Taking the Pulse of Partnership

Youth-Adult Partnership Reflective Tool

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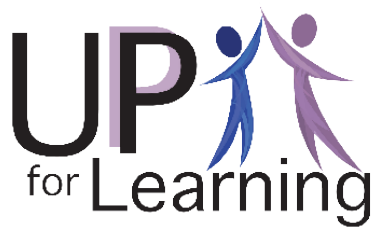
UP for Learning

Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

Authentic youth-adult partnerships in learning, teaching, and school leadership are **equitable, respectful, trusting** cross-generational relationships characterized by shared **power, voice,** and **responsibility.**

WHY Does Youth-Adult Partnership Matter?

Student-centered learning requires a fundamental shift in the student-teacher relationship to one of partnership. Similarly, the success of school redesign efforts rests on mobilizing young people — primary stakeholders in education — as partners in the change process.

When youth work closely with adults toward shared goals, they gain skills and confidence for lifelong learning and civic engagement. When adults work closely with youth as partners, the opportunity to learn from students' insights and unique perspectives often

renews a professional sense of purpose and shifts teaching toward more student-centered practices.

Yet students are often overlooked as co-constructors of learning and agents in education redesign. Unfortunately, there remains a pervasive societal belief that high school students are too young, too immature, or not yet wise enough to contribute in a meaningful way. This could not be further from the truth. Of course, educators bring a wealth of professional expertise to school redesign efforts; they have a systems-level perspective and a wide array of knowledge and skills about education accrued over time. Less understood is the fact that young people have an insiders' perspective on the learning experience adults cannot fully fathom. They are highly invested in shaping the world that will hold their life story and feel a deep desire to make a difference now. Young people have the wisdom, creativity, and proven capacity to partner in school remodeling efforts, ensuring integrity in the process.

When young people are challenged to bring forth their best efforts, adults similarly rise to the occasion. Both parties grow in their understanding and commitment to change, grappling with the complexity of classroom learning and the school change process from the diverse perspectives of both key stakeholder groups. Youth-adult partnership unleashes a previously untapped source for enhanced problem solving, increased engagement in learning and teaching, and expediting school redesign.

Creating and sustaining an authentic youth-adult partnership is no easy task. Few members of either generation have experienced this paradigm shift. This change can feel risky and foreign, sparking fears, hidden assumptions, and confusion. Similar to any other culture shift, youth-adult partnership requires frequent tending through reflection, dialogue, and ongoing goal setting. These are the means to fend off the human tendency to return to the status quo. Partnerships are also the way to create highly engaging and vital learning communities for students and teachers alike.

DIRECTIONS: This reflective tool provides a way to take the pulse of partnership. It captures three essential attributes of authentic youth-adult partnership: (1) effective communication and collaboration, (2) shared decisions and (3) shared responsibility. Each rubric is separated into four sections. The first provides the core attributes of youth-adult partnership as they grow over time, in both an individual and group context. The second section describes what it looks like and sounds like as the partnership evolves. Questions then offer help to understand the current state of partnership and chart next steps. The last section provides space to name a goal, either as an individual or for the group, which can be revisited at the next reflection opportunity.

The rating scale moves from left to right with the categories "Getting started", "On the move" and "Got it!". The final column, "Got it!", is the goal for behavior exemplifying youth-adult partnership. For each of the options for each goal, circle the descriptor that you feel best reflects your behaviors or the current state of the group, based on your own experience. If you find yourself between rating scores, it is perfectly fine to rate a behavior between two neighboring descriptions by marking the line between the two boxes.

Next, pace through the questions provided to think more deeply about your youth-adult partnership. Finally, set a goal for yourself, or with your group, that will take your partnership to the next level.

GOAL 1: Communication and Collaboration

Goal	Getting started	On the move	Got it!
Youth and adult team members communicate & collaborate effectively.	**Individual Context** I rarely feel accepted or respected in this group.	**Individual Context** I feel accepted and respected in this group much of the time.	**Individual Context** I feel fully accepted and respected in this group.
	I rarely feel safe or free to communicate and exchange my ideas with others.	I am somewhat cautious to communicate and exchange my ideas with others.	I feel free to communicate and exchange my ideas with others.
	I do not take risks in this group (offer my ideas or take on novel tasks).	I am cautious about taking risks in this group (offering new ideas or taking on novel tasks).	I take risks in this setting, offering new ideas or taking on novel tasks.
	I tend to work separately from others on my team.	I occasionally perform tasks with youth and adults on my team that involve collaboration.	I routinely work collaboratively on tasks with youth and adults on my team.
	Group Context My intergroup interactions do not feel natural or inclusive.	**Group Context** My intergroup interactions feel natural and inclusive at times.	**Group Context** My intergroup interactions feel natural and inclusive of all members.
	Power is imbalanced and unpredictable between youth and adults.	Power is generally equally shared between youth and adults although that is not yet fully predictable or consistent.	Power is equally shared between youth and adults.
	Trust and mutual respect, particularly between youth and adults, is inconsistent and unpredictable.	A sense of mutual respect and trust is evolving.	There is a spirit of mutual respect and trust among all members.
	My team does not welcome collaboration and our meetings are not effective.	My team recognizes the value of collaboration but we sometimes act separately.	My team is collaborative in our process and demonstrate that we are better together than we are separate.

