

  
**Education Review**      **Reseñas Educativas**  
**Resenhas Educativas**

August 20, 2025

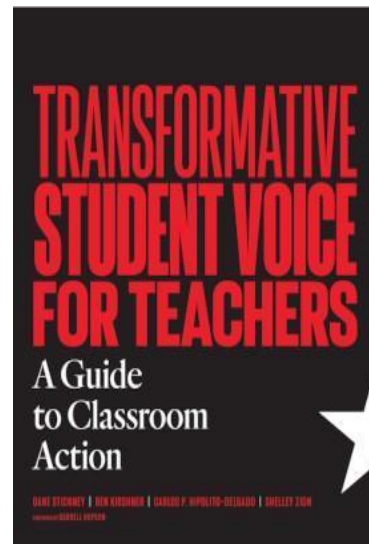
ISSN 1094-5296

**Stickney, D., Kirshner, B., Hipolito-Delgado, C. P., & Zion, S. (2025). *Transformative student voice for teachers: A guide to classroom action*. Harvard Education Press.**

211 pp.

ISBN 978-1-68253-985-9

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*Transformative Student Voice for Teachers* arrives at a moment when student voice is being elevated in different ways. For example, in March 2025, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) hosted its first-ever Student Summit, inviting more than one hundred students from forty high schools to participate in policy-oriented conversations. Students spoke candidly about their experiences with mental health, school discipline, college and career preparation, and how to make their school environments more inclusive. For those invited to attend, the event was no doubt powerful; their insights were slated to inform future recommendations to the State Board. As State Superintendent Dr. Tony Sanders noted, “[Student] voices shape better policies, stronger classrooms, and more meaningful learning.” (2025) For those watching from the outside, it marked a hopeful step toward more student-centered educational practices in Illinois.

But what about the voices of those not invited to attend? And what happens after a one-day summit ends? What becomes of the conversations once the students return to their schools and the adults resume their roles? *Transformative Student Voice for Teachers* offers a compelling answer.

The authors of this text do not simply argue for student voice as a symbolic gesture. Transformative Student Voice (TSV) aims to empower students to identify problems, collect data, and speak directly to decision-makers in an effort to influence change in policies that directly affect students and their peers. One hopes that this text offers educators a step-by-step framework for cultivating agency in ways that are ongoing, institutionalized, and capable of shaping policy from the classroom outward.

Conerty, J. J. (2025, August 20). Review of *Transformative student voice for teachers: A guide to classroom action* by D. Stickney, B. Kirshner, C. P. Hipolito-Delgado & S. Zion. *Education Review*, 32.  
<https://doi.org/10.14507/er.v32.4189>

The book is a creative collaboration among four authors, who bring a wide range of experiences to the table, from classroom teaching to school counseling to academic research on student engagement. Their collective expertise results in a work that is both practically grounded and conceptually rich; readers benefit from their fluency in both pedagogical language and scholarly rigor.

Early in the text, the authors distinguish between the broader concept of Transformative Student Voice (TSV) and the specific curriculum they developed, what they have named Critical Civic Inquiry (CCI). TSV encompasses schoolwide practices that center student voices. CCI is a student-driven action research model that functions within that broader structure of guiding student inquiry, data collection, analysis, and advocacy. Understanding TSV as a superstructure and CCI as one of its key tools helps educators implement the work in their own schools.

Organized into five major sections and 17 chapters, the book begins with identity and trust before progressing toward public-facing advocacy. Each chapter concludes with clearly distilled summaries, anecdotes from practitioners, guiding questions, and cautions about common missteps. Real-world examples throughout help bring the concepts to life, and a particularly helpful visual metaphor at the end of each chapter—a game board—helps readers situate their current practice within the larger arc of the TSV and CCI process. This structure makes the book accessible to early-career educators while still offering depth for veterans.

