

## Student voices – an underutilized quality input in school education in Sri Lanka

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Over the past decades education has been subjected to increasing pressure to conform to market forces. As a result all over the world there have been several education reforms. In this Endeavour educational policy makers have focused on teachers, administrators, parents and even politician as the main stakeholders and sought their views. On the other hand, students who are the most important client and educational consumer have not been consulted and sadly neglected.

However, in more recent years there have been attempts in the west to involve students in school improvement. Empowered student voice in educational reform is increasingly identified as critical to the successful implementation of specific academic programs and projects. (Ericson and Ellett, 2002; Wilson and Corbett, 2001). These studies have shown that students are most likely to be engaged in learning when they are active and given some choice and control over the learning process. Yet, in Sri Lanka this quality input continues to be under utilized.

Based on a data base of 'student voices' in Sri Lanka, this paper challenges the traditional view that the Sri Lankan student is passive, exam oriented and waiting to be filled with facts. On the contrary as one student claimed. 'Students are trapped in the school and then in the tuition class' The available data indicate that there are similarities between the Sri Lankan students vision of a school they like and those of the rest of the world. Thus like in other countries where student voice has been infused into educational planning, research, instruction and evaluation, Sri Lanka should also exploit the possibility of utilizing this quality input in education.

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