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Expanding Students' Choices in Language Education

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Abstract

Many teachers seem interested in their classes being more student-centered. Students making more choices about their own learning forms a key aspect of student-centered learning, as well as life-long learning. This article offers ideas for ways to provide students with more choices in their learning and suggests ways to encourage students to make choices when given opportunities to do so. These ideas for increasing student choice include extensive reading, cooperative learning, multiple intelligences, service learning, thinking questions, and use of the internet and other IT affordances. Student choice fits with an overall paradigm shift toward democratizing society, and it also fits with greater choice for teachers. Theoretical underpinnings of student choice include social cognitivism, social constructivism, humanistic psychology, self-directed learning, and social interdependence theory.

Keywords**:** student choice, student-centred learning, extensive reading, cooperative learning, thinking questions, democratization

1. Introduction

Student-centered learning (SCL) (Lancaster, 2017) seeks to facilitate a more active and more powerful role for students in their own present and future learning. SCL can be seen as integral to a paradigm that links and overlaps with a range of widely-accepted perspectives on learning (Jacobs, Renandya, & Power, 2016), including social cognition – the idea that in coordination with others, people select, comprehend, and remember information - (Di Vesta, 2017), social constructivism – the related idea that people construct their own understanding rather than absorbing information from teachers and others - (Brown & Duguid, 2017), humanism – the idea that emotions and personal relations play an important role in learning - (Milhollan & Forisha, 1972; Rogers, 1969), transformative education – the idea that education performs an essential function in changing society for the better - (Kincheloe, 2012), self-directed learning – the idea that education works best when each person is essential to shaping their own learning journey - (Knowles, 1975), and social interdependence theory – the idea that life is more fruitful and enjoyable when people see their outcomes as positively correlated with those of others (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

SCL champions greater choice for students. These choices can be exercised in many aspects of learning, including what is studied, how, when, where and with whom it is studied, and how learning is assessed. The purpose of the present article lies in joining with readers to brainstorm openings for students to exert greater choice in language learning and teaching, although the discussion is clearly relevant in education more widely. A shorter section near the end of the article briefly addresses teachers' choices and links greater power for teachers with the same overall paradigm that facilitates greater power for students. The article's main topic of expanding student choice must be prefaced by two areas of discussion: (1) discussion of constraints on choices in life generally and on choices open to all stakeholders in education, not just students; and (2) discussion of the benefits of greater student choice.

2. Constraints on Choices

Researchers in the areas of economics and management (Goldratt & Cox, 2016; Kahn et al., 1987; Tversky et al., 1988) have discussed how people's choices in many areas of life are constrained by various factors. For instance, people may have many choices when searching for a home in which to live, but those choices are constrained by such factors as the location, size, quality, and price of the available dwellings, not to mention differences of opinion and circumstances among co-occupants, such as family members, and competition with others who are also seeking housing.

Similarly, in education, people also face constraints on their choices. Most severely, millions of students face constraints on their ability to muster the physical and mental wherewithal to study. These students include those with special needs, such as being legally blind or suffering from muscular dystrophy. Similarly, billions of people lack the food, clean water, and sanitation facilities needed to study (UN, 2020). As a result, millions of children die annually from these deficits, not to mention those who fall victim to irreversible stunting of their mental and physical capacities due to a shortfall in these education prerequisites. Even when students escape the aforementioned constraints and are ready to participate in formal education, other constraints may cruelly restrict their choices (UNICEF. 2020). For instance, especially in the case of adults, funding and culture may deny them participation, e.g., although the literature on geragogy (education of senior citizens) grows (Council for Third Age, 2021), many seniors lack the funds to pursue lifelong learning, not to mention facing traditional views that education stops for people after their teens and twenties.

Extensive Reading (ER) (Nation & Waring, 2019) programs provide examples of constraints faced even by students who are able to attend schools and other education institutions. In ER, students read large quantities of materials. The reading level of these materials usually approximates students' current reading levels. However, a number of constraints restrict the reading materials students have at their disposal. Students normally can only read books that their teachers have approved, but the books teachers can approve are limited by the funds allotted to teachers by administrators at the school level or higher. Furthermore, administrators are constrained by the education budgets approved by government bodies, school boards, etc. Family members can also play a role in increasing the reading materials available to students, but these stakeholders are also constrained by such factors as finances, access to reading materials, and

knowledge of reading materials, especially when family members lack proficiency in the language of focus for a particular ER program. Other constraints on reading materials include censorship of materials that may be viewed as inappropriate for students (Zilonis & Swerling, 2020), and the lack of materials from particular contexts, e.g., for English language ER programs, many books may be available from English native speaker countries and cultures, with far fewer available from other countries and cultures. Happily, the literature on ER proposes a range of options for overcoming, at least partially, the above constraints, e.g., to provide more locally-themed reading materials, students, teachers, and others can create ER materials, and governments, etc. can support the development of local publishing industries (e.g., Singapore Book Council, 2021).

To conclude this section on constraints on choices, it should be stated that choice, as with many other areas in life, exists not as a matter of either/or. Instead, choices reside along continua. For example, when choosing materials to read for their ER program, students face the constraint that the materials they can choose from are limited in many ways, including the quantity of books available and the variety of books in terms of genre, topic, useful background schema (e.g., will knowledge of holidays celebrated in a particular culture increase the comprehensibility of a book), and language level.

3. Potential Benefits of Greater Student Choice

Why should students have more choices? Firstly, the same paradigm that supports SCL also supports empowerment of people across the spectrum of society. Of course, with this power comes the responsibility to take into account the greater good. The paradigm from which SCL emanates (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001) holds that people should have choices in the way their society works. While views differ as to how those choices should be exercised, gone are the days when the divine right of omnipotent and all-knowing emperors, queens, etc. is seen as legitimate. Furthermore, while slavery still exists (e.g., Ng, 2020), it exists only in the shadows, not legally.

A second rationale for greater student choice emanates from the concept of lifelong learning, i.e., that people need to continue learning throughout their lives, as society continues to change. In the words of an African proverb, "Those who stop learning are like the living dead." To fulfill the responsibilities that come with the power that people hold, people need continually updated knowledge and skills to make informed choices for themselves and others. Further evidence of the need for lifelong learning comes from the concepts that now in the third decade of

the 21st century, society finds itself in the midst of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Oke & Fernandes, 2020). In this Industrial Revolution 4.0, forces, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology, and quantum computing, are disrupting many aspects of society for better or worse, and to be knowledgeable, active participants in these changes, people need to be ongoing learners. The Climate Crisis, for example, constitutes one disruption that affects society mostly for the worse.

Exercising wise choices demands more than knowledge; another prerequisite are the thinking skills to apply that knowledge constructively. For instance, too many people are deficient in the ambiguity tolerance (Hancock & Mattick, 2020) – ability to cope with lack of clarity, simplicity, and transparency - to deal with the complex issues people face on personal and societal levels. Too many people prefer to surrender their choices rather than exercising them (Fromm, 1994). Too many people prefer to view our grey world only in the colors of black and white, seeing controversies as you're-100%-wrong-while-I'm-100%-right. Instead, making responsible choices demands thinking skills. By providing students with more choices in their education, SCL prepares students with the willingness and ability to make choices in other aspects of their lives. The next and longest section of this paper looks at what already happens in some learning contexts to increase student choice, in the hope that these existing instances of student choice will inspire teachers and students to try out and share more ways of expanding student choice.

4. Where Students Can Makes Choices

Many teachers want to move closer to the student-centered end of the teacher-centered / student-centered continuum. Thus, they want to provide their students with more choices, and these teachers are ready to guide students to make carefully considered choices. The current section of this article offers ideas for where students can make choices.

4.1 Extensive reading

Extensive reading (ER) (Extensive Reading Foundation, n.d.c) is a SCL method, which was discussed earlier in this paper in the section on constraints on choices. Research suggests that ER promotes not only gains in reading proficiency but also gains in vocabulary, writing, spelling, listening, and background knowledge (Krashen, 2004). Many choice points arise when students do ER. These include choosing which books to read.

