

Features

3 Youth Participation: From Myths to Effective Practice

By Jennifer L. O'Donoghue, M.P.A., Ben Kirshner, Ph.D., and Milbrey McLaughlin, Ph.D.

The concept of youth participation has become a hot topic. Yet, many people struggle to understand what youth participation means, what it looks like, and how it happens. This article defines youth participation, provides a review of what it looks like and where it takes place, and concludes by debunking four myths surrounding youth participation.

7 Increasing Student Voice and Moving Toward Youth Leadership

By Dana Mitra, Ph.D.

"Student voice" describes the many ways in which youth might have the opportunity to participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers. This article describes the progression of youth development opportunities available to youth, from "being heard," to collaborating with adults, to building capacity for leadership.

11 Understanding Innovation: Youth-Adult Partnerships in Decision Making

By Shepherd Zeldin, Ph.D., and Julie Petrokubi, B.S.

The notion that youth and adults can collaborate on issues of importance runs counter to prevailing societal norms, public policies, structures and standards of practice. This article describes connecting youth development with organizational and community development. It focuses on understanding how community organizations refine structures, processes, and practices to include youth-adult partnerships in their programming.

17 Adult-Driven Youth Programs: An Oxymoron?

By Kathrin Walker, Ph.D., and Reed Larson, Ph.D.

Though strong arguments are often made for a youth-driven approach, comparative research on what actually transpires in programs using youth-driven or adult-driven approaches has been missing. This article presents an in-depth look at a project in which the adult held control but used it in ways that were responsive to and supportive of youth. The article highlights some of the considerations that practitioners should weigh when thinking about what approach to use and outlines some conditions under which an adult-driven approach might be appropriate.



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From the Editor's PC

Dear Colleague,

Welcome to our latest issue devoted to "Youth Participation and Leadership." Something new, but not really! The past couple decades have seen a shift in focus among youth development programs. Besides focusing solely on treatment and prevention, programs have shifted to include approaches that build skills and support adolescents' broader development. Additionally, some programs have taken that a step further and actively engage youth as partners in organizational and public decision making, which is the subject of this issue.

We begin with an article by Ms. Jennifer O'Donoghue and colleagues which introduces the topic of youth participation, describes what it looks like, then explores four myths which surround it.

Most youth spend a large amount of time within the school environment. Dr. Dana Mitra explores how one school provided youth development opportunities which increased student voice. Building on this success, the school then moved toward involving youth in positions of leadership.

Implementing any new innovation can be difficult. Dr. Shepard Zeldin and Ms. Julie Petrokubi describe how community organizations can integrate youth-adult partnerships within their structures, processes, and practices.

Finally, though we know that youth participation and leadership can be a powerful way of working with youth and improving the programs which serve them, we have to question if youth-driven programs are always the ideal. This issue concludes with an article by Drs. Kathrin Walker and Reed Larson which explore

when adult-driven programs may be the most appropriate and effective approaches for working with youth.

As we conclude, it is important to remember that all youths, regardless of how "at-risk" we perceive they are, benefit from participation and power sharing. As shown in Dr. Mitra's article and her example at Whitman High School, all youth possess knowledge and perspectives that adults cannot fully replicate. It is therefore imperative that all youth get opportunities for participation and leadership that is developmentally appropriate for them.

All the best,



Steven Ungerleider, Ph.D.
Editor/ Psychologist

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