Supporting Student and Staff Agency

Agency is founded on the belief "that people have the capacity to take action, craft and carry out plans, and make informed decisions based on a growing knowledge" (Safir & Dugan, 2021, p. 229). Embracing agency in schools means that students and educators are empowered by their own voices and choices in their learning, teaching, and leadership experiences.

When people speak about student agency, they often talk about students taking ownership of their learning and active versus passive learning.   While "there is no broad consensus on the definition of student agency" (Poon, 2018, n.p.), there are common concepts among experts that have helped shape both the definition of agency and what it looks like in practice. Embracing agency requires a shift in educators' and students' thinking and in instructional practices that allow students to contribute their strengths, cultures, ideas, interests, and experiences to their own learning. It is vitally important for educators to understand that while in many settings students use their agency effectively on their own, in the classroom teacher support and guidance are essential. It is particularly important that schools ensure that all students have the support they need when their teachers employ instructional strategies that embrace agency ("Student Agency for 2030", 2019).

Agency demands movement away from the mindset that test scores provide the only data that matter and toward a vision of student data that consider what happens in the classroom each day, how students feel about what happens, and what students are interested in learning. Student agency is not a dismissal of learning standards or assessments or the quantitative data that they yield, rather it is a shift in perspective about the level of importance these standards and assessments have in our thinking and discussions about what and how well our students are learning. With agency, quantitative data is part of the picture, but it does not represent the totality of what a student knows.

Agency recognizes power of possibility within each learner. It is about helping learners recognize that what they bring to the classroom, (e.g., who they are, where they come from, what they think about and believe) and is an important and valuable part of their educational experience (Safir and Dugan, 2021; O'Rourke and Addison, 2017).   Embracing agency as a practice that benefits *every* learner requires a shift in mindset that entails learning, reflection, and effort. Agency is empowering for students and for educators alike as it values one's sense of identity, belonging, mastery, and efficacy.

Schools that embrace agency communicate the following messages: (1) Your ways of learning, being, and knowing are important and valued; (2) You are seen and loved; (3) You can effectively build knowledge and demonstrate what you have learned; (4) You can make a difference (Safir and Dugan, 2021). Building curricula, classrooms, and learning communities around these tenets of agency is transformative.

The following literature review is divided into five sections:
1. Understanding the Power of Agency
2. Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: The Shift
3. Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Getting Started
4. Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices
5. Understanding the Importance of Teacher Agency

Understanding the Power of Agency

Main Ideas	Additional Information	Resources

When teachers embrace a culture of agency in their classrooms, students excel in all parts of their learning experience. Their learning is deeper, their thinking more critical, and their engagement more meaningful. In agency-powered classrooms, students are not measured by what they don't know; rather, they are valued for their strengths and for their ways of knowing and being.	• **Why agency?** Inviting student agency into our work as educators relegates our current hyper-focus on test scores to a less dominant part of the data discussion and allows student agency to be the goal, rather than test scores. Dr. Shane Safir and Dr. Jamila Dugan, authors of *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation*, posit that when we work to create schools and systems based on "…students' brilliance, cultural wealth, and intellectual potential rather than self-serving savior narratives that have us "fixing" and "filling" academic gaps" (2021, p. 4), we will thwart the deficit-based, standardized-test-score narrative and finally embrace a strengths-based view of our students.
	
	• **Students' learning experiences are powerful.** Many researchers have argued that when students have agency in their learning, they are more motivated, more engaged, and feel greater satisfaction in their learning experiences. Students with agency in their learning see themselves as capable and successful learners. Indeed, research shows that students who have agency make greater learning progress that will extend well beyond the classroom (Siddall, 2016).
	
	   o With agency, students work harder, set more challenging goals, choose challenging learning tasks, self-regulate, self-motivate, and become deeply engaged as they plan how to proceed with greater focus and interest (Hannon, 2011; DET, 2017; Johnston, 2004).
	   o Students experience deeper learner and stronger critical thinking skills so that they can solve problems they have never encountered before (Fullan, Hill, & Roncón-Gallardo, 2017; DET, 2017).
	   o Students experience rigorous learning that is more personally and socially relevant when they act as co-designers in the curriculum (Shawer, 2010).
		What is the rationale and evidence base for student agency?
		