4.2 Book choice

Students can individually choose which books to read. In this way, books can fit each student's individual interests. Furthermore, if students choose a book and after reading it for a while, they decide it is not the best book for them at the present time, they can return the book unfinished and choose another. The 5-Finger Test (Extensive Reading Foundation, n.d.a.) helps students choose more wisely. The steps in the 5-Finger Test are as follows:

a. Students select a book or other form of reading material and open it to any page.
b. They begin reading, and each time students encounter an unknown word, they put one finger from one hand on that word.
c. If they use all the fingers on that one hand before finishing the page, the book may be too difficult at this time.
d. If they use two or three fingers, the book may be at the right level for them, although there may also be benefits from reading materials with fewer challenges (Namaziandost et al., 2019)

Of course, flexibility must prevail. Perhaps the randomly selected page was not representative of the entire book. Or, perhaps the book is of great interest to a particular student. Therefore, they are willing to invest the time needed to look up many of the words in that one book. For example, many years ago, the nephew of one of this article's authors wanted to watch the film *Jurassic Park*. His father said he could watch the film if he first read the book, which the boy did, despite the fact that the book most likely would not have passed a 5-Finger Test, if the boy had conducted the test back then. This anecdote serves as a reminder of the need for flexibility as to choice points.

4.3 Everyone reads the same book

Another ER example of flexibility at choice points can be seen in the use of whole-class reading (Extensive Reading Foundation, n.d.b). In the case of whole-class reading, the entire class reads the same book, rather than each student reading a different book. Of course, student choice points exist even with whole-class reading, as students can have a voice in choosing the book that the whole class reads, not to mention other matters to be discussed later in the ER subsection of this article. Advantages of occasional use of whole-class reading are:

a. Teachers and students can share reading strategies.

b. Students new to ER can become comfortable with reading and discussing entire books, rather than the short texts which often dominate language textbooks.
c. The entire class can build their background knowledge of books, characters, genres, and writing techniques which may prove useful when doing individually-chosen reading.
d. The whole class can discuss important themes (e.g., character traits) or language features (e.g., the use of polite and peaceful language) of the book.

Something of an intermediate position between whole-class reading and individually chosen books can be provided by the use of literature circles (Herrera & Kidwell, 2018), also known as book clubs (Jocius & Shealy, 2018; Lewis & Zisselberger, 2019). In literature circles and book clubs, groups of students select books to read and dialogue about. With this intermediate position, in addition to negotiating book choice with their teachers, students also negotiate with peers.

4.4 Post-Reading Activities

Another choice point in ER arises in the matter of whether or not students should do post-reading activities, i.e., activities after they have finished a book. For example, students might write a short piece about their favorite character in the book they recently finished. Or, a class can construct a paper dragon on the walls of their classroom, with each scale in the dragon's body containing brief information about a book that one of the class members has read. The more books the class reads, the larger the dragon grows.

M-Reader (Rajabpour, 2020) provides an automated system of short right/wrong answer tests for thousands of graded readers, i.e., books specially designed for readers at different levels of language proficiency. M-Reader provides teachers and students with ways to monitor how much reading students are doing and their comprehension level. It can also supply data when seeking to justify ER programs to administrators and other stakeholders.

A wide variety of post-reading activities exist, and lists of these activities can be presented to students in the form of a menu from which they can select. In addition to monitoring student reading progress, post-reading tasks can:

a. Offer students ways to tell peers about the available books, thereby providing guidance on which books to read or perhaps avoid.
b. Offer students opportunities to think more deeply about books.
c. Motivate students to read carefully and check their understanding.

d. Motivate students to read more books on the same themes and genres or by the same authors.

The above notwithstanding, some guidance on ER suggests that post-reading activities be avoided, as students may view them as onerous and, as a result, seek to avoid doing ER in order to escape doing the tasks. Indeed, many controversies exist on this topic (Meganathan, 2020), with some suggesting that post-reading activities should be small and enjoyable and not require much time to do, and others arguing that the best post-reading task is to choose another book and start reading it.

5. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning (Jacobs et al., in press) offers another SCL method widely used and researched in many areas of education. In cooperative learning (CL), also known as collaborative learning, students work together in small groups of usually 2-4 members. Two key principles of CL are positive interdependence and individual accountability. Positive interdependence represents a feeling among group members that their outcomes are positively correlated, i.e., that they sink or swim together. Individual accountability represents a different feeling, i.e., that everyone should do their fair share toward the accomplishment of their group's goals. Thus, while positive interdependence provides group members with a supportive environment, individual accountability fosters pressure for everyone to live up to their responsibilities to their group.

In teacher-centered environments, peer interaction may often be discouraged, e.g., traditional classroom rules state that students should keep their eyes on their own papers and should not talk to their peers, only to their teachers. Thus, teachers are the center of attention and are authorized to play a multitude of roles which are off limits to students. Of course, playing these roles brings with it many choices for teachers to make. These teacher-only roles include assessing student work, deciding what will be assessed and how the assessment will be done, deciding what will be studied and how it will be studied, reminding students about their tasks, encouraging students to participate in discussions and other activities, asking students questions, keeping track of time, checking that students understand, thanking students, providing help and comfort to students who are having difficulties, and addressing conflicts among students.

In contrast, when students learn via CL, every single one of the above roles can, in coordination with teachers, also be played by students, and the choices involved in playing those roles can be exercised by students. For instance, students can assess each other, although teacher- and self-assessment remain important. Choices involved in peer-assessment include not just deciding on the quality of peers' work, but also choosing how best students can share both their positive and negative feedback with peers, as well as what, if any, steps might be useful after assessments have been delivered, e.g., in the case of positive assessments, students can consider what to do next to continue improving. Another, simpler example of the choices students need to make when making choices that normally fall to teachers surrounds monitoring time constraints. For example, how best can timekeepers encourage groupmates to be more on task so as to finish punctually. Or, in the case of groups finishing too early, what can they do to usefully employ the remaining time.

One misconception about CL arises from an either/or view of learning methods. Just as the teacher-centered / student-centered distinction should be viewed as a continuum, not an either/or dichotomy, with CL, students are not always talking and otherwise communicating with peers while teachers remain silent. Instead, at least three learning modes co-exist: students sometimes work alone, teachers sometimes lecture, show videos, or otherwise take centerstage, and students sometimes engage in peer interaction. Additionally, CL often takes place in collaboration with the other SCL methods discussed in this section, e.g., ER, and a wide variety of choice points can be seen in these collaborations of students and methods. Yet still other SCL methods (e.g., inquiry- and problem-based learning) typically involve students working in CL groups.

6. Multiple Intelligences

Multiple intelligences (MI) (Gardner, 1993) presents another SCL view of education. Indeed, the originator of MI was also a champion of cognitive psychology, in contrast with behaviorism, a view of learning that supports teacher-centered learning (Gardner, 1987). The reason that the word "intelligences" is plural, rather than singular, lies in the belief that multiple ways, eight at present count, exist for humans to be smart. These eight intelligences are verbal/linguistic intelligence (preferring to learn via words and other language forms), logical/mathematical intelligence (preferring to learn with calculations and logic), visual/spatial intelligence (preferring to learn with art and other visuals including graphic organizers), musical/rhythmic intelligence (preferring to

learn with music and rhythm), bodily/kinesthetic intelligence (preferring to learn via hands-on activities, skits, and gestures), naturalist intelligence (preferring to learn by observing, categorizing, being in natural settings, and showing concern for nonhuman animals), intrapersonal intelligence (preferring to learn with time for reflection and planning, and to consider one's strengths and weaknesses), and interpersonal intelligences (preferring to learning in social settings, such as CL).

MI espouses a positive view of education, stating that everyone is smart, and that everyone can become smarter. Each student has their unique intelligences profile, a mix of all the above eight intelligences. Three goals of MI (Armstrong, 2017) advocate that (1) sometimes each student learns in their preferred ways; (2) sometimes each student learns in less preferred ways, allowing them to grow in less preferred intelligences; and (3) students celebrate being able to learn with and from classmates with intelligence profiles that differ from their own. Unfortunately, most instruction and assessment highlight only two intelligences: verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical. To achieve MI's three goals, more choice points are necessary as to how students learn and how they display their learning.

Fortunately, online learning offers many additional choices to students who prefer to learn and to be assessed via a greater variety of intelligences. For example, for topics in Nutrition, in addition to learning via textbook reading and standard lectures and by calculating the mix of nutrients in a particular meal, students can also learn and be assessed via various less-used intelligences (although Armstrong and others do not suggest that every lesson must feature all eight intelligences).

a. Visual/spatial intelligence – videos showing the nutrients being processed and distributed in a human body.
b. Musical/rhythmic intelligence – creating songs that highlight key ideas in nutrition and then performing the songs for others with instruments and movements.
c. Bodily/kinesthetic intelligence – doing role plays that bring to life main points from the curriculum; inventing hand symbols, similar to the heart hand symbol popularized by the musician Taylor Swift.
d. Naturalist intelligence – using double bubble maps – a form of graphic organizer - (El-Muslimah, 2021) to categorize nutrients; in regard to food sources, doing observation of the differences in the lives of hens living in an animal sanctuary and hens living in a large

CAFO - (National Association of Local Boards of Health, 2010) - (Confined Animal Feeding Operation)

e. Interpersonal intelligence – interviewing people with nutrition-linked ailments, such as diabetes; designing a nutrition program that diabetes sufferers are likely to follow. (Note: the sequence of the two activities here follows that recommended by Covey (2004), i.e., before seeking to be understood, first seek to understand.

f. Intrapersonal intelligence – keeping a diary of one's diet (Jimoh et al., 2017) and the nutritional strengths and weaknesses of that diet; reflecting on why the diary writers chose to study nutrition.

7. Service Learning

Language teachers can collaborate with students to reach out beyond their classrooms. One form such outreach can take is known as service learning (Lake & Adinolfi, 2017). Service learning fits with the transformative approach to learning, going back at least to Dewey (1897). It involves the combination of students doing service to others and also learning content and skills relevant to their school curriculum. In the language curricula, this curriculum learning often occurs via the keeping of reflective journals (Lypka, 2018), and teachers can reflect in concert with their students, especially on the learning that takes place in the outreach part of service. Examples of service learning projects include tutoring low achieving younger students, teaching ICT skills to seniors, helping seniors create their memoirs, and encouraging other people the students' age to adopt greener behaviors, such as transitioning toward alternative protein foods, including meats made from cultivated cells of chickens (Good Food Institute, 2021).

Liss (in press) described one especially noteworthy service learning project done by her primary school students who had read the classic work, *Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank, 1947) and other works on the need for tolerance. The students had also experienced first-hand the need for tolerance. Over multiple years, Liss' classes set up a club, Tolerance Kids, which carried out a variety of activities with the goal of overcoming prejudice in its various forms in the school and in the world generally.

The club's most noteworthy project was the Bandage Project (https://www.kcra.com/article/sacramento-students-teach-community-about-anne-frank/29098168#). The project was inspired by students' interest in the Holocaust (Hale, 2020),

i.e., the murder of people in concentration camps by the Nazis during World War II, and all the 11 million people who had lost their lives. The students "wanted to learn not only about the Jews, but the Polish Christians, Jehovah Witnesses, political prisoners, homosexuals, Gypsies and anyone involved**.** Students who never wanted to listen to a teacher, listened. Those who never participated in projects, participated" (Liss, in press). The students learned that 1.5 million children had been killed in the Holocaust. To remember them, the students launched an international appeal to collect 1.5 million bandages. After 11 years, in 2019, on what would have been Anne Frank's 90th birthday, they reached their goal.

How does student choice factor into the Bandages Project? After all, over 11 years, all of Liss' students worked on the same project. Where are the choice points? Yes, the entire class contributed to the same project, but each student could decide how they contributed, e.g., using language skills to communicate with schools in different countries and to publicize the effort. Most often, rather than the entire class doing the same project, students do projects in groups, thereby expanding the range of topics available. What if some students want to do projects in support of controversial causes, e.g., some students support vegan diets, whereas some of their classmates feel such diets lead to ill-health and want to do projects opposing veganism? Fortunately, cases of this sort provide opportunities for students, and their teachers, to develop tolerance for and appreciation of diverse perspectives (Johnson et al., 1996) and the ensuing discussions offer students chances to use language functions related to polite disagreement (Nguyen & Dao, 2021).

