

Youth-Adult Partnership Roadmap to Agency



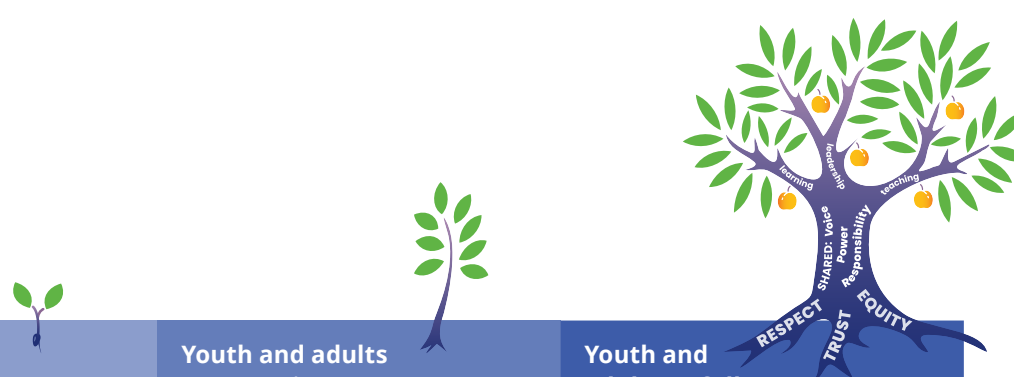
Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

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
Mental Models (what we believe about youth and adults as partners)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth generally believe that they do not have the life experience or wisdom to make decisions, and they defer to adults. • Adults make most of the decisions, believing that youth do not have the life experience or wisdom to position them as decision makers. • Adults believe quality education is done "to" and "for" students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth are generally comfortable leaving the final decisions to adults; they have doubts about their ability or right to influence change. • Adults believe that youth have a unique life perspective that can, and at some times should, inform adult decisions. • Adults believe quality education is largely done to and for students, with some youth input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth start to believe they have a right to be partners. They develop confidence to take responsibility in shaping their education. • Adults believe that with time and support, youth can be capable leaders of change and their perspectives are key to make the right decisions. • Both youth and adults <i>believe in</i> partnership, but are still working on what it looks and feels like in action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both believe that youth fully participating in decision-making is a basic human need and right. • Both believe that partnership and shared responsibility are essential to quality education. • Both can learn and practice the skills they need to be trusted partners.
Power Dynamic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth have a largely compliant role. • Adults have full power. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth have inconsistent opportunities for input, and often only when requested by adults. • Adults mostly hold the power. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth begin to step up and take the space in co-ownership. • Adults begin to shift some power and control to make space for youth input and co-ownership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both share power. • Both center equity in the partnership as a core value. • Both are empowered to voice their thoughts or opinions without fear of consequences.

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"> Youth do not expect, or have not had the opportunity to foster the skills, to take an active role in communication or collaboration. Adults dominate communication based on what they feel is in the best interest of youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth begin to perceive that their input has some value. Youth are beginning to express their opinions about their learning and school environment. Adults seek youth input to take into consideration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth begin to contribute more openly and honestly. Adults begin to share the “air time,” listen authentically, and collaborate. Both are developing new norms grounded in trust, mutual respect and safety. Communication and collaboration is becoming more balanced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication flows freely between youth and adults; all feel valued, comfortable, and competent in their new roles as partners. Both understand the responsibility that if the group strays from the norms of mutual respect, trust and equity of voice, they will revisit their norms.
Decision-making & Shared Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth are recipients of adult decisions and have no expectation of contributing to decisions. Youth see their role in “shared responsibility” as being compliant with adult decisions. Adults hold full decision-making responsibility and see this as their role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth input may or may not be considered in ultimate adult decisions; the impact of input is often unknown. Youth are willing to offer input, but do not believe it will be reflected as change in their education or community. Adults have the ultimate responsibility for decisions, with a recognition of youth input as useful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth are gaining more confidence in their facilitation and leadership skills. Adults are becoming more comfortable stepping into a new role of support through active listening and advocacy. Both begin to share decision-making and responsibility; both parties are learning to embrace the other’s contributions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions reflect a variety of opinions across the generations; all voices are equally heard and valued. 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.