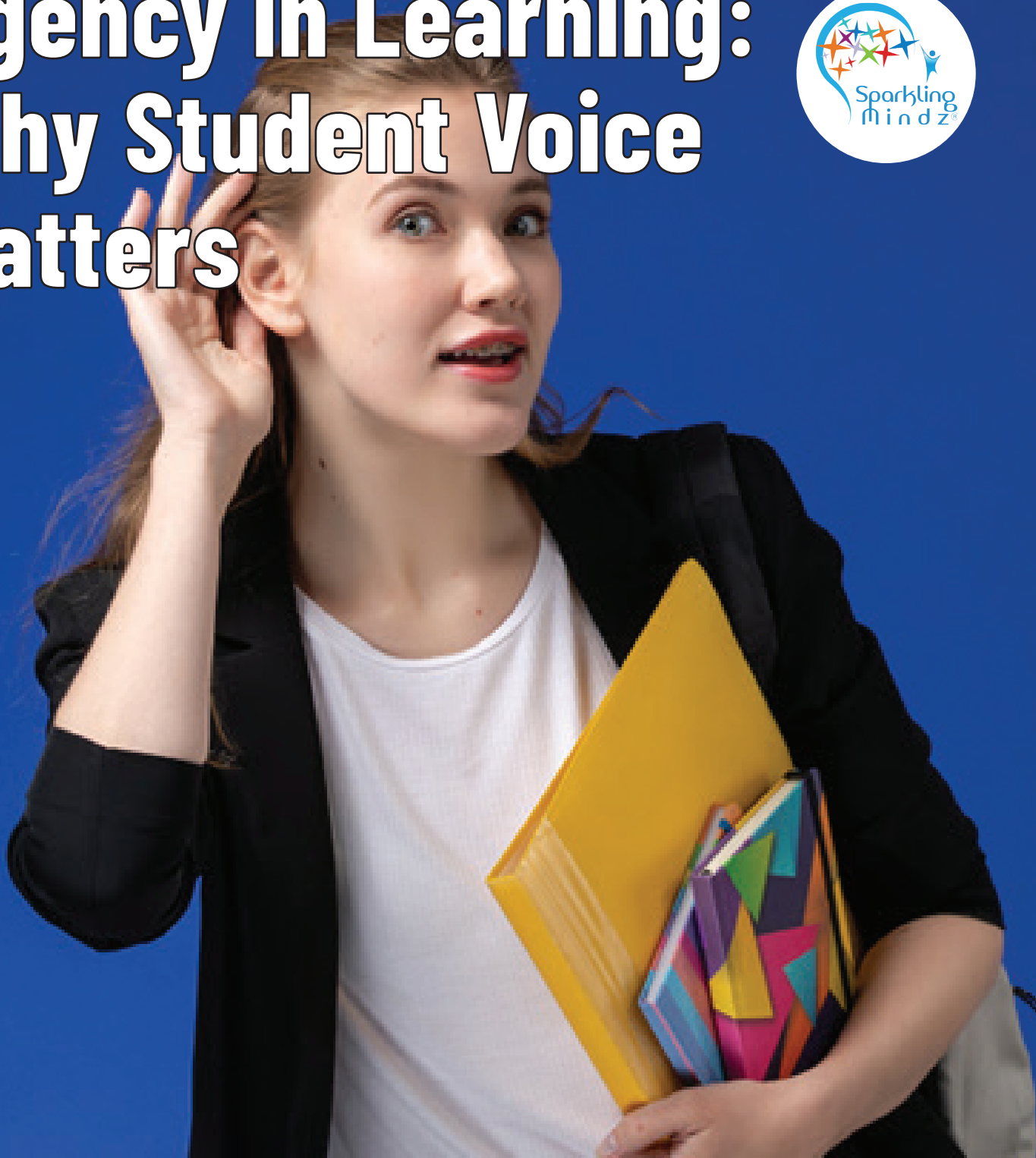


Agency in Learning: Why Student Voice Matters



Agency in Learning: Why Student Voice Matters?

When children become active participants in learning, they know that their thoughts, emotions, and experiences can influence what happens next.

Voice is not about children simply disagreeing, demanding choices, or getting their way. A child's voice is their authentic truth, grounded in emerging values and steeped in empathy. It develops when children can express what is happening in their minds and hearts while remaining open to perspectives beyond their own.

How Does Student Voice Build Agency?

When a child shares, we often discover that the visible behaviour was not the real problem.

A child who appears uninterested may be confused. One who refuses to collaborate may feel unheard. Another who avoids a task may fear being judged. If adults respond only to the behaviour, we may increase false compliance without humane understanding. When we listen deeply, children learn that their experiences matter and that they can participate in changing a situation.

The OECD Learning Compass identifies student agency as essential for navigating unfamiliar contexts meaningfully and responsibly, rather than waiting for fixed instructions. Agency brings together knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. OECD Learning Compass 2030

A 2024 review of student-voice practices similarly identified strong student-teacher relationships, meaningful choice, and responsive teaching as foundational. It also found that seeking student feedback and involving learners in collaborative decisions remained relatively uncommon. Teaching and Teacher Education.

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What Does Meaningful Student Voice Look Like?

At Sparkling Mindz, voice is woven into the learning ecosystem.

During Choice Hour, children choose an interest, set goals, track progress, and reflect on their decisions. In P2P (Problems to Projects Labs), their lived frustrations can become authentic enquiries. Children gather information, empathise, map systems, define problems and co-create possible responses.

In Empathy House and whole-school connects, children bring forth ideas, feelings, and disagreements. They learn to name what matters to them, listen without blame, and hold themselves and others accountable to shared values. Through thinking routines and learning agreements, voice becomes connected to reflection, action, and responsibility.

Research involving 172 students in Grades 5–7 found that autonomy-supportive instruction produced higher autonomous motivation, greater flow, and stronger interest in continuing the activity than controlling instruction. *Frontiers in Psychology*

This helps explain the joy children experience when learning feels genuine. When children know their authentic truth matters, they begin to recognise that who they are matters. Learning then becomes more than effort directed towards an external result. It enriches who they are becoming.

Student voice does not remove challenge or adult guidance. It transforms the child from a recipient into a co-creator who is curious, accountable, and intrinsically motivated to learn and grow with others. ■