		Student Agency is Ownership
		
		Student Agency: Promoting Student Engagement
		
		Everything You Need to Know About Student Agency (Blog Post)
		
		The Benefits Of Student Agency: It's Not About Instructional "Strategies"; It's About Empowering Learners

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	Understanding the Power of Agency	
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	• **Students achieve greater academic success.** The result of incorporating student agency in the classroom, the school, and the district yields a greater likelihood for students to achieve academic success (Williams, 2017, p.10) and become lifelong learners (O'Rourke & Addison, 2017). Without agency, students are passive learners who are generally compliant in "doing school" in the way the education system dictates. They might perform well on assessments, but this does not indicate that they will be successful or motivated in their learning. Often, too many students are disengaged and underachieving when they have little agency in what they are learning (Hannon, 2011). In contrast, agency demands "a paradigm shift from compliance and disengagement to commitment, motivation and deep intellectual engagement in learning" (O'Rourke & Addison, 2017, p.3). • **Students can overcome adversity.** When students are nurtured and taught to develop a thorough sense of agency, they can overcome challenges in their lives ("Student Agency for 2030", 2019). The support of teachers is critical when students are marginalized and are asked to use their agency. Specifically, students who face disadvantages "need carefully designed support to build foundation skills, such as literacy and numeracy, and social emotional skills" ("Student Agency for 2030", 2019).	

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	Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: The Shift	
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**

Embracing agency in the classroom requires a shift in how educators view students and their ability to contribute to their learning experiences. Specifically, incorporating agency demands a shift in thinking about identity, mastery, belonging, and efficacy. Learning then becomes co-creative combining student and teacher effort. Teachers are still the guides and experts in the room, but the students' voices, interests, cultures, and gifts shape how learning happens.	• **What is required to make the shift and embrace agency?** There is a shift in mindset that fuels the needed changes in classroom culture, in perspectives about students, and in how we prioritize what is most important in learning so that we can invite our students to use their agency in our classrooms. Teachers need to ask themselves, "What do I need to change about how I see my students, how I approach instruction, and how I measure learning so that my students can have more agency in my classroom?"
	
	• The most frequent challenge to incorporating agency in the classroom ". . . is that in schools, control over learning and activity is often fully in the hands of the adults" (Willis, 2019, n.p.). For agency to be effective in schools, teachers need to be
	
	    ○ Willing to share the power and co-create learning and knowledge with their students, and
	
	    ○ Have the freedom to create classrooms where students can develop their agency "through self-reflective and intentional action and through interaction with the environment in which they are embedded" (Klemencic, 2015, p. 11).
	
	• **Agency is about connection.** The authors of *Street Data*, Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan (2021), argue that in the classroom, "agency is about connection to self, peers, adults, the community beyond the classroom, and ultimately the world" (p. 102). In other words, agency flourishes in a classroom where the power is distributed among the students and the teacher, where diverse perspectives and experiences are welcomed and valued, and where students are nourished both intellectually and emotionally. They break agency down into four components: identity, mastery, belonging, and efficacy.
		Part 1: What Do You Mean When You Say "Student Agency"? - Education Reimagined
		
		Part 2: Toward a Culturally Responsive Understanding of Student Agency - Education Reimagined
		
		What is Student Agency?
		
		How to Build Student Agency in Your Classroom
		
		Harvard EdCast: Tapping into Student Agency (Podcast)
		
		Cult of Pedagogy Episode 178 on

	Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: The Shift	
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	o **Identity.** In an agency-rich learning experience, students need to feel that who they are and their ways of being and learning and knowing are valued. Students are seen and heard for their strengths, rather than their weaknesses. Students are valued for what they bring to the classroom learning experience. o **Mastery.** As a domain of agency, mastery is about students' ability to build knowledge and demonstrate their understanding of what they are learning. Students show what they know in ways that highlight their strengths, and paper-and-pencil tests are not the main form of assessment. Rather through portfolios, project-based learning, and in discussion-based classrooms, students can explore, construct, reflect on, and publicly demonstrate knowledge. In these settings, "students become agents in their own learning rather than consumers of curriculum" (Safir & Dugan, 2021, p. 102). o **Belonging.** In agency-rich classrooms, belonging is all about trusting relationships. It is about students feeling safe and knowing they have peers and adults who care about them. Belonging is illustrated by the following statement, "I see myself, and I am seen and loved here" (Safir & Dugan, 2021, p. 102). Yet, many students of color do not feel a sense of belonging when they go to school. Students in high-poverty areas are tragically sent the message that they don't really belong in the academic community because they are not achieving on standardized assessments, and they need interventions to fill in their gaps and "fix" whatever is wrong with them (p. 103). In contrast, belonging "demands rigorous attention to systemic racism, school and classroom cultures, and the micro-interactions that characterize a student's passage through the school day" (p.104). What do the adults on a campus do *every day* that help all students know they are cared about and that they belong?	Street Data and Agency (Podcast) Student Agency for Powerful Learning Learner Agency a compilation of resources about student agency Prioritizing Agency for Students With Disabilities | Edutopia Kamm Solutions' Lit. Review on Building a Culture of Trust

	Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: The Shift	
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**

	o **Efficacy.** As a domain of agency, efficacy is powerful in that it nourishes a student's sense of contribution to the classroom experience and beyond. In essence, efficacy is about students believing that they can make a difference, that they can set an intention or make a goal and produce the desired result. When marginalized students can make things happen that they have set out to do, when they can impact their school or their community in positive ways, or take action to make positive change, they are empowered with a restored sense of self and well-being (Safir & Dugan, 2021, p. 104).
	
	 • **Student voice and choice.** Student voice and choice are hallmarks of agency-rich classrooms. While student voice and choice indicate a great deal of student preference for what and how students learn, it is not a free-for-all without any sense of accountability or guidance from a teacher. Effectively cultivating student agency should "empower learners so that their minds and hearts become the engines that drive learning in our classrooms. This isn't as simple as some might believe. Providing too much voice and choice without proper scaffolds can be counterproductive, resulting in chaos in the classroom" (France, 2022, n.p.). Rather, student voice and choice, which is another way to define agency, is characterized by the following approaches to instruction and learning:
	
	      o **The primary form of data** is not tests and quizzes, but rather formative or performance-based assessments.
	
	      o **The core belief** is not that the teacher holds all the power and expertise but rather that students and teachers build the knowledge and learn together.
	
	      o **The instructional approach** is not the "sage on the stage" lecture style, but rather learning through inquiry, discussion, exploration, projects,	

Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: The Shift		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	simulations, and experiments. The teacher is the activator of learning. o **The culturally responsive practices** of the teacher do not rest on the dominant cultural norms of compliance and a deficit lens ("What are you lacking?"), but rather on collaboration and interdependence where students' cultures and strengths are present in all aspects of learning. Students are, therefore, viewed through the asset lens: "What gifts do you bring to the classroom?"	

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	Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Getting Started	
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**

Getting started with student agency requires clarity about what agency is. Teachers begin incorporating agency by making small adjustments to how they approach teaching and learning. Teachers and students alike need to be willing to take some risks, make some adjustments, and co-create the teaching and learning experience.	• **Define your words.** Research notes that the words we use matter: "Our conversations with students and how we interact with them can help students build bridges between their actions and results, reinforcing a sense that they are the kind of people who accomplish things" (Williams, 2017). How do you define the words that are important to understanding agency? How will you explain what agency looks like to parents and students? Start by defining agency and the words related to it such as voice, choice, ownership, self-regulation, and self-reflection.
	
	   o Consider this jargon-free definition of agency. Agency "refers to students' desires, abilities, and power to determine their own course of action (whether that means choosing a learning goal, a topic to study, an activity to pursue, or a means of pursuing it)" (Vaughn, 2018, p. 63).
	
	   o This definition of agency may also be helpful: "Student agency is defined as the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change. It is about acting rather than being acted upon; shaping rather than being shaped; and making responsible decisions and choices rather than accepting those determined by others" ("Student Agency for 2030", 2019, p. 2).
	
