *"Young people want to be heard. They have ideas and perspective on their lives and the world around them, and when their voice is incorporated in learning, good things happen."* [Source: McCarthy, John. Activating Student Voice Empowers Learning. p.65]

Personalize Learning, LLC designed Continuum of Voice adapted from "Motivation, Engagement, & Student Voice" by Toshalis & Nakkula from Students at the Center @StudentcCntrHub - Visual designed by Sylvia Duckworth @sylviaduckworth.

Stage One: Teacher- Centered Environment

Expression

As the teacher introduces the lesson, they request learners to offer background information to determine prior knowledge or to give feedback on the lesson. You will see learners working individually to develop and update their Learner Profile (LP) based on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) lens of Access, Engage, and Express.

Consultation

Learners will consult with the teacher to share how they learn best and have conversations about their strengths, interests, and challenges in their LP. This is where the learner develops a relationship with the teacher that grows as they learn. The learner shares learning goals in their Personal Learning Plan (PLP) with the teacher. and these conversations validate them as a learner.

Stage Two: Learner-Centered Environments

Participation

Learners define their learning targets in the PLP with the teacher, how they plan to meet learning goals, and articulate how they will demonstrate mastery with evidence of learning. Learners take on more roles in decision making in the classroom and school, i.e. committees, clubs, student council, etc. Learner voice is encouraged because now they are more invested in how and what they learn. Each learner designs how they will meet their learning goals in their PLP and showcases evidence of mastery.

Partnership

Learners contribute to the design of lessons and projects based on their interests and questions. You will see learners in multiple areas in the room working in pairs, small groups, one or two learners in a corner of the room, or a learner one-on-one with the teacher. Some learners are sharing information virtually. You may even notice a group where one learner is leading a brainstorming session with his or her peers on the interactive whiteboard. The noise level changes and the teacher is walking around the room checking in with different learners.

Stage Three: Learner-Driven Environments

Activism

Learners have identified a problem or challenge that they want to tackle. You may see learners in the hallways or other areas in or outside of the school with an excitement about information or resources they discovered that could solve the problem. Learners are using technology effectively to make connections and build their personal learning network (PLN). Learners are showcasing evidence of mastery using how they tackled the problem. They may even create a call to action in an exhibition, on a website or to their peers.

Leadership

This is where learners take a leadership role and self-direct their learning around interests or what they want to do to make a difference. They take responsibility for the outcomes. The teacher takes on the role of advisor, providing feedback and any support needed in finding connections and resources to meet goals around what each learner believes is their purpose for learning.

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References

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