What does it look like?	The ideas presented by the team do not reflect the team as a whole; ideas come from individuals without full team participation or consensus.	Recognition of the contributions of ideas is not consistent and opportunities to ask clarifying and probing questions are infrequent	Participants can identify how the outcome of ideas reflects not only the work of individuals but the synthesis and synergy of all participants.
	Group members do not trust or respect each other and power is often unevenly distributed (most often held by adults).	Group members are developing a sense of trust and mutual respect and learning how to equalize the power in the group.	All members feel trusting and at ease as they engage in discussions without fear of judgment or power inequity
	No process is in place to structure how the group works together or to reinforce partnership.	The team is working to set patterns and commitments that promote efficiency and partnership.	There are clear, consistent working agreements for procedures to reinforce the partnership and make the best use of everyone's time and resources.

Questions to consider...

☐ What is the physical set-up of the meeting space? For example, does the space allow for everyone to see everyone else at all times?

☐ What are the protocols or processes that have been established to encourage the communication of ideas? Do these, include "wait time" and opportunities to reflect and change one's ideas?

☐ How are both youth and adult ideas solicited in decision-making?

☐ What is the response of youth and adult team members to ideas after they are presented? Do adults tend to speak first? Do adults speak more often or at greater length?

☐ Does the group check in regularly about the quality of communication? collaboration?

☐ What one thing could happen that would help to establish greater mutual respect and trust in the group?

☐ If the group is generally safe but you do not feel you can fully participate, what is causing this to happen?

☐ Do you address youth-adult partnership issues as they arise, rather than letting the task override tending the partnership?

Goal: **What goal can I and/or my team set that will improve our communication and collaboration?** Please write it below:

GOAL 2: Shared Decisions

Goal	Getting started	On the move	Got it!
Team decisions are informed by youth and adult voice, perspectives, and experiences.	**Individual Context** I find it hard to listen to the opinions of youth and/or adult group members or consider their impact on the group's decisions.	**Individual Context** I hear both youth and adult perspectives and sometimes consider them when I contribute to group decisions.	**Individual Context** I equally value the perspectives and experiences of both youth and adults when negotiating a decision.
	Group Context I do not feel supported and/or valued by the group and my opinions are not reflected in decisions made.	**Group Context** My perspective is heard by the group but it is not clear to me how it shapes decisions that are made.	**Group Context** My perspectives and experiences are supported and valued by the group and this is evident in the decisions that are made.
What does it look like?	*Participants interrupt others' input or do not consider alternate perspectives. One or more participants direct and instruct throughout the process.* *Facilitator or dominating member controls the decision-making process; we have many passive participants.*	*Ideas are considered, but at least one participant (either youth or adult) feels tokenized or overlooked in the process of decision making.* *Participants do not feel full ownership of the decisions made by the team, but do feel included.*	*When making a decision, alternative possibilities are discussed thoroughly from both youth and adult perspectives and this affects decisions that are made.* *Active participants share ownership in decisions.*

Questions to consider...

☐ Are youth and adult ideas and experiences sought out and valued when making decisions?

☐ Do youth and adults both contribute to ideas that are represented in final conclusions?

☐ Does the group regularly check in on the group members' perception of youth-adult balance in soliciting ideas and making decisions?

☐ What do meeting minutes reflect about the balance of voices and perspectives in decision making processes?

Goal: **What goal can I and/or my team set that will improve our team's decision-making process?** Please write it below:

GOAL 3: Shared Responsibility

Goal	Getting started	On the move	Got it!
Youth and adult team members share responsibility for key roles needed to carry out our work.	**Individual Context** I have little or no responsibilities in carrying out our work. *or* I do a majority of the work as I am one of the few team members with the necessary skills.	**Individual Context** I assume roles and responsibilities that are "low-stake" and not central to carrying out our work. *or* I try to share roles and responsibilities but still find I do more than others.	**Individual Context** I share key roles and responsibilities with members of all ages as a valued team member.
	Group Context Individual group members have limited input regarding the roles and responsibilities they assume in the group; roles and responsibilities are generally assigned.	**Group Context** My group has no clear process to distribute roles and responsibilities so that all participants are meaningfully involved in our work.	**Group Context** My group has a process for task assignments and support that enables all group members to assume meaningful roles in order to carry out our work effectively.
What does it look like?	*Either youth or adults are delegated tasks without input.*	*Either youth or adults are consistently given responsibilities that are limited in their importance to the work.*	*Group identifies tasks and group members decide on their contribution based on interests and skills (unrelated to age).*

Questions to consider...

☐ Is the responsibility for tasks central to carrying out a decision determined by youth and adults together?

☐ Are you deliberate about recording and reviewing youth and adult voices in the minutes of the meeting with the purpose of checking in to see who is contributing and designating responsibilities?

☐ Is the responsibility for "low stakes" tasks generally assigned to youth and "high stake" tasks held by adults or are they distributed in a balanced way through a group decision- making process?

☐ Do youth and adults co-facilitate and co-lead the discussions and share other leadership roles and responsibilities?

☐ Is adequate training and support available to group members so they can become comfortable and confident in varied roles and responsibilities?

☐ Has the group assessed the strengths and interests of group members to align tasks accordingly?

Goal: **What goal can I and/or my team set that will improve how we share responsibility as a group?** Please write it below: