

# INCORPORATING STUDENT VOICE AND CHOICE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING





Providing opportunities for student voice and choice empowers students, makes them more invested in their learning, and teaches them how to advocate for themselves in their learning. Meaningful learning experiences can be developed by involving students and encouraging them to share their interests and perspectives. This resource provides 10 easy ideas for incorporating student voice and choice into many learning environments.

Incorporating Student Voice and Choice in Teaching And Learning  
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## When planning to include more opportunities for student voice and choice in physical and health education classes:

- start with a few structured choices and gradually introduce more choice and autonomy for students over time
- teach students how to make choices to support their needs and provide feedback on the effectiveness of student choices
- ensure choices provide an optimal level of challenge and learning to meet the needs of all students
- offer different choices to different students within the same class
- use opportunities for student choice to:
  - engage students
  - promote autonomy and students taking charge of their learning and learning environment
  - support student competence and connectedness
- use a variety of feedback methods to learn how students are responding to the choices being offered and to engage students in identifying the choices they would like to have available in class.

### 10 Ideas to Incorporate Student Voice and Choice

1. Choice of warm up
2. Choice of equipment
3. Choice days
4. Choice in level of challenge
5. Choice in type of competition
6. Choice of learning focus
7. Choice of leadership opportunities
8. Choice in goal setting
9. Choice of assessment
10. Choice of changerooms/clothing

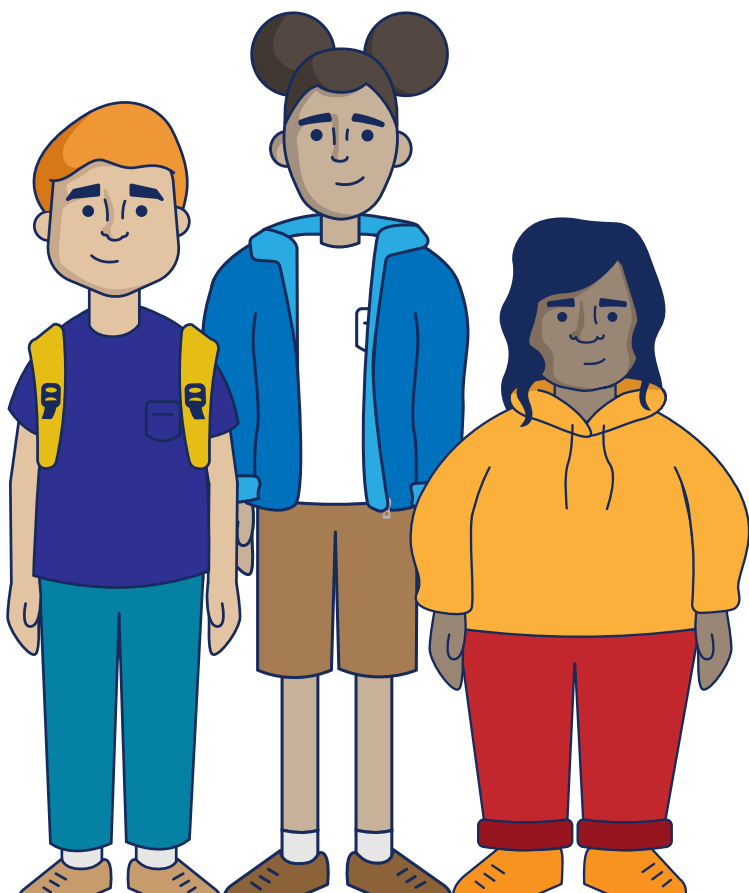




## 1. Choice of warm up

Consider warming up for a predetermined amount of time instead of a specific number of laps/repetitions to allow students to tailor warm up activities to their needs and avoid being on display (e.g., last to complete five laps).

