

Youth-Adult Partnership Roadmap to Agency



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

Agency is the ability to make intentional choices about, and take an active role in, the course of one's own life and on behalf of others' lives. It is what happens when youth and adults join together as partners in learning and decision making. This tool provides a means to understand, assess, and monitor youth-adult partnership and the sense of personal control and agency young people and adults have in the educational setting.

Setting the Stage

	Youth as recipients	Youth as consultants	Youth and adults as emerging partners	Youth and adults as full partners
What we believe about youth and adults as partners (mental models)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults believe that youth do not have the life experience or wisdom to position them as decision makers and make most of the decisions. Adults believe quality education is done "to and for students." Youth generally believe this perspective and defer to adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults believe that youth have a unique life perspective that can, and at some times should, inform adult decisions. They believe quality education is largely done to and for students, with some youth input. Youth are generally comfortable deferring final decisions to adults; they have doubts about their capacity or right to influence change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults believe that with time and support, youth can be capable agents of change and their perspectives are key to make the right decisions. Youth start to believe that they have a rightful role as partners in shaping their education and have the ability to assume this responsibility. Neither youth nor adults have a clear vision of what this looks or feels like. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults and youth believe that youth input with full participation in decision-making is a basic human need and right. Both believe that partnership and shared responsibility are essential to quality education. Young people and adults can learn the skills they need to be trusted partners.
Power Dynamic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults assume full power; youth assume a largely compliant and passive role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults largely hold the power. Occasional requests for youth input suggest minimal and unpredictable power for youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults begin to shift some power and control to make space for youth input and co-ownership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth and adults share power and value equity as essential norms. All youth and adults are empowered to voice their thoughts or opinions without fear.

Partnership in Action

	Youth as recipients	Youth as consultants	Youth and adults as emerging partners	Youth and adults as full partners
Communication/ Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults dominate communication as assumed experts based on what they feel is in the best interest of youth. Youth do not expect, nor do they necessarily have the skills, to take an active role in communication or collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults seek youth input to take into consideration. Youth begin to perceive that their input has some value. Youth are learning how to express their opinions about their learning and school environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trust, mutual respect, and safety are emerging as youth-adult communication and collaboration become more balanced. Youth begin to contribute more openly and honestly; adults begin to share the “air time” listen authentically, and collaborate. New norms are being established. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mutual respect and trust ensure a fully authentic youth-adult partnership through a collaborative process. Communications flows freely between youth and adults; all feel valued, comfortable, and competent in their new roles as partners. If the group strays from partnership norms, either youth or adults flag the issue and re-establish norms.
Decision-making & Shared Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults hold full decision-making responsibility and see this as their role. Youth are recipients of adult decisions and have no expectation of contributing to decisions. Youth perceive “shared responsibility” as compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth input as consultants or data sources may or may not be considered in ultimate adult decisions; the impact of input is often unknown. Ultimate responsibility for decisions remains adult-centered, with a recognition of youth input as useful. Youth are willing to offer input, but do not believe it reflects increased responsibility in their education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth and adults begin to share decision-making and responsibility; both parties are learning to embrace the other’s contributions. Adults and youth are developing new skills to ensure the success of this change. The group lapses into adult-dominated or youth-dominated dynamics from time to time, but is able to self-correct. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions reflect a variety of opinions across the generations; all voices are equally heard and valued. Comfort with accepted norms of partnership allows for many decision-making options depending on the task or context (e.g. adults as consultants, youth-only and adult-only at times). Both deeply believe that sharing responsibility and valuing all voices are essential to successful decision-making.

Note: Some other models have described early steps in the development of youth-adult partnership with terms such as “Tokenism,” “Manipulation,” “Decoration” or use of youth as “Window Dressing.” It is important to be aware of the potential danger in such approaches to youth-adult relationship, as they are the opposite of partnership.