	• **Understand the components of student agency.** There are typically four parts to student agency that researchers commonly identify. These four common components of agency are encapsulated in the following student actions:
	
	   o Students set advantageous **learning goals** with the guidance of their teacher.
	
	   o Students **initiate action** toward those goals.
	
	   o Students **reflect on and regulate their progress** toward those goals.
	
	   o Students **internalize a sense of self-efficacy** during the process (Poon, 2018).
		5 Activities to Promote Student Agency in the Classroom - Fresh Ideas for Teaching
		
		Teacher Moves That Cultivate Learner Agency from Edutopia
		
		Student Agency Rubric | LEAP Innovations
		
		6 Reasons to Try the Single Point Rubric
		
		Agency for Learning: Intention, Motivation, Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation

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Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Getting Started		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**

	• Keep in mind that when teachers are encouraging more agency in their classrooms, they "**never cede control entirely, and they always have to be ready to provide necessary supports, structures and guidance**" (Vaughn, 2018, p. 66). In fact, in schools and districts where student agency is encouraged, "Learning involves not only instruction and evaluation but also co-construction" or co-agency where students and teachers—and even parents and community members—work together to create the teaching and learning process ("Student Agency for 2030", 2019, p. 2).
	
	• **Determine your students' present sense of and readiness for agency in your classroom.** This can happen through observations, interactions, and conversations with students. Consider the following expert suggestions:
	
	    ○ **Assess readiness.** Especially in the early grades, teachers need to be alert to students' readiness to assert themselves, to state their needs, to provide input or guide their own learning, and to make choices for themselves (Vaughn, 2018). That's not to say that teachers should avoid allowing young students agency, but rather, the agency they are given should match their readiness.
	
	        ▪ For example, if students are supposed to discuss a topic in small groups, but they seem to be struggling, the teacher can provide a few questions and sentence starters to help them along, rather than canceling the activity all together.
	
	        ▪ Also, teachers may have students who want to pursue of line of inquiry that they are not ready for. Rather than redirect the student away from their interest entirely, allow students to do what they can and provide the support they need to find success in their efforts and build the necessary foundational skills that will help them in future learning ("Student Agency for 2030", 2019).	

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Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Getting Started		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**

	o **Evaluate your classroom.** Reflection is an important part of agency for teachers as well as for students. When implementing agency in their classrooms, teachers should take some time to evaluate their own classroom structures, the materials they are using, and the assignments they are asking students to complete, to make sure that all these parts of the classroom experience allow for students to assert their agency in some way (Vaughn, 2018, p. 65). Consider the following questions on the level of agency a classroom experience might allow:
	
	        ▪ Do students have a choice in the topics they want to write about in a writing assignment?
	
	        ▪ Is there a way for students to choose what novel they want to read for a project?
	
	        ▪ Can students choose how and what they want to show what they've learned?
	
	        ▪ Will students see themselves represented in the topics, people, and places that are explored in the class materials?
	
	        ▪ Are the students encouraged to challenge the ideas represented in the content the class is studying?
	
	        ▪ Does the teacher control the direction and content of a group discussion or is the control shared with the students?
	
	        ▪ Is there time in the class every day where students can have meaningful discussions with each other about what they are learning?	

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	Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Getting Started	
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	▪ Do the students have access to the teacher to ask questions or express concerns? ○ **Take risks and practice an adaptive stance.** Experts argue that teachers should err on the side of mercy and freedom when incorporating agency in the classroom. In other words, it is a better to give student too much choice and freedom initially. If they aren't ready for it, then scale it back by limiting choices or options or providing more specific direction and guidance to students. Teachers should not give up entirely and take over all the decision making (Vaughn, 2018, p. 66). This requires some decision-making to happen in the moment, based on what is occurring in the classroom and how the students are responding to it. Maybe the lesson or discussion takes a different direction because that is what intrigued the students. Adaptive teachers are willing to run with the new direction and make it meaningful and engaging for students because the new direction is driven *by* the students. ○ **Use surveys and interviews.** Experts suggest administering surveys, setting up interviews with students, or inviting students to rate their experiences with single point rubrics. Use the survey information as initial feedback for how to get started and continue to ask for feedback from students about their sense of agency in the class. Adjust according to student feedback throughout the school year. ▪ Survey questions could ask students to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements about agency (adapted from *Street Data* (2021), pp. 104-5). Consider the following examples: • My ways of being, my culture, and my identity are valued in this class.	

Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Getting Started		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	- How I learn best is valued in this class. - How I know and understand the world is valued in this class. - I have opportunities to build my own knowledge in this class. - I am invited to demonstrate what I know and understand to my peers and my teachers. - I am invited to demonstrate what I know and understand to people outside of my classroom. - I see myself represented in my school's staff and curriculum. - I feel seen and loved by the adults at my school. - I feel seen and loved by the students at my school. - I can make a difference at my school. ▪ Younger students might rate their response to questions such as the following: - I feel important in this class. - In this class, everyone knows my cultural identity and how to pronounce my name. - I have a lot of chances to show what I know in this class. - My teacher cares about me. - My classmates care about me.	