Service learning most often takes place in groups and constitutes just one of many forms of group projects. Problem-based learning represents yet another well-known mode of learning in groups (Fard & Vakili, 2018). Skill at cooperative learning, discussed above, is vital to successful completion of group projects regardless of the type of project. Examples of group disfunction were recounted by Ong (personal communication) who, at the time of the writing of this article is about to enter her final year studying Psychology at a well-regarded Asian university. Over her years in secondary and tertiary education, Ong has recounted to her uncle, one of the authors of this paper, an ongoing trail of disappointment in some of her groupmates who fail to enact the cooperative learning principle of individual accountability, i.e., not doing their fair share in the group effort. These disappointments have occurred despite the best efforts of Ong and her more diligent groupmates. Thus, another choice point arises. Rather than leaving the task of motivating students to teachers, in group activities, students must make choices about how to motivate peers. The easier

route involves reporting errant groupmates to teachers, and Ong has, at least once, taken that approach. However, more recently she and other groupmates tried speaking to their groupmate to encourage greater participation, and in the process, perhaps all the group members learned about important choices in life: choices of strategies for motivating others.

8. Thinking Questions

Thinking questions (Bloom et al., 1956), also known as higher-order thinking questions (Setyarini & Ling, 2019), as well as creative/critical thinking questions (Hiler & Paul, 2006), fit well with the theories underlying SCL, because such concepts as social cognition, constructivism, and transformational education (please see the Introduction section of this paper) posit that learning involves so much more than passively receiving information from teachers. Instead, students learn best when they actively process information by applying it to their own interests and needs, as well as those of others. Perhaps the easiest way to understand thinking questions contrasts them with retrieval questions. Retrieval questions ask students to retrieve information that they were previously given, for example, in a textbook or via teacher explanation. In contrast, thinking questions ask students to go beyond the information given (Bruner, 1973).

An example of a text retrieval question might be "What year did Singapore become an independent country," [Note: Singapore had been a British colony and then a part of what is now Malaysia.] when that information can be easily found in students' history textbook, and the teacher has mentioned the year on several occasions. A question that asks students to "go beyond the information given" might be, "In 1963, Singapore joined Malaysia but left after two years. What advantages might Singapore enjoy if it was still a part of Malaysia?"

The central point here lies in the fact that text retrieval questions usually have right/wrong answers, whereas thinking questions can have a number of possible good answers, thus offering students the ability to develop a greater number of possible answers. The quality of answers lies in the explanation given to support the answer. In other words, there can certainly be wrong, or at least partially wrong, answers to thinking questions. Returning to the question in the previous paragraph about Singapore remaining in Malaysia, a wrong answer would be, "If Singapore was still in Malaysia, more mangoes would grow in Malaysia, because 'Malaysia' begins with the letter 'm' and 'mangoes' also begins with 'm'.' "

9. Internet

Use of the internet and related learning tools has increased due to a variety of factors, although access for some students remains minimal or even nonexistent (Jesperson & Dimova, 2021). Such tools, when available, greatly support SCL because language students become much less dependent of teachers for information about so many aspects of their learning, including finding information on topics of interest and learning skills that students deem important. Furthermore, as mentioned in the above section on Multiple Intelligences, the internet allows students to learn in many more ways. They can learn from textual, visual, or multimodal texts, either alone or in collaboration with their peers using online tools such as Padlet.

The internet frees teachers to transition from roles as "sages on stages" in which they feel obligated to dispense information to students who otherwise would likely have great difficulty accessing knowledge. Now, teachers can assume an SCL identity as "guides on the sides." Part of that guidance involves teaching students how to stay safe and find reliable information while they search for information that synchs with their choices (Biletska et al., 2021). Thus, teachers are not abandoning students when encouraging them to exercise choice. Choice involves not just choosing what topics to search about; it also involves how students share their ideas with others, and how they receive and respond to feedback from others. For instance, it has now become so much easier for students to create videos (McNelly, 2021).