- When completing laps to warm up, students can choose how they would like to move on their feet around the activity area to increase heart and breathing rate (e.g., speed walk, jog, run, skip, shuffle, dance) for a predetermined length of time.
- Introduce 3-4 variations of a warm up exercise with different degrees of difficulty. Students can choose the variation they would like to complete. For example, push-ups:
  - slowly lower body to ground from a plank position
  - full push up from kneeling position
  - lower body to ground from plank position and push up from kneeling position
  - full push up in plank position
  - spiderman push up (bring thigh to elbow while doing a full push up)
- Post/project a visual that includes elements of an effective warm up (e.g., [Let's Warm Up](#) poster, students can choose two activities from each column/component to warm up, or [Darebee](#), students can choose one warm up poster).
  - Suggestion: use a strategy to gather student feedback (e.g., magnetic board) about the effectiveness of their choices in warming up the body for active participation.
- Students can design or research best warm up practices for a specific sport or physical activity they enjoy and share with classmates.





## 2. Choice of equipment

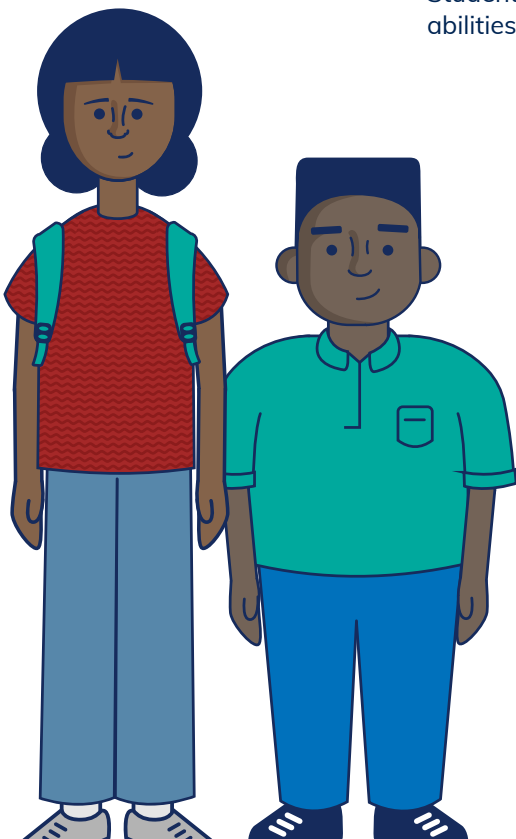
Consider the type and kind of equipment that will best support individual learning needs and abilities.

- When learning a specific skill (e.g., leading overhand pass) in a specific sport (e.g., football) students can choose from a variety of balls (e.g., regulation, junior or mini football).
  - Suggestion: prior to the learning activity, use a strategy to gather student feedback (e.g., four corners) on the types of balls they would like to have available for skill practice.
- When building cardiovascular endurance, students can choose the equipment they would like to use (e.g., jump rope, stationary bike, basketball, soccer ball) to move at a moderate to vigorous level for the predetermined length of time.
- Begin each class with a 5-minute 'skill builder' challenge. The teacher (in collaboration with students) identifies a skill. Students can choose the equipment they would like to use to practice and improve their performance of the skill.

### Examples:

- Skill - volleying  
Equipment - volleyball, mini-volleyball, hacky sack, soccer ball
- Skill - juggling  
Equipment - scarves, bean bags, tennis balls, sticks
- Skill - jump rope  
Equipment - individual jump rope, long jump rope, rope taped to stick for helicopter jumps, jump bands, elastic for Chinese garter jumps

- Identify the goal of a game or challenge (e.g., send an object to the target in the fewest number of tries) and equipment available (e.g., tennis racquet and ball, volleyball, disc, soccer ball, foxtail). Set a rule that each piece of equipment may only be used once. Students can choose the order in which to use the equipment that best matches their abilities and will allow them to achieve the goal (e.g., [Dude Perfect All Sports Golf Battle](#))





### 3. Choice days

Consider offering choice days once a week, once a month, or once every couple months.

- Offer 'Free Friday' when students can choose the movement activity in which they would like to participate. Start by offering a choice of 2-3 activities (e.g., double-ball, basketball, HIIT workout) and progress to student-suggested activities, each with a designated space for safe participation in the activity area based on the number of students participating and equipment required.
- Schedule 'Hot Topics in Health' classes, during which students can choose a health-related current event or health issue in the community to learn more about, discuss and debate.
  - Suggestion: use a strategy to gather student feedback (e.g., suggestion box) to determine the topics to be explored.
- Coordinate with teacher(s) and community members to offer a menu of physical activity options during a specific time/period of the day for all students in the school. Students can sign up in advance to choose the physical activity they would like to experience.
- Share a choice board, bingo, or tic-tac-toe to describe different activities that support the same learning goal. Allow students to choose the activity that best supports their learning needs.

