

## AGENCY

**"highly engaging environments often promote empowerment because they focus on student agency and ownership"**

- DR JOHN SPENCER

Learner agency is connected to a student's belief in their ability to succeed. Conceptualized by Bandura in social cognitive theory, agency "enable[s] people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times" (Bandura 2001). Learners with agency use their own initiative and will, and take responsibility and ownership of their learning. They direct their learning with a strong sense of identity and self-belief, and in conjunction with others, thereby building a sense of community and awareness of the opinions, values and needs of others.



Students take initiative, express interest and wonderings, make choices and are aware of their learning goals. They are actively engaged, and monitor and adjust their learning as needed. Students offer feedback to others and consult on decisions that affect them. In school, students take responsibility for their learning and collaborate with teachers and other students to plan, present and assess learning needs. Teachers recognize students' capabilities through listening, respecting and responding to their ideas. They make thoughtful considerations and decisions with an emphasis on relationships, dialogue and respect for one another. Efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their "capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura 1997). This belief is integrally connected to agency because the stronger the sense of self-efficacy, the greater likelihood that the individual will exercise agency (Bandura 1997). Self-efficacy influences the choices students are confident in making, which, in turn, influences the degree of ownership and impact they have in their lives." (From: 'The Learner' IBO 2018 Pg 1-2)

At ISU we fully embrace the value of promoting agency in order to enable our students to be successful in an ever changing world or in the words of Bandura in his research paper ‘to play a part in their self development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times’ (Bandura 2001). There are three aspects to Agency: voice, choice and ownership. Below are some of the ways that we support learner agency and build self-efficacy at ISU:

- **VOICE:** Actively listening to students’ opinions, wonderings, perspectives and aspirations to extend student thinking and action through student surveys and student council among other opportunities. Getting input from students on planning and taking action on student suggestions. This connects to the UN Convention on Rights of the Child. Article 12 states: “Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times.”
- **CHOICE:** Allowing students choice about where to learn, how to learn and what area of learning to explore, for example through iTime, passion projects and wellbeing workshops. This happens in the context of clear goals and structured reflection on how the choices they made contributed to their learning.
- **OWNERSHIP:** Getting student input into the learning spaces and into classroom routines. Creating a learning environment where students can reflect on their thinking and learning; where they can set their own learning goals and success criteria, and monitor and adjust their learning against them. With schedules that build in time for reflection on successes and ways to improve.

Collaboration and partnerships between teachers, students and parents in learning enables a continuous discussion around learning and the whole child. Different perspectives, strengths and interests are valued in analysing learning and creating a varied and culturally sensitive curriculum. Change towards responsive and inclusive education is challenging and requires the support of the whole community to keep the vision alive, help recognize and celebrate successes and unearth misconceptions and assumptions, ultimately to improve learning for all.

### Partnership

You may find it helpful to consider the following reflective questions:

1. Recognise the diversity within your own family. How can this be viewed as a gift and opportunity?
2. In which ways could you support your child’s personal learning journey?
3. In which ways could you support the schools journey towards inclusion?

#### CITATIONS:

Bandura, A. 2001. Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. Annual Review of Psychology. Vol 52, number 1. Pp 1–26. Bandura, A. 1997. Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. New York, NY, USA. WH Freeman and Company.