This resource is from the national
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA
(10/5/22)
Featured:

>*Can youth empowerment enhance violence prevention?*

>**About Student Voice and Participation**

>*How optimistic are teens about the future?*

>**Links to a few other relevant shared resources**

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For discussion and interchange:

>**Can youth empowerment enhance violence prevention?**

Empowering youth is an end in itself. Ongoing, whole-school efforts are involved in ensuring that all students feel included, heard, and can participate in ways that influence school life. The aim is to build a school culture in which student voice is seen as essential. Such a culture also is a critical part of facilitating school improvement that enhances student academic outcomes and general well-being, establishes relationships that can serve as protective buffers, builds a sense of community, and betters school climate.

Research also suggests that empowering youth can enhance violence prevention.

Preventing youth aggression and increasing prosocial behavior
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ajcp.12577

"... Applying a developmental lens to violence prevention strategies helps us focus on reducing risk by building youth assets and resources that can both prevent negative behaviors and enhance positive behaviors.. Assets such as self-esteem, supportive adult relationships, and community engagement can reduce risk of negative outcomes such as violence, and may be particularly important for youth in contexts with limited access to or resources for programs that promote positive youth development. In addition, a developmental orientation to violence prevention may also consider how interventions can promote positive behaviors such as prosocial involvement and not simply prevent negative behaviors like aggression or violence. Implementing preventive strategies in pre-adolescence (e.g., around age 12) may be particularly helpful given that this is the age when youth begin to engage more autonomously in interpersonal relationships, engage independently within their community, and have the cognitive ability to take on more leadership within these social relationships....

Empowerment Theory applied to youth development helps to focus attention on enhancing promotive factors and positive youth development by involving youth in planning and implementing community development projects which will help them gain vital skills, responsibilities, and confidence at the individual- and interpersonal-level which are necessary for positive youth development. These skills and responsibilities can help youth make choices to avoid negative influences and problem behaviors and improve engagement in positive behaviors like academic performance and community projects, which help youth learn skills to become leaders ...

At the individual-level, evaluations of empowerment-based interventions indicate that engaging youth in community improvement activities can reduce violent behaviors and other violence-related psychosocial outcomes. At the interpersonal- and community-levels, researchers suggest that youth can be engaged in a range of community improvement activities (e.g., public art projects, developing community gardens, creating social service activities, and community beautification projects) with positive outcomes for both the youth and community....

Empowering youth to address violence through engaging in community improvement activities at this critical developmental period (i.e., middle school years) may enable them to think critically about their own lives, the context, and systems in which they and their families live, and make choices to avoid problem behaviors as they face risk factors for negative outcomes in their school and community (e.g., negative peer behaviors, witnessing violence)....

In urban settings that have high levels of economic challenge helping youth to develop the

confidence in themselves to be effective change agents, developing the skills to think critically about resources needed to make positive change in their community, and taking action to be positive change agents in their community reduces aggressive behaviors and increases prosocial behaviors. ..."

For more on these matter, see our online clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

>*Safe schools and violence prevention* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2108_03.htm
>*Youth Development* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/youthdev.htm

There you will find links to resources from our Center and from others. Here is a sample

>>*Promoting youth development in schools* http://http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/yd.pdf
>>*Service learning in schools* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/service.pdf
>>*Violence Prevention and Safe Schools* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/violence/violence.pdf
>>*Addressing Neighborhood Problems that Affect the School*
     http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/neighpn.pdf
>>*Youth Participation: Making It Real* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youthpartic.pdf
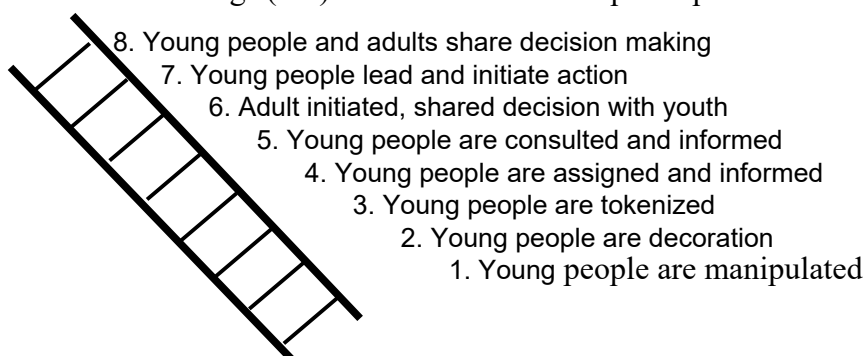
>About Student Voice and Participation

Thanks to advocacy for and by youth leaders, it is now commonplace to hear folks stress "If we are going to plan for young people, we need their voices at this table."