#### Examples:

**Learning goal:**  
improve hand-eye coordination

**Directions:**  
choose 3+ activities to complete in class today to support your learning and increase confidence

**Choice board activities:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Juggle individually or with a partner 2, 3, or more objects</li> <li>2. Hockey stick and ball challenges</li> <li>3. Stones in a fist game</li> <li>4. Ring the hoop game</li> <li>5. Paddle and ball challenges</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Wall ball toss including corner challenge</li> <li>7. Tennis ball challenges</li> <li>8. Spider dribble with ball of choice</li> <li>9. Design your own coordination challenge</li> </ol> |
|---|---|

**Learning goal:**  
improve competence and confidence playing territorial games with long-handled implements (e.g., floor hockey, lacrosse, ringette, shinny, field hockey)

**Directions:**  
choose one activity to complete today to support your learning and increase confidence

1. Play a game with classmates. First half with person-to-person defense, second half with zone defense.
2. Take on the role of coach providing team strategies and tactical feedback for players.
3. Choose a complex skill needed for successful game play and use a variety of strategies (e.g., peer feedback, video analysis with performance cues, skill practice with different conditions) to improve.
4. Play a small-sided game with classmates adjusting the size of the playing field and rules to meet your learning needs.





## 4. Choice in Level of Challenge

Consider how to provide the optimal level of challenge (e.g., just beyond current ability but not so hard as to get discouraged) for individual and small groups of students.

- As students work to improve a movement skill, they can choose and work through different levels of challenge posted in the activity area. For example:
  - Can you perform the skill...
    - when your heart rate is high?
    - when you have to go fast?
    - when you have to change direction?
    - when you have to compete against someone else?
    - when you have to do a different skill first?
- When participating in low organized activities, students can choose the level of intensity of play to challenge their abilities. For example, play ball tag where partners throw and catch a ball a few meters apart. On a signal the partner with the ball tries to tag their partner with their hand while carrying the ball. On the next signal, partners return to throw and catch. Students can talk with their partner and choose if they would like to speed walk, jog, or sprint during the tag part of the game.
- When participating in fitness stations, provide two or more activities students can choose at each station. For example, to increase flexibility choose 'this' - hold a deep squat position with feet flat on the floor or 'that' - hold a back bridge position. In this example, the two activities develop flexibility and mobility in different parts of the body. The choices could also focus on different ways to increase flexibility in the same part of the body (e.g., hip mobility with butterfly stretch or kneeling lunge stretch) or provide variations in degree of difficulty for the same activity (e.g., shoulder mobility with shoulder rotations in tabletop position on hands and knees or in front plank position).
- Invite students to suggest rules changes to make a game more challenging or enjoyable (e.g., fewer people on each team, larger play area, play with four teams instead of two, add a crease in front of the goal, play with a different object, everyone on the team must receive a pass before attacking the goal). Incorporate any possible changes the next day.
  - Suggestion: use a strategy to gather student feedback (e.g., exit slip) about potential rules changes.





## 5. Choice in Type of Competition

Consider how and when competition can enhance student motivation, engagement and learning.

