

Student Voice and Choice at Shelburne Community School: Curriculum is a Conversation

Video Transcript

Gabriel, Student: We were choosing our revolutions and there were around three or four main revolutions you could choose. They were the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, and the Russian Revolution, and those were very big ones, but I chose one that was more centered toward my heritage. Because my grandparents came from the Philippines, so I decided to choose the Philippine revolution.

Sam Nelson, Teacher: Students having choice really gives them that empowerment and makes them stakeholder in their learning. Instead of me saying to a student, "Hey Emma, I want you to learn about the Cuban revolution because I think it's important for you to know." She might say, "Well, I'm actually really interested in the hip-hop revolution. I'd like to do the same skill and attach it to that."

Emma, Student: I'm doing the hip hop and rap revolution because I am a hip hop dancer mainly. I'm a part of companies at my studio and so hip hop has been a really big part of my life for a really long time.

Sam Nelson, Teacher: That's a great opportunity to say, "Amazing, I want to be there, support your learning, and give you the structure so when you're doing the causes and effects; you can be successful, but yeah go nuts I want you to explore it in your own way."

Emma, Student: We still see police brutality, we still see color discrimination. I feel like I'm connecting to the target because I am trying to show how these things are still playing out.

Gabriel, Student: It really makes you want to know more because if you were forced to do a revolution, it wouldn't be fun at all. It would just be forcing you to do something you didn't want to do.

Sam Nelson, Teacher: This year we started a student planning committee where once a week with 6th and 7th graders and once a week with 8th graders, I sit down with a group of students and they literally sit down and we discuss curriculum. Making curriculum a conversation not a mandate. Not only do we decide what are we going to explore, but how are we going to explore it, what standards or proficiencies are we going to practice and attach to the learning and what are the outcomes going to be.



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Putting the emphasis on making it a discussion with students, making curriculum a conversation and together kind of designing what we're going to do with our time together. It really goes from being a teacher with students, to being part of a learning community.

If you have any questions, start with the students, because they always have better answers than you're going to come up with on your own.

