

Strategies for Engaging and Empowering Students

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Climate Anxiety

Research shows that today's youth are worried about the future and it's affecting their mental health. According to a study published in 2021, "more than 45 per cent [of respondents aged 16 to 25] said their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily life and functioning" (Basu) and climate change has only gotten worse since then.

It's their right to participate!



Sheltering youth from this problem is not a solution. The United Nations confirms that it falls within the Rights of the Child “to know about, and be involved in, issues that will affect their future” (Sanson, p. 206).





Working towards a healthy planet is healthy for people!

Engagement and participation can help those affected by climate anxiety. Helping young people to connect with each other and take action for climate change “may be the most beneficial approach” (Sanson, p. 207) for climate related mental health issues.



Inspiring Youth Activists

Although student involvement will vary, they need to know that they are capable of making a big difference in the world. Climate change is not a problem that can be solved by a single person. “Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world” (Zinn).



How should we empower students to get involved?

Strategies include:

- Ask, don't assume
- Co-development & partnership
- Ensuring accountability
- Consider who is being heard and who is being excluded
- Compensation
- Ask students what skills are valuable to them

Ask.
Don't Assume.



Get youth involved! Don't assume what they think or feel about a topic or decision. Ask them. Then find out what they need to be involved in decision making. (Tamarack Institute, p. 3)

Co-Development & Partnership

Including youth as a community of equal contributors, partners, and leaders is an important part of authentic engagement (Knowledge Institute). Youth have a right to participate in matters affecting their futures (United Nations Development Programme). Informing them is not the same as giving them the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the decisions that will affect their futures. Rather, "authentic youth engagement is about [adults] relinquishing that power and sharing the power with youth" (Tamarack Institute, p. 4).



Ensuring Accountability

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If you've given your time and thoughts to someone, it's reasonable to expect to know how it made a difference. With "a follow-up call, email, or meeting to show them how their input was implemented," (Tamarack Institute, p. 4) youth will know how meaningful their contributions were and have a reason to participate again in the future.

Who is Being Heard?

Who is Being Excluded?



Silence does not mean someone doesn't have something meaningful to contribute. Just like adults, "youth experiences are unique, and while it is valuable to have a youth perspective, having many perspectives is much more meaningful" (Tamarack Institute, p. 3). By ensuring that the stories and opinions of even the quietest youth in the room are shared, more perspectives can contribute to the overall picture. It's also important to consider intersectionalities as climate change exacerbates inequalities and those perspectives need equal consideration.

Compensation



When students take the time and effort to volunteer ideas and opinions, it's pulling them away from something else, no matter how small. As a result, youth should be compensated. Whether it's a meal or swag, or if financial compensation is an option, find out what is "valuable to them" (Tamarack Institute, p. 4) and show your appreciation.

What Skills are Valuable to Students?



Students have different experiences based on their different teachers and other associations so finding out from them what skills they want to gain will make learning more meaningful for them than simply assuming. This can be applied to technologies, public speaking, political engagement, researching, and more.
(Tamarack Institute, p. 3)



What to Avoid



Tokenism

Don't include youth just to tick off a box, "especially those with diverse identities" (Knowledge Institute).



Manipulation

Don't tell students what to do or say without providing "genuine opportunities to provide input" (Knowledge Institute).



Informing

Don't make decisions without students and then update them about it after. Informing and engaging are not the same things. (Knowledge Institute)



Conclusion

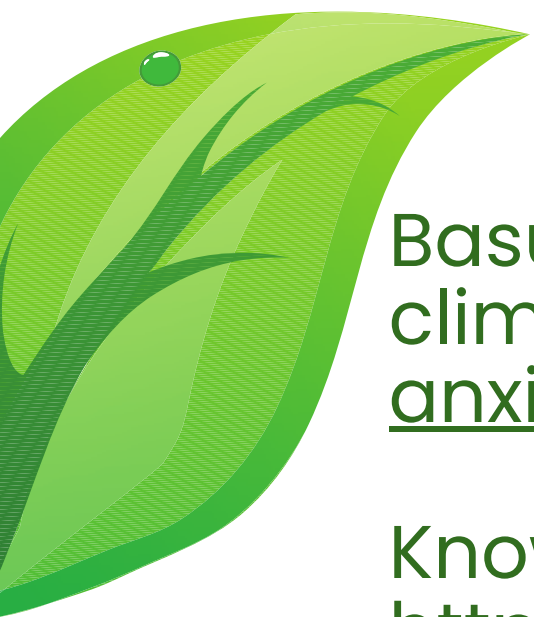


Treat youth the way you'd expect to be treated as an adult. Listen to what they contribute and ensure they understand the impact of their contributions. Relinquish the power so many different youth perspectives can be heard and appreciated. Finally, make sure they are gaining from the experience, too. Youth are the future. Let them help shape it.

Thank You

Now let's empower youth!





Works Cited

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