

*Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together*

# **CURRICULUM GUIDE**

SECTION 2, MODULE A

*What is authentic  
youth-adult partnership?*



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*in partnership with  
many wise youth and adult guides*



**Y**OUTH AND **A**DULTS **T**RANSFORMING **S**CHOOLS **T**OGETHER

## **CURRICULUM GUIDE**

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SECTION 2

# **HOW will we do our work?**

MODULE B

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**Developed by Helen Beattie Ed.D.**  
in partnership with many wise  
youth and adult guides.

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## MODULE B

# What is an Authentic Youth-Adult Partnership? Why does it Matter?

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### **Introduction:**

One essential shift in a transformed high school is the creation of a partnership in learning between youth and adults, breaking the traditional model of teacher as expert and student as passive recipient of this wisdom. YATST also strives for an authentic youth-adult partnership within the team. We aim to “walk the talk” of the change we wish to instigate school-wide. Only when we live youth-adult partnership, can we rightfully then advocate for it within the greater school community.

This is no easy task. In the words of Alison Cook-Sather, “The twin challenges authorizing student perspectives are: a) changing the structures in our minds that have rendered us disinclined to elicit and attend to students’ voices and b) changing the structures in educational relationships and institutions that have supported and been supported by this disinclination”. (Educational Researcher, May 2002, p. 4). Youth also must grow in this new relationship with adults, assuming greater voice and responsibility.

The Ladder of Student Involvement serves as a basic framework to continually assess the integrity of the partnership. The Youth-Adult Partnership Journey Tool and Youth-Adult Stereotype Activity are other means to explore and assess the partnership. The Bridge Activity is an engaging problem solving activity which provides a rich opportunity to build metaphors about youth-adult partnership.

### **Enduring Understandings**

- Youth have a unique perspective regarding education and school change, and possess the capacity and wisdom to partner in transformation efforts.
- Any school transformation effort that lacks intentional youth involvement is fundamentally flawed.

### **Essential Questions:**

- What defines an “authentic” youth-adult partnership?
- Why does an authentic youth-adult partnership matter in school transformation work?

- Where is **our** team in living an authentic youth-adult partnership? How do we make it even better?

**Know and Do:**

Participants will be able to...

- Describe the defining qualities of an authentic youth-adult partnership.
- Identify where the team is functioning on the Ladder of Student Involvement, and assess where the level of youth-adult partnership in the school.
- Set specific goals and strategies to improve their own youth-adult team partnership

# ACTIVITY 1: Ladder of Student Involvement

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**Materials:** Copy of the Ladder of Student Involvement for each participant

**Purpose:** Introduce the concept of youth-adult partnership, providing a framework for on-going assessment of this partnership throughout the year.

**Time:** 45 minutes

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**Pre-reading Suggestion:** “Meaningful Student Involvement Resource Guide” by Adam Fletcher found at [www.soundout.org/MSIResources.pdf](http://www.soundout.org/MSIResources.pdf).

**Step 1:** Pass out the Ladder of Student Involvement and briefly explain the steps on the ladder.

**Step 2:** Create groups of 3. Make these groups multi-generational if possible. Ask each group to come up with an example of as many of these “rungs” as is possible from their own school experience. Share examples.

**Alternate Step 2: Skits:**

Separate the room into 4 groups. Have each group develop a skit based on a common theme related to classroom learning (i.e. giving the teacher feedback through a mid-semester survey).

Suggested ladder step grouping for skits:

- Steps 1-3
- Steps 4 & 5
- Step 6
- Step 7 & 8

After **each** skit, ask what **thoughts and feelings** were provoked watching the skit.

**Dialogue Questions:**

- If you looked at your school as a whole, which rung best represents how the majority of decision making happens? Examples?
- What are the barriers to moving up the ladder?
- What are the supports in place for moving up the ladder?
- What will moving up the ladder require of students?
- What will moving up the ladder require of adults?
- What will moving up the ladder require of parents?

