



Active Insight: Evidence in Action



Tip #844: Student Agency Through Movement

Overview

Giving students genuine agency in their learning time, through choice, co-design, and self-directed learning, builds intrinsic motivation and a more durable connection to physical activity. When students have a say in what they learn, how they are assessed, and how the program is structured, they develop ownership over their learning experience that extends beyond the school day. Student agency is not about removing structure but about creating space for student voice within a purposeful framework.

Key Teaching Ideas

Building student agency requires teachers to create genuine decision-making opportunities rather than the appearance of choice. This means asking students to contribute to unit planning, co-construct assessment criteria, and reflect on program decisions in ways that actually influence what happens in the lesson. Teachers can start small, offering a choice between two activities, or asking students to suggest one modification to a game or activity, and gradually expand the scope of student decision-making as trust and capability develop. The key is following through on student input so that agency is real, not performative.

Practical Application

- **Unit Co-Design Sessions**, At the start of a unit, share the learning outcomes with students and ask them to suggest activities, game formats, and assessment tasks that would help them achieve those outcomes.
- **Student-Constructed Assessment Criteria**, Ask students to identify what a skilled performance looks like in a specific movement context, then use their suggestions to co-construct the assessment rubric for the unit.
- **Choice-Based Skill Stations**, Offer students a choice of three or four skill stations at different challenge levels, allowing them to self-select the level that matches their current ability and goals.
- **Program Feedback Surveys**, At the end of each unit, ask students to evaluate the program and suggest improvements, then share how their feedback has influenced the design of the next unit.



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Next Steps

[Active Education Australia](#) has resources on student agency and voice in physical education and beyond. [Anywhere PD](#) includes tools for co-designing units, student-led assessment, and choice-based HPE and classroom tasks.

References and Research

1. Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (Version 9.0) – Establishes the curriculum expectations for developing movement competence, health literacy, personal and social capability, and lifelong participation in physical activity.
2. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior – Explains how autonomy, competence and relatedness strengthen intrinsic motivation, engagement and wellbeing.
3. Mitra, D. L. (2004). The Significance of Students: Can Increasing "Student Voice" in Schools Lead to Gains in Youth Development? – Demonstrates how authentic opportunities for student voice build agency, belonging, competence and meaningful participation in school communities.
4. Whitehead, M. (2010). Physical Literacy: Throughout the Lifecourse – Establishes the theoretical foundations of physical literacy, explaining how confidence, competence, motivation and understanding support lifelong participation in physical activity.