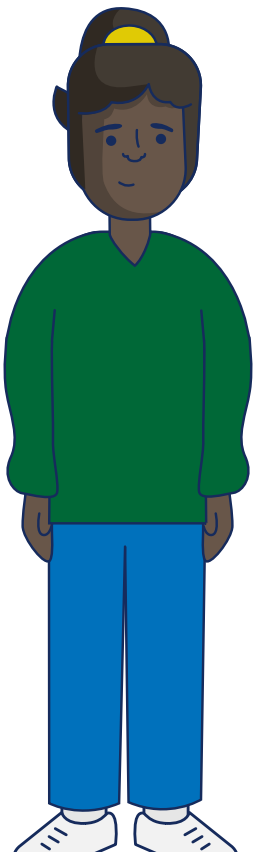
- When playing games, students can choose to play with others who would like to keep score, or with students who do not want to keep score (shifting the focus to participation).
- When practicing a skill (e.g., classic cross-country skiing) students can choose practice activities that are competitive (e.g., timed races on different tracks) or cooperative (e.g., working together to improve shifting weight from one ski to the other during stride).
- When playing small-sided games, indicate varying degrees of competition from one field or court to the next (e.g., students who are ready and interested in playing intensely and keeping score start on court 1; students who are ready to play with effort but want support in learning the game as they play, which may include a second attempt to serve, pass, or shoot start on court 4)
  - Suggestion: use a strategy to gather student feedback (e.g., survey) to learn about the level of competition students prefer for upcoming learning activities.



## 6. Choice of Learning Focus

Consider different ways students can achieve a learning goal that appeals to their interests, learning styles, abilities, goals, and background.

- When learning about activities to promote holistic well-being, students can choose one station activity in which to participate (e.g., guided meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga)
  - Suggestion: use a strategy to gather student feedback (e.g., interest inventory or ranking scale) to learn about the types of wellness station activities in which students would like to participate.
- When learning a specific skill (e.g., partner juggling), students can choose the instructional strategy to best support learning. For example, direct instruction (teacher or video instructor), or video self assessment, or cooperative learning in a group of 4-6 students.
- When learning tactics and strategies used in a specific games category (e.g., attacking open space in net/wall games), students can choose to play one of three available games. All games in the example below can be played on a badminton court with net:
  - Takraw, played with a takraw ball or other small sized ball struck with the foot
  - Tennikoit, played with a rubber ring or quoit thrown and caught with hand
  - Badminton, played with shuttles struck with a racquet
- Throughout the year/semester when exploring components of health-related fitness and their connection to enhanced movement experiences, students can choose activities to achieve their self-selected goals. For example, students explore and analyze the impact of flexibility through participation in yoga, Inuit side reach and high-kick games, and throwing and batting in striking and fielding games. Then a student with a personal goal to improve flexibility chooses the best activities to develop the range of motion of the targeted joint(s).







## 7. Choice of Leadership Opportunities

Consider the kinds of opportunities that will allow students to practice and develop leadership skills, self-confidence and empathy, to respond to changing and challenging situations, build relationships, communicate, and think creatively.

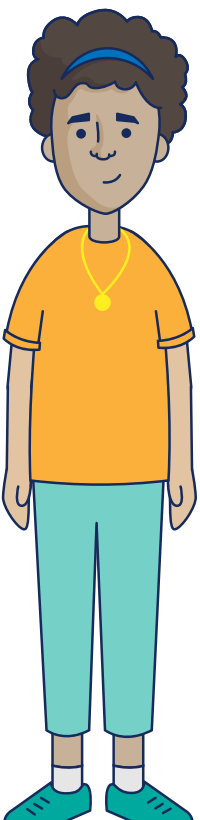
- Plan for 'Share Days' throughout the year when a student or group of students will demonstrate or lead classmates in a warm up, skill, or other movement activity in which they have expertise and experience.
- When creating a game, movement challenge or physical activity break, students can choose the target audience (e.g., seniors, students in grades 1-2, students in grade 6 at a feeder school, parents) and then lead their created activity with the target audience.
- Secondary students can join elementary Physical Education classes at scheduled times (e.g., once a week, once a month, twice a year) to lead a movement activity (e.g., design an obstacle course or large group game), model movement skills (e.g., throwing and catching partners), or provide mentorship for social skills.
  - Suggestion: use a strategy to gather student feedback (think-pair-share) to learn what students already know and would like to know before serving as leaders with younger students.



## 8. Choice in Goal Setting

Consider how best to support students in setting specific goals and in developing the skills (e.g., motivation, resilience, self-awareness, determination) required to achieve goals.