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** *If time allows, consider ending with this video, which touches on both youth-adult partnership in learning and on the importance of rigor/high expectations. Adora Svitak is a remarkable 12 year old girl who shares her view of youth-adults as partners in learning:*  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/adora\\_svitak.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/adora_svitak.html)

## Climbing Towards Partnerships

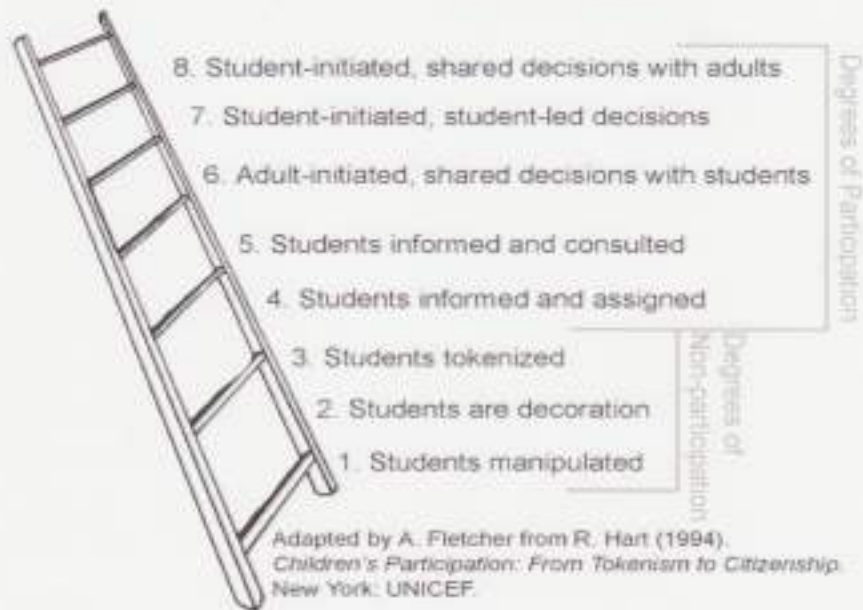
As this guide describes, simply calling something “meaningful” doesn’t make it so. Saying that young people are complex is an understatement: saying that schools need to be responsive to their complexity seems overtly simplistic. However, according to the following measurements, many schools may currently be treating students in a disingenuous, non-empowering way. Schools should aspire to the challenge William Butler Yeats is said to have written, “Education should not be the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

Simply calling something “meaningful” doesn’t make it so.

## Measuring Student Involvement

The *Ladder of Student Involvement in School* is designed to allow students and educators a way to measure situations and activities that involve students throughout schools<sup>6</sup>. The higher the rung on the *Ladder*, the more likely that activity is going to be meaningful to students. This guide seeks to help schools reach higher rungs by increasing the amount and improving the quality of student involvement in schools.

Figure 2. Ladder of Student Involvement



Each rung on the *Ladder* can be applied to a variety of situations in schools. There are important differences for each type of student involvement that acknowledge a particular activity’s current position on the *Ladder*. There are three important points to consider about the *Ladder*:

1. The *Ladder* is not designed to be applied to a whole school at once; instead, use it to assess individual activities.



2. There is an active debate among young people, educators, and others about the placement of rungs 7 and 8. Which is more meaningful? Meaningful student involvement should build community in schools while empowering students, which makes activities that students initiate and share decisions with adults most important.
3. The rungs are not a process that happens in order. Activities can go from the second rung directly to the sixth; sometimes, they'll be on two rungs at different ends of the *Ladder* at once, depending on who is looking.

These considerations are crucial to understanding the potential of this *Ladder* as a planning and assessment tool. Students and educators can reflect on the *Ladder* as they understand it, and should consider the possibilities of how other people might view their circumstances, also.

### Descriptions of Student Involvement

The following descriptions of Student Involvement describe the *Ladder* further, calling on readers to examine student involvement in their own setting.

**8) Student-Adult Partnerships.** Students initiate action and share decision-making with adults. Meaningful student involvement is integrated into school improvement at every level. Students are authorizing with the authority to create change, and incorporated throughout school improvement activities.

**7) Student-Initiated, Student-Led.** Meaningful student involvement is propelled by students and creates opportunities for students to initiate and direct projects, classes, or activities. Adults are involved only in supportive roles.

**6) Adults Initiate Action and Share Decisions with Students.** Students are involved in designing projects, classes, or activities that are initiated by adults. Many activities, including decision-making, teaching, and evaluation, are shared with students.

**5) Students Consulted by Adults.** Students give advice on projects, classes, or activities designed and run by adults. The students are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.

**4) Students Assigned to be Involved.** Student involvement is assigned by teachers, who assign specific roles, determine how, and teach students why they are being involved.

**3) Tokenism** – Students appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

**2) Decoration** – Students are used to help or bolster a cause in a relatively indirect way; adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by students. Causes are determined by adults, and adults make all decisions.