10. Choices for Teachers

SCL represents but one of many aspects of the overall paradigm shift in society, a shift toward greater power to people at the lower end of the status hierarchy. Thus, while in teacher-centered learning, it might seem that teachers rule their classrooms, in education institutions, teachers are more like the serfs than the dukes. Even the idea that once teachers close their classroom doors, they possess complete control (Rothman, 2009) is, rightly or wrongly, being challenged by attempts at greater teacher accountability (Rahmatollahi & Zenouzagh, 2021), including feedback from students (Röhl, 2021). For instance, although teachers in many countries have university degrees and many years of day-to-day teaching experience, their knowledge is often ignored in favor of dictates by people from universities and research institutes, many of whom have little, no, or from-many-years-ago classroom experience.

Indeed, the term "teacher-proof materials" (Priestley & Xenofontos, 2020) has arisen, i.e., materials with which anyone can walk off the street and teach effectively. Thus, teachers are seen as technicians, not engineers. Another instance of teachers being controlled, rather than controlling, can be seen in an anecdote shared by Warschauer (personal communication). He and other experts were in the office of the Minister of Education of a country when the Minister pointed to the clock on the wall and confidently asserted, "It's 10am now. I can tell you what page in their textbook every English teacher in my country is on."

Others have strongly argued for a more powerful role for teachers as decision makers and as researchers whose research-based knowledge bestows upon them greater power to choose (Ulla et al., 2017). Sahlberg (2021), writing about the role of teachers in his native Finland, a country that has attracted thousands of visits by educators from other countries seeking to learn from Finland's successes in education, aggressively refuted calls for the teacher-proofing of education. Instead, Sahlberg asserted that teacher choice is crucial in the Finnish education model. What underlies the role of teachers in this model? First, entry to the teaching profession is highly selective. Second, teacher development at the pre-service and in-service stages of their careers receives priority. Third, teachers have a great deal of autonomy, i.e., choice in the design and delivery of their lessons. No teacher-proofing in Finland.

Just as working in groups of peers provides students with greater power to choose, so too does teacher-teacher collaboration enhance teachers' power to choose. Villavicencio et al., (2021) and Giordano (2020) posited that education improves when teachers metaphorically "leave their doors open" by sharing and cooperating with peers, thereby increasing their power to choose. Even more impressive are suggestions that teachers increase their efficacy by choosing to collaborate with their students on curriculum design (e.g., Blithe & Fidelibus, 2021). Thus, it appears that by cooperating with each other, teachers and students can increase each other's power to choose. In other words, just as teacher-centered / student-centered should be seen as a continuum, rather than a dichotomy, teachers and students are not competing with each other in a zero sum struggle for power and choice. Instead, by cooperating with each other, both parties increase the power of each. Furthermore, as teachers better appreciate a greater distribution of power between themselves, on one hand, and administrators and university researchers, on the other hand, teachers may gain an increased appreciation of a greater distribution of power between themselves and their students.

11. Encouraging Students to Make Choices

As noted earlier in this article, despite efforts to provide students with choices, students may sometimes be reluctant to exercise the choice options available to them. The authors of this article have often heard their students say, "Teacher, you decide, please." Furthermore, students may misinterpret teachers' availing them of choices, e.g., when teachers say, "What would you like to study?" or "How would you like to be assessed?" Such offers by teachers to students to exercise choice may be interpreted as teachers being unprepared or disinterested, when in reality, teachers are showing students that their knowledge, experience, and confidence are so strong that the teachers are willing and able to adjust to student choices or at the very least to dialogue with students.

One idea to increase student willingness to make choices involves addressing the culture of the classroom and, perhaps more fundamentally of the larger society. For example, researchers have identified four main parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent, and neglectful (Garcia & Serra, 2019). The two most common styles – authoritarian and authoritative – present a strong contrast as to the amount of choice granted to children. In authoritarian parenting, little choice is granted, while in authoritative, children have choices which are guided and monitored. Thus, authoritarian more closely resembles teacher-centered learning, and authoritative bears a greater resemblance to student-centered learning. As a result, when educators and families interact, it might be useful to help families gain increased appreciation of authoritative parenting practices (Epstein et al., 2018).