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Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**

Specific teaching strategies that practice student agency include an emphasis on creating safe places for belonging and learning. Content exploration and delivery is centered on inquiry, dialogue, collaboration, feedback, reflection, and revision. Students' interests, identities, and curiosity shapes their learning experiences.	• **What does embracing agency look like in practice?** Safir and Dugan (2021) suggest that instructional practices that promote agency include the following:
	
	   ○ **Talk less, smile more.** Design learning experiences where learners can discover what they think and feel about something rather than being told what to think and feel about something. When teachers do all the talking, they carry the cognitive load, and less learning happens for the students. Note the following suggestions:
	
	      ■ Avoid talking for more than 10 minutes at a time without some sort of pause for information processing, practice, and/or reflection.
	
	      ■ Design lessons and learning experiences so that learners are engaged in conversation with each other for at least 75% of the time.
	
	      ■ While learners are conversing, circulate, guide, and ask more questions to model the culture of inquiry.
	
	      ■ Smile and use tone and nonverbal and verbal cues to communicate to learners that they are welcome, they are safe, and they are invited to take risks in learning.
	
	      ■ Maintain consistency and kindness that conveys the message that students are seen and loved.
	
	   ○ **Seek questions over answers.** Igniting students' curiosity, encouraging them to ask questions, and preparing thoughtful questions ahead of time, are all strategies in a classroom that practices inquiry. Too often, students are expected to sit quietly and absorb what the teacher is telling them. But
		10 Ways to Incorporate Student Choice in Your Classroom
		
		How Can Educators Best Promote Student Agency?
		
		Developing Agency With Student-Led Conferences | Edutopia
		
		The KWL Method
		
		Fishbowl Strategy
		
		Teaching Strategy: Fishbowl
		
		Reciprocal Teaching
		
		Socratic Seminars

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Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**

	classrooms that embrace a culture of inquiry welcome students' questions. In fact, in such classrooms, teachers respond to students' questions with more questions. Questions, and not necessarily their answers, become the priority. For example, in classes that practice inquiry you might see some of the following learning experiences.
	
	▪ **Students are encouraged to develop their own questions.**
	  • Start units with journal entries: *What questions are you having as we begin studying cell structure?*
	
	  • Use KWL Charts: *What do you already know about The Great Depression? What do you want to know about it? At the end, we'll write down what you learned.*
	
	▪ **Students ask each other questions as a central part of their learning.**
	  • Create small group or fishbowl discussions that center on questions the students have generated. They can write their questions after a lesson and use them as an exit ticket from class. During the next class meeting, they can use their questions for small group discussion and even research the answers.
	
	  • Use reciprocal teaching where students predict, question, clarify, and summarize the content that they are reading.
	
	▪ **Students ask the teacher questions.**
	  • Conference with students regularly when they are working on major projects or products. Ask them to prepare questions for the conference time.
		Kamm Solutions' Learning Through Inquiry Review
		
		Turn and Talk: An Evidence-Based Practice
		
		One-Minute Papers: A Way to Further Design Thinking
		
		Cultivating Curiosity Among Older Students
		
		Developing Agency with Student-led Conferences (Video from Edutopia)
		
		Student-Centered Learning: Building Agency and Engagement (Video from Edutopia)

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Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	Teachers pose questions to the class. - Use the Socratic Seminar where teachers and students pose open-ended questions about topics or texts that students have studied. - Invite students to lead the discussions as they become more comfortable with the seminar. **Teachers create units of study around driving questions.** - Identify the driving question (the essential question, the engaging question, etc.) that highlights the purpose of the unit of study. - Have students revisit the essential question as they work through the unit. - Create project-based learning and performance-based assessments that center on driving questions that are open-ended and interesting. **Teachers model and invite inquiry.** - Embrace inquiry as part of the everyday classroom culture. After projects or assignments ask students to reflect on what they did well, what they learned, and what they want to learn or work on. - Ask students questions that connect them to their agency: **Identity:** *What is important to you about this project or subject and why?*	[Kamm Solutions' Guidelines for Effective Feedback](#) [Kamm Solutions' Hyperdoc on the Formative Process (K-5)](#) [Kamm Solutions Webpage on the Formative Process](#)

Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**

	o **Belonging:** *What is getting in the way of your learning and how can I best support you?*
	
	    o **Mastery:** *What is the evidence of the claim you are making or the solution you are presenting?*
	
	    o **Efficacy:** *What ideas or actions do you want to contribute to this discussion or project?* (Safir & Dugan, 2021, p. 113).
	
	o **Practice reflection and revision.** Making reflection and revision part of the culture of your everyday classroom experience will normalize the idea that our work can be improved, that learning is continuous, and that feedback is a critical part of learning. Indeed, "reflection and revisions are two of our strongest tools in this regard and help students at the margins accelerate their skills over time" (Safir & Dugan, 2021, p. 113).
	
	   ▪ **Teach and model.** Teach students the explicit skills and processes required for reflection and revision. Model it in lessons.
	
	   ▪ **Reflect daily.** Begin class with reflection activities such as journaling or a turn and talk session.
	
	   ▪ **Ask for feedback.** Ask students for feedback on their level of understanding throughout a lesson. For example, thumbs up, thumbs middle, or thumbs down will signal how well they think they are understanding what you are teaching. Or, for older students, use one-minute papers to seek feedback. Ask them to write everything they understood from the day's lesson in one minute.	

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Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	You might also invite them to write a one-minute, muddiest point paper where they identify what they don't understand and what questions they still have. ▪ **Invite peer feedback.** Invite students to provide feedback to each other using simple rubrics or graphic organizers with sentence starters: *What I loved about this work was… One question I have is…* ▪ **Reflect weekly.** End each week with reflection. *What did I learn this week? What am I most proud about this week? What am I still struggling to understand?* ▪ **Conference.** Use one-on-one conferences often to check in with students on their progress, let them ask questions, and get to know them individually. o **Make learning public.** Use portfolios, presentations, oral defenses by students, and showcases to put students in the driver's seat. Inviting them to design and teach lessons, for example, helps them show what they have learned. Teachers need to stop being the only audience for students. Consider the following suggestions for public learning: ▪ **Create portfolios.** Invite students to create portfolios of their work that showcase their in-depth research efforts in the form of research projects, science experiments, art or performance exhibitions, creative writing, mathematical models, literary or historical analysis, etc. ▪ **Create rubrics.** Design and share assignment rubrics with the	

Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	students that clearly identify standards by which to assess students' performance and work products.	
	▪ **Invite oral defenses.** There is nothing more empowering for students than successfully sharing their long-term work in front of a committee of peers and teachers.	
	▪ **Encourage and support revision.** Students need the opportunity to revise, redo, correct, and redeem their work and their academic status. We want students to learn what we are trying to teach them, to learn from their own mistakes, to discover the mess and joy of learning on their own. They need to be able to revise, adjust, and correct as they go.	
	o **Arrange the classroom to invite agency.** Organize the classroom in a way that invites discussion and collaboration. Classrooms with rows of desks that all face the front are designed for lectures. All the power is up front with the teacher. Classrooms with desks in circle or square shapes or with tables students sit around invite collaboration and discussion. The arrangement of the desks conveys to students what kind of conversation is important in that classroom and who has the power in that conversation. Either it's "you sit there and maybe comment when I ask you a question, but mostly you listen to me tell you what you should know" or "I'll get you started, but you need to spend the bulk of your time talking with each other to figure out what is important for you to know." To put it another way, administrator and educator Perry Smith said, "All the power in the world comes from the circle. When we sit in a circle, there is no head. Everyone is equal" (Smith, 2020 as cited in Safir & Dugan, 2021, p. 116).	
	o **Emphasize the feedback process over grades.** Formative learning tells us	

Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	that feedback is critical to student learning. Safir and Dugan (2021) state that "our primary task as educators is to provide regular feedback to students so they can grow, not to evaluate them in order to anoint them academically capable or not" (p. 116). ▪ **Employ wise feedback**. Effective, unbiased feedback that is empowering for students tends to follow these guidelines: • The teacher describes the nature and purpose of the feedback being offered. • The teacher emphasizes and clearly explains the high standards that will be used to evaluate the students' work. Students have an opportunity to engage with the standards through a collaborative activity. • The teacher sincerely expresses the belief in the students' ability to meet those high standards. ▪ **Rethink grading**. Grades so often create added stress and emotional pressure, especially for students who are trying to catch up to grade level or who have learning challenges. While we cannot wholly dismiss grades in most settings, we can certainly employ several feedback focused strategies that minimize the stress of grades and emphasize the importance of feedback and learning. Consider the following recommendations: • **Avoid grading homework.** Homework should be viewed as low-stakes practice on new skills and not a way to punish students who lack the support, resources, or attention to	

	Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices	
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	complete it.	
	• **Avoid measuring participation.** Unfortunately, participation grades can be riddled with bias. Teachers cannot possibly see who is participating and who is not at every moment in a classroom session. Likewise, students vary dramatically in challenges with attention, in culture, in communication styles, etc. These differences can make it difficult to assess whether a student is participating.	
	• **Plan for late work.** Late work can be such a challenge to manage, but it is important that students can turn in their work within a reasonable grace period. This practice conveys to students that teachers see them and recognize that sometimes it is difficult to get work done by the deadline. Accepting late work may provide the extension of time needed to ensure learning.	
	• **Allow do overs and retakes.** If students are putting in the effort and coming to school, they may have earned the right to try again for full credit. The idea that they are only evaluated once and have no opportunity to learn from and correct their mistakes is contrary learning. Educators want students to learn the content, to master the standards, to meet their goals. They may need more time and space to make the corrections needed to do so.	
	• **Use rubrics.** Design rubrics/guidelines that are descriptive and criterion-based to provide feedback for students. Share student-friendly rubrics/guidelines with assignments so that	

Incorporating Agency in the Classroom: Implementing Key Practices		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
	students understand the expectations right from the beginning. Invite students to self-evaluate and reflect (France, 2022). • **Use grades to summarize achievement.** Grades should represent what students have achieved over time and after they have had time to redo, retake, and correct their errors. • **Use conferences.** Student-led conferences support student agency and work well for an exchange of feedback.	

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Understanding the Importance of Teacher Agency		
Main Ideas	**Additional Information**	**Resources**
Teacher agency is critical to transforming professional learning and school and classroom culture. Teachers will find more meaning in their teaching and learning experiences as they are able to act upon and direct their own professional growth as well as provide input and make decisions about their own classrooms and the school at large.	• **Why is teacher agency important?** Just as students thrive when they have some level of agency and choice in what and how they learn, so do teachers thrive when they are encouraged to use their gifts and strengths in the classroom. Indeed, we must collectively recognize and respect the truth that "teaching is an activity involving a deep awareness of the significance of one's choices and how those choices influence the development and well-being of others" (Buzzelli and Johnston, 2002, p. 120). • **Teacher agency promotes retention.** When teachers feel that they have no say in what they do in their classrooms, they are less likely to stay in the profession. Indeed, the reality most teachers face is encapsulated in the following statement: "The capacity of teachers to use professional discretion in their pedagogical and curricular practices exists, not always easily, alongside their accountability to the state, which generally maintains the overall authority for educational policy" (Campbell, 2012, p. 183). The tension between what the state wants and what teachers know is best for their individual students is real and tangible. Much of that tension can be alleviated by allowing teachers choice and voice in what and how they teach and in what and how they learn as it is not only empowering but also creates a sense of efficacy in teachers that promotes joy in their work, encourages them to stay in the profession, and prevents burnout. • **Defining teacher agency.** One source defines teacher agency as "the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues" (Calvert, 2016, p.52). As teacher retention continues to be a challenge, districts need to rethink how they address teacher agency by creating systems where teachers are decision-makers and innovators—where teachers are empowered to act as the professionals they are (Campion, 2020).	The Power of Teacher Agency Five Ways to Increase Teacher Agency in Professional Development, Edutopia The Role of Teacher Agency in Curriculum Making Teacher Agency: What Is It and Why Does It Matter? What Does Teacher Agency Look Like in a School? Elements of Teacher Retention - Teacher Agency Infographic