**1) Manipulation** – Adults use students to support causes by pretending that those causes are inspired by students.

### Considerations

The *Ladder* is meant to inspire action that validates students by authorizing them to improve schools. When students initiate action and share decisions with adults, partnerships flourish. Further in this Guide there are examples of specific ways that students and adults can work together to realize that vision.

Suggested citation: Taken from Fletcher, A. (2005) *Meaningful Student Involvement Guide to Students as Partners in School Change*. Seattle, WA: HumanLinks Foundation. Available online at [www.soundout.org](http://www.soundout.org)

## ACTIVITY 2:

# Youth-Adult Partnership Journey

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**Materials:** Copies of Youth-Adult Partnership Journey Rubric & Youth-Adult Partnership Check-in (p. 31, 32)

**Time:** 30 minutes

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This rubric identifies four key attributes of a strong youth-adult partnership and can be used as a means to both introduce and explore those qualities, as well as assess the integrity of the team's partnership throughout the year.

Introduce the rubric in as creative a means as possible. (There can be a strong adverse reaction to rubrics!). As in the ladder activity, you might choose to create skits for each step along the way, or write newspaper headlines or a story synopsis which would capture some aspect of the partnership at the given stages.

Facilitating dialogue to self-assess your team's place on this rubric is key, using the check-in to set goals to strengthen the partnership and identify very specific strategies to accomplish these goals.



## Youth Adult Partnership Journey

	AWESOME	ALMOST THERE	ON YOUR WAY	GETTING STARTED
Level of shared decision-making	Youth & adults share in decision making, with youth very often taking the lead in initiating ideas.	Youth & adults share in decision making, with youth sometimes taking the lead in initiating ideas.	Adults dominate decision making, with youth helping carry out decisions.	Youth are invited to participate in decision making, but effort is not genuine. The decision has already been made by adults and student input is token or "decoration".
Level of mutual Respect	Respect is mutual.	Respect is generally mutual.	Respect is somewhat mutual.	Respect is limited.
Level of shared Power & decision making	Power & decision making is shared.	Power & decision-making are often shared.	Power and decision making is clearly held by adults.	Power & decision making is totally held by adults.
Sharing of unique life experiences & skills in youth-adult partnership.	Youth & adults learn from the unique life experiences & skills of each other to create a highly effective partnership.	Youth & adults sometimes incorporate the unique life experiences & skills of each other to create an effective partnership.	Youth & adults infrequently consider the unique life experiences of each other and the partnership is limited in effectiveness.	Youth and adults never consider the unique life experiences of each other. The benefits of this partnership are non-existent. Generally adult life experiences "trump" all and youth potential contributions are not valued.

## Checking in on our youth-adult partnership....

	How are we doing... (Getting started, On our way, Almost There, Awesome)	Our goal for making our partnership even stronger....	How we are going to achieve this goal ?  (specific steps we will take)
Level of shared decision making			
Level of mutual respect			
Level of shared power			
Sharing of unique life experiences and skills in partnership			

## ACTIVITY 3: Youth-Adult Stereotypes

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### **Materials:**

- 2 Pads of Newsprint Paper for Brainstorm
- 2 Easels
- Markers

**Time:** 30-40 Minutes

**Purpose:** To explore stereotypes and language that serve as barriers to true partnership.

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This activity works best when there is a critical mass of both youth and adults (not a solo adult). You might consider recruiting in other adults from the school to gain the full value of this activity. Ideally the debrief will be co-facilitated by a youth-adult team.

**Step 1:** Youth are separated from adults in different rooms. Each group has a newsprint pad with a line about 2/3 of the way down running across the page. For the next 15 minutes each group will brainstorm & record:

### **YOUTH:**

1. The ways youth believe they are stereotyped by adults. For example, if you are walking down the street and an adult you do not know passes by you, what do you think they are thinking about you? (This list goes on the top of the page)
2. A list of phrases or language that does **NOT** empower you as a partner. For example, "You don't understand now, but you will when you are older." (This list goes on the bottom of the page)

### **ADULTS:**

1. The ways adults believe they are stereotyped by youth. For example, if you are walking down the street and a group of teenagers pass by you, what do you think they are thinking about you? (This list goes on the top of the page)
2. A list of phrases or language that does **NOT** empower you as a partner. For example, "You are way too old to understand my world or my issues." (This list goes on the bottom of the page)

**Step 2:** Get back together and share these lists, looking for similarities and differences. This should be a very rich dialogue!