- Based on feedback from the teacher, peers, or video self-analysis, students can choose a short-term goal to improve performance over the next few classes. The goal can be related to individual or team performance in an activity, game, or sport.
- After exploring components of health-related fitness (e.g., cardiovascular endurance, muscular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility) throughout the year/semester, students can choose a goal to improve one component of health-related fitness that is personally relevant and use fitness principles of training (e.g., overload, progression, specificity, reversibility, recovery) to design a plan to improve.
- When learning about a specific game or sport (e.g., volleyball), students can choose which skill (e.g., serving, passing, setting, attacking, blocking) to develop and set a goal to improve performance. Students who have chosen the same skill (e.g., serving) can work cooperatively together to identify performance cues, analyze performance, and practice to achieve individual learning goals (e.g., making 90% of jump float serves during game play; serving 8 of 10 underhand serves over the net; consistently serving overhand to a position target chosen by coach/teammate).
  - Suggestion: use a strategy to gather student feedback (e.g., storytelling) to learn about the experience of working together to achieve a movement goal.
- After learning about and participating in a variety of movement activities to develop components of skill-related fitness (e.g., agility, balance, coordination, reaction time, power, speed), students design a movement challenge focused on one component of skill-related fitness they feel is a personal area of strength. Then, share all the student-designed movement challenges with the class (and possibly with students in a different class or school working on the same project). From the shared movement challenges, students can choose one challenge to develop a component of skill-related fitness they feel is a personal area of growth and set a goal to practice and improve. Where possible, students can connect with the creator of the movement challenge for support in achieving their goal.





## 9. Choice of Assessment

Consider how assessment opportunities and criteria are authentic and meaningful for students and will improve learning.

- Provide a variety of ways students can show what they know and understand (e.g., video, conversation with teacher, performance analysis, peer coaching) related to the same learning goal.
  - Suggestion: use a strategy to gather student feedback (e.g., student-teacher conference or focus groups) about the number and kinds of options to provide that would engage and not overwhelm students in showing what they know.
- When learning about a specific sport (e.g., cricket) or sports within a games category (e.g., striking and fielding games) students can choose if they would like their assessment to be focused on skill (e.g., performance of bowling during game play) or tactics (e.g., working together with teammates to cover space).
- Share assessment criteria focused on the development of personally relevant and student-selected goals to improve functional fitness, as opposed to completing and translating results from fitness tests into percentage grades. Students can choose the area of focus for their goal to show understanding. Assessment criteria can include:
  - I can identify a specific and personally relevant goal to improve functional fitness.
  - I can apply 3 or more principles of training to describe how to progress to achieve my goal.
  - I can explain personally relevant and holistic benefits of improving my functional fitness.
- Co-create assessment criteria with students that allows for choice:
  - Set three assessment criteria for a learning task. Two are required for all and students can choose the third criteria.
  - Design a rubric with a choice option where students can propose the criteria they would like to add to continue to develop and challenge their abilities in a context that matters to them. For example:

**Team strategies and tactics in net/wall games example:**

**Level 1:**

We are having trouble playing the game. Our current level of skill is making it challenging to maintain a rally. We are not moving much when we don't have the object. We are not enjoying the game, yet!

**Level 2:**

We are having success with some (2+) offensive and defensive tactics for the game, but not consistently and not always at the right time.

**Level 3:**

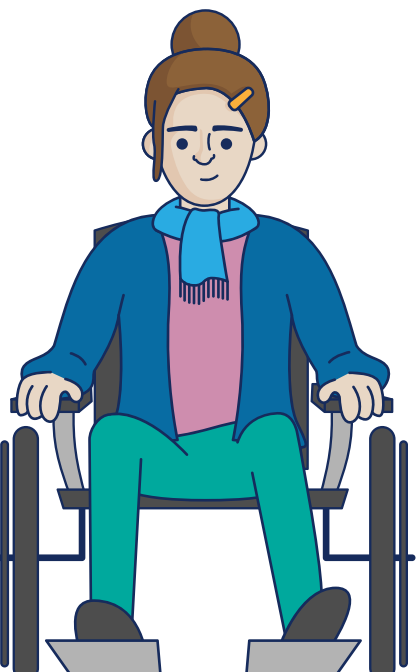
We can regularly execute most (5+) offensive and defensive tactics and can suggest new tactics to improve our team's performance.

**Level 4:**

...and we can reorganize and keep playing well when the players and/or rules change.

**Level 5:**

Criteria proposed and negotiated by student to extend learning and increase personal challenge.





## 10. Choice of Changerooms / Clothing

Consider why there is a requirement for students to change for Physical Education classes and creative ways these requirements may be met by all students.

- Identify a variety of spaces (e.g., changerooms, bathroom stalls, private and non-gendered bathrooms) from which students can choose to change for class.
  - Suggestion: use a strategy to gather student feedback (e.g., journal/reflection) about how effective the changing spaces are at helping students feel safe.
- Provide a choice for students not to change for class. Discuss together the requirements for safe participation in movement activities (e.g., proper footwear, clothing free of belts and chains), why these requirements must still be met, and how it can be done without changing in a changeroom.
- Collaborate with students to design elements of changing spaces (e.g., organization of furniture, visual and text images posted on walls, rules and expectations) that are inclusive, inviting and safe for all students.





# Creating a Class Social Contract:

## Steps

### Step 1:

Pre-determine a means (e.g., poster paper, markers; technology - [Padlet](#), [Pear Deck](#)) for students to share their voices and a means to retain their thoughts.

### Step 2:

Prompt students with 3-4 questions that will support meaningful discussion about what they value in their class learning experiences. As students discuss in small groups, have them record the common themes of each student's responses. This begins to bring to light common themes about student values.

For Physical Education and Health Education questions could include:

- What motivates you to actively engage in this class?
- What do you need from each other to be successful while enjoying your time in this class?
- What do you need from the teacher to maximize your sense of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness while in this class?
- What does showing support for others look like and sound like in this class?
- How do you want me (teacher) to treat you?
- How do you want to treat each other?
- How do you think I want to be treated?
- What will it look like and sound like in our learning space when everyone is included?

### Step 3:

Come together as a class and have each group present the common themes from their discussion.

### Step 4:

Ask students to identify common values/themes present in all group discussions and synthesize them to be the guiding values of the class.

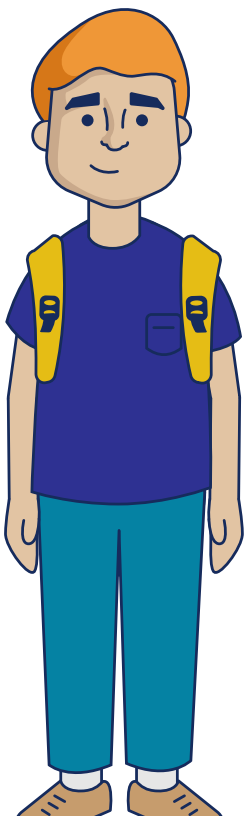
- Encourage strength-based language focused on what we will do instead of what we will not do.

### Step 5:

Based on the shared values, empower students to develop rules that everyone in the class can agree upon, teachers can ask questions such as:

- What are some rules you think are non-negotiable?
- What are some rules you think I (teacher) will say we must have in place?
- Who should be responsible for ensuring the rules are followed?
- If we are going to be a supportive community of learners, how can we support each other even when a rule is broken?

**Time to Implement:**  
30-40 minutes



# Creating a Class Social Contract:

## Steps

### Step 6:

To establish student informed consequences for violations of the contract rules, teachers can ask questions such as:

- How could we handle it when a rule is broken?
- If this is a rule ... then what would be an appropriate consequence?
- Should there be different consequences for breaking different rules?
- Who should be responsible for providing and monitoring consequences?

### Step 7:

Compile and synthesize student responses to create the class social contract.

### Step 8:

When the social contract is finalized, encourage commitment with the addition of student signatures, then post or distribute.

### Step 9:

Refer to the social contract frequently throughout the year. For example:

- before game play or group work
- after a holiday or break in learning
- when learning is moving to a different space (outdoors or community facility instead of gymnasium or classroom)
- before a learning task you expect will be challenging for students
- when revisions become necessary.

Looking for more resources about student-centered learning?  
Visit [www.phecanada.ca](http://www.phecanada.ca).