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	• **Teacher agency in professional development.** For too long, professional development [PD] has been structured so that teachers "receive" training or learning. Too often, PD has been an "empty exercise in compliance, one that falls short of its objectives and rarely improves professional practice" (Calvert, 2016, n.p.). Yet, just as in all learning settings, when the one doing the learning can act with agency—in this case the teacher—the experience is more meaningful, and the desired change is more likely.
	
	    o Note that the level of a teacher's agency in professional learning depends on
	
	        ▪ The teacher's motivation to engage in the professional learning,
	
	        ▪ The school's structure and culture to encourage and support professional learning, and
	
	        ▪ The degree to which the system for professional learning seeks and involves the teachers in what and how they might learn (Calvert, 2016).
	
	    o Creating an effective professional learning experience is complicated and riddled with challenges that range from limited time and resources, to limited motivation, dramatically varied teaching experiences, burnout, and so much more. There are a few actions that seem to help improve the overall professional development experience for teachers as they each invite a mindset or approach that promote the teachers' agency.
	
	        ▪ **Avoid "getting teachers to do things."** Too often campus administrators and leaders see professional development from the perspective that teachers are providing a service, not acting as problem solvers or decision makers (Calvert, 2016). In other words,
		[Kamm Solutions on Professional Development](#)

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	the teachers had a PD on something, but it's still not working. The leaders in these settings see their job as "getting teachers to do things." When there are no visible improvements, the teachers are blamed, rather than the error of the initial approach. Professional learning that leads to classroom application requires modeling, coaching, and multiple opportunities for implementation with feedback. ▪ **Use data analysis strategy loops**. This is a practice in which teachers work with multi-disciplinary teams to learn about a new instructional practice. They develop lesson plans to use the new strategy, collect and share data, and observe each other in action, providing feedback to one another. ▪ **Engage teacher leaders.** While every school has teacher leaders that are capable and knowledgeable, not all schools utilize these leaders. Effective teacher leaders communicate directly and regularly with their peers. They are often a direct part of the campus and involved in the day-to-day operations and decisions of the school, and they interact with their peers in ways that build trusting relationships. ▪ **Support teachers' extended learning.** With the shortage of substitutes it has become difficult for teachers to attend conferences during the school year. Many school districts have opted to bring experts to their schools, provide summer workshops, or send teachers to summer conferences. When it is possible to support teachers in these extended learning options, the teachers take the time to explore and engage in their craft and profession, make connections in teacher networks, and become more committed to education (Calvert, 2016).	

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	• **Teacher agency in the classroom and the school.** Most notably, teacher's belief in their ability to positively affect their students is the number one influence on student learning according to John Hattie (2008). That belief, known as **teacher efficacy**, is fueled by teachers having agency or freedom to direct what happens in their classroom and in the schools where they teach. Consider the following ways that teachers might be given more agency in their classrooms and schools overall.
	
	  o **Encourage teacher agency in processes and systems.** There are so many systems and processes in schools that directly impact teachers, students, and their families. Teachers have unique insight regarding that impact on the individual students. As such, giving teachers opportunities to provide input and make decisions about school and classroom policies, academic and curricular focuses, and the general operations of a school will provide a more student-centered perspective (Campion, 2020).
	
	  o **Invite teachers to make decisions.** The test-and-punish culture of the recent decades has dramatically reduced educators' opportunities to make decisions about what and how to teach in their classrooms and how the school at large operates. Allowing teachers to make meaningful decisions about how the school and their own classrooms are run requires a shift in team and staff meetings from administrator directed decision-making to shared decision-making where input and advice of teachers is sought. If administrators make decisions contrary to the recommendation of the teachers, they sincerely explain why they did not follow the teachers' advice. This explanation conveys the administrator's respect for the teachers as colleagues.
	
	  o **Create a culture of innovation through teacher agency.** School cultures that successfully embrace innovation and risk-taking only happen on campuses	

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	and in districts where psychological safety and teacher agency are present. **Psychological safety** is "a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmonson, 1999, p. 354). In other words, it is "the belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake" (Delizonna, 2017). At its core, psychological safety is a blend of trust, respect for colleague's competence, and genuine care and concern for others with whom one works. Teachers who enjoy psychological safety can positively shape school culture, think and work outside the box, and explore innovative ways of learning and teaching that directly impact students. Teachers who have this level of agency know that their contributions are valued, and they are more likely to not only stay in the profession, but also thrive as they have the freedom to use innovative, student-centered instructional practices.	

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