**Possible Summation:** Reinforce our choice to operate from stereotypes or, instead, to identify our biases and change our behavior, setting the stage for true partnership. Talk about ways to openly identify when you feel that you are being stereotyped or that the language being used is making you feel uncomfortable or dishonored as a partner. Only by giving honest and open feedback, and assuming best intentions, can we begin to establish authentic youth-adult partnerships.

## ACTIVITY 4: Building a Youth-Adult Partnership Bridge

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### **Materials:**

Each team of approximately 8 needs:

- Stack of newspapers 1-2" thick
- 1 new roll of masking tape
- an industrial size empty tin can
- note cards; one has "Youth" written on it, the other has "Adults" written on it

**Time:** 40 minutes

**Purpose:** The purpose of this activity is to explore youth-adult partnership through metaphor. Ideally, this is done with youth-adult participation, but it works with adult only or youth only groups as well. You can see this activity facilitated by the Harwood Union team at a faculty in-service by going to: [Bridge Building Activity: Harwood Union](#)

**Step 1:** Divide your group into teams of 6-8 and give each team the materials noted above.

**Step 2:** Explain:

- The group's job is to learn how to build a bridge that will span over the "Youth-Adult Partnership Can", AND will then be able to support the tin can.
- The only materials which you can use are the newspaper and the tape.
- When you have completed your bridge, put the "Youth" card on one side of the bridge and the "Adults" card on the other.

**Step 3:** Tell participants that they will have 12 minutes to complete this task. However, there is some bad news. One half of the group has lost its ability to speak (or make any sounds at all); the other half has lost use of their hands. They can decide who has which constraint ...within the next **5 seconds**. Immediately start their ten minutes to solve the problem. (*Note: If there are adults in each group, ask them to be the ones to lose their voice*).

**Step 4:** Three minutes into this phase, announce that there is actually good news -- their muteness has suddenly been cured, as have the hand ailments.

**Step 5:** Call time at 12 minutes & explain that whatever phase their bridge is at is just fine! It is time to talk about the process.



### **Reflection Questions:**

- What was it like to learn to build this bridge without the use of your voices and hands? What were you thinking and feeling during those first 3 minutes?
- What was the shift like to have all members be full partners in this learning experience? What were you thinking and feeling during the last 9 minutes?
- How does this experience mirror learning experiences in our school for students? teachers?
- If this bridge represents a true partnership in learning between students and teachers, what can block the free passage of this bridge (from either direction) - what gets in the way of the learning partnership?
- If this bridge represents a true partnership in learning between students and teachers, what will facilitate the free passage over this bridge (from either direction)? What will promote authentic learning partnerships between youth and adults?



**Note:** *The loss of voice and use of hands is intended to highlight the consequence of imposed passivity in the classroom, and the frustration and disengagement that can follow.*

### **Potential Metaphors to Highlight:**

- Youth-adult partnership is not easy - to have integrity we need to stretch beyond (& over) our existing norms of student-teacher relationships.
- Our youth-adult partnership bridge must span over....
  - Stereotypes of youth
  - Stereotypes of adults
  - Assumptions of lack of capacity and/or desire
  - Fears related to giving up power or assuming power as a partner
  - Existing structures, policies & mind-sets that reinforce a traditional teacher-student hierarchical relationship.
- For youth-adult partnership to have integrity, it must be strong enough to endure stress/weight.
- The bridge will be as strong as is the trust and commitment to continue to identify impediments and address them, growing in partnership.

### **Potential Closing Quote:**

*“The twin challenges authorizing student perspectives are a) changing the structures in our minds that have rendered us disinclined to elicit and attend to students’ voices and b) changing the structures in educational relationships and institutions that have supported and been supported by this disinclination.”*

*Alison Cook-Sather, Educational Researcher, May 2002, p.*

**ACTIVITY 5:**

# **What Works in the Classroom? Ask the Students**

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**Materials:** Reprints of the New York Times article “What Works in the Classroom: Ask the Students” published December 10, 2010. Go to: [www.nytimes.com/2010/12/11/education/11education.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/11/education/11education.html)

**Time:** 20 minutes

**Purpose:** The purpose of this activity is to highlight the legitimacy of incorporating students into the redesign of our schools and classrooms"

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**Directions:** Any one of the text-based discussion protocols in the Youth Voice Advocate Facilitator Guide is recommended ([YVA Facilitator Guide](#)).