One of the text's great strengths is its insistence that educators begin by examining their own roles, privileges, and positionality. The early chapters guide readers through this “unlearning” process and provide multiple models for establishing classroom community through collaboratively developed group agreements. These frameworks emphasize shared power and build trust.

TSV is highly adaptable. It can function as a standalone course, a unit within an existing class, or a student-led club. Across all formats, the focus remains on lived experience: students identify a pressing issue, gather and analyze data, and craft a narrative to share with school leaders or other stakeholders. As the authors observe, “When youth can identify and address the root causes of problems, their advocacy is likely to be more successful in addressing their identified problem” (p. 62). They stress the importance of selecting issues with immediacy and resonance: “like transportation issues making students tardy, the effects of a splintered school, feelings of exclusion at their school, or political barriers for undocumented students. And it should also have a close impact either on the students themselves or on the people they care about” (p. 56).

A full chapter is devoted to helping students craft the story they want to tell. This framing acknowledges that students often enter the process with a desired outcome in mind, such as equitable access to meals or transportation, and must shape their inquiry accordingly. The authors are explicit in naming the role that bias can play in research design and interpretation, though that discussion might have benefited from earlier treatment. As they write, “While it is important for researchers to not falsify

or ignore data, we believe that youth benefit from having a clear agenda or stance in their research (what some might consider bias)” (p. 111).

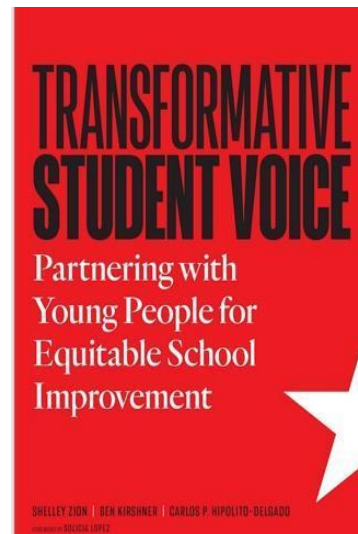
One limitation of the text is its brevity in addressing the reality that not all TSV efforts result in policy change. The book includes strategies for preparing students to navigate difficult conversations with administrators or school boards, but it stops short of fully exploring the emotional and practical fallout when change does not materialize. A deeper engagement with that possibility would better equip educators to guide students through both the promise and the disappointment that this work can entail.

Still, the book offers clear, field-tested guidance. It is especially useful for those who teach teachers, such as faculty in schools of education or leaders of professional learning communities. While individual teachers may find inspiration reading it alone, I recommend reading it in community to leverage multiple teacher perspectives to develop initial ideas, anticipate roadblocks, and reflect on the opportunities this work can create.

That said, implementing this work in a constrained or unsupportive school environment would be difficult. While teachers acting alone could lead TSV efforts, doing so may place them in a precarious position especially if administrators perceive the work as a challenge to their authority or institutional priorities. This risk makes it all the more important for school leaders to be informed about TSV. Whether implemented through a class, a unit, or a club, these efforts should not come as a surprise to school leaders.

The book is also part of a larger effort. A companion volume, *Transformative Student Voice: Partnering with Young People for Equitable School Improvement*, was released the same year and is aimed at school leaders. While I have not reviewed it in full, it appears to carry the same frameworks into administrative practice, which could be helpful to administrators either in training or looking to expand this area of their school’s practice.

This is not a manual for one-time events. It is a sustained, serious invitation to reimagine what schools can be when students are not merely consulted but truly centered. Or, as the authors put it on page 1, “the goal [is] starting a youth revolution, one that centers voices of young people in school reform and transformation.” If that revolution is to take root, it will need educators who are not only open to change but also willing to share power. For educators seeking to move beyond performative inclusion toward real partnership, this book is an essential companion.



## Reference

Illinois State Board of Education. (March 14, 2025). *ISBE hosts first-ever student summit to elevate student voices in education* [Press release].

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## About the Reviewer

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