However, reasons for bringing young people to the table vary. Advocates range from those who appreciate the importance of understanding the perspective of youth, on through those who also are dedicated to promoting youth development and empowerment, and on to those who stress that youth participation benefits families, adults, organizations, planners, policy makers, communities, and society in general.

There is particular concern about empowering youth voices to ensure hearing and understanding of concerns raised by those segments of the population that have little power to influence policy. As the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families stresses

"Young people want and deserve a voice in their communities. City officials make decisions that affect youth on a daily basis. Yet young people often have no direct role in shaping or influencing local policies and programs. Even well-intentioned efforts to work for youth – by 'protecting' them from perceived threats or by 'rescuing' those who already are in jeopardy – can prevent us from recognizing the importance of working with youth to identify positive solutions and build stronger communities."

Youth participation in planning and policy may take the form of (1) bringing youth to the table of an established "adult" organization (e.g., providing input as consumers and clients, representing the voice of youth as a group participant, assuming a leadership role at the table), (2) youth establishing and operating their own organization, or (3) creating a new organization where youth and adults collaborate as equals. Hart (1997) conceptualizes types of participation as 8 rungs on a ladder with the bottom three rungs (1-3) described as not true participation.*

8. Young people and adults share decision making
7. Young people lead and initiate action
6. Adult initiated, shared decision with youth
5. Young people are consulted and informed
4. Young people are assigned and informed
3. Young people are tokenized
2. Young people are decoration
1. Young people are manipulated

*Hart, R. (1997). *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care.* UNICEF.

From: *About Student Voice and Participation* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/voice.pdf

"...Various resources suggest principles and steps for encouraging and facilitating student voice and participation. The following list is a synthesis:

1. *Provide and expand youth opportunities to become long-term contributors to school and community development.* Establish as many ways as feasible to involve youth and enable them to participate in decision-making, planning, problem solving, evaluation, and in taking action.

2. *Be inclusive – reach out to all youth. Being inclusive means recognizing diversity and differences* (e.g., in socio-economic status, age, ability, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, life style, etc.). Particular emphasis should be placed on engaging those who have been under-represented such as the many disconnected youth and those who often are experienced as disabled, disturbed, or delinquent. Participation enables those who are viewed as problems to become problem-solvers.

3. *Develop the capacity of youth to participate and lead effectively and the capacity of adults to work with them in supportive ways*. Capacity building must focus on developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for working together productively (e.g., development of communication skills, teamwork, collaboration, and conflict and stress management). Mentoring should be mutual – respecting the reality that adults and youth have much to learn from each other. Properly designed, such capacity building encourages and facilitates pursuit of opportunities for personal self-growth, skill enhancement, and leadership for all participants.

4. *Engage youth actively in providing new ideas that stimulate enthusiasm and investment in strengthening communities, families, schools, and young people.* This requires actively facilitating youth input and ensuring that young people's ideas are recognized as of value. All ideas must be heard with respect. Youth bring to the table a fresh perspective for identifying issues and possible solutions.

5. *Design the working environment to ensure equity and safety for young participants; pay special attention to the distribution of power between young people and adults*. Establish member and leadership positions of authority, responsibility, and accountability for young people, and design discussions in ways that facilitate and maintain motivated participation and that ensure voting rights in decision making on all issues and solutions. If there are paid staff positions, some should be offered to young people as a way of ensuring a youth perspective is available on a daily basis.

6. *Through collaborative mechanisms integrate and weave together the resources of schools, homes, and communities to support meaningful youth participation and a wide-range of networking for accomplishing the group's mission*. Resources should be budgeted to underwrite the costs of effective youth participation and networking.

7. *Link youth to comprehensive planning and policy efforts*. This includes participation in bodies that analyze existing policies and propose new ones. Ensure they have ample opportunity to identify their own interests within the context of community and societal policy making and program development. Involve them in confronting serious social problems and conditions that will allow them to see themselves as agents for the positive transformation of their environments. Such participation can be a major step toward long-term participation and contributing to community programs/policy.

8. *Self reflect, evaluate, and celebrate the group's accomplishments in ways that recognize differences in perspective and contribution.* A key factor in capacity building for participating and leading is the ability to learn