As discussed in the section on Thinking Questions, certain question types provide students with more choices. In contrast to retrieval questions, thinking questions give students more choices, because there can be multiple possible good quality responses. However, due to the complexity of thinking questions, student anxiety may increase. To address this potential obstacle to student willingness to choose, a supportive classroom atmosphere becomes instrumental (Richardson & Mishra, 2018). Making decisions involves taking risks. If the choices made by students are later labeled to be ill-advised, students could be criticized, whereas when choices are the exclusive province of teachers, the teachers are the only recipients of blame; classrooms are the teachers' classrooms; students bear no responsibility.

As discussed earlier, cooperative learning (CL) provides more choice points for students, because it expands the number of roles that students play. One CL principle, group autonomy

(Jacobs et al., in press) also support students making choices. Group autonomy encourages groups to stand on their own without over-reliance on teachers, just as the CL principle of individual accountability, encourages each individual student to do their fair share in the group. Two related strategies for encouraging group autonomy are TTT and 3 + 1 B4 T. TTT stands for Team Then Teacher, i.e., students should ask their groupmates for help before asking their teachers. 3 + 1 B4 T extends TTT, i.e., in groups of four, students first ask their three groupmates. If none of them can help, they ask another group of classmates, i.e., the 1 in 3 + 1, before (B4) asking a teacher.

Perhaps more than strategies, students may become more motivated to make their own decisions when they feel passionate about what they are doing. Humanistic Psychology (Rogers, 1969) emphasizes this point, as does CL with its principle of positive interdependence, i.e., that everyone in the group is important; therefore, students are learning not just for themselves but also for the group. The CL principle of cooperation as a value extends this learn-for-others motivation further, as it extends positive interdependence, the sink-or-swim-together feeling, beyond the small group to the entire class, school, community, country, and world, e.g., students learn to disagree politely not just so that intra-group conflicts can be resolved productively but so that the choices students and others make regarding conflicts on larger scales can generate more light and less heat.

Another way CL can encourage students to make choices when they have opportunities to do so is that they can discuss with each other the pros and cons of choice options. For instance, if students can choose the due date for an assignment, points in favor of a later due date include more time to work together and to revise their work, more time to put the work aside and return to it with fresh eyes. Points for an earlier due date include avoiding procrastination as predicted in Parkinson's Law (Parkinson, 1955), i.e., that any task will take as much time as is given to complete it. Also, finishing an assignment earlier allows more time for other pursuits and lessens time conflicts with other assignments. Group deliberations on choices is particularly appropriate when decisions affect an entire group or class.

12. Conclusion

This article has advocated that students be given more choices in harmony with student-centered learning and an overall paradigm shift toward more decentralized power distribution in society. Constraints on choices were also considered, as well as ideas for encouraging students to make

choices when they are available to them. Table 1 summarizes some of the ideas that support greater student choice and tools these ideas afford.

Table 1 – Ideas for Providing Greater Student Choice

Ideas Supporting Student Choice	**How The Idea Supports Student Choice**
Extensive reading	Students can choose what they read and what if anything they do after reading.
Cooperative learning	Students take on many roles in their groups. With those roles come many choices.
Multiple intelligences	When students use a wider variety of intelligences, they have more choices to make,
Service Learning	Service learning and other types of projects afford students a greater variety of choices.
Thinking Questions	As opposed to retrieval questions, thinking questions move away from right/wrong answers, thereby opening up many answer choices, although answers need proper reasoned support.
Internet and other IT affordances	IT lessens student dependence on teachers as information sources, as well as providing more choices as to how to share ideas with others.
More choices for teachers	Democratizing the overall education system can provide more choices both for teachers and students; cooperation between teachers and students can support this democratization.

The topic of expanding student choice can be a rich source of ideas for future work, including conducting research of various types, theorizing, connecting to various trends and theories, and trialing and sharing implementation strategies. It also fits well with overall changes in society, changes which carry with them the possibility of a more participatory, conscious, harmonious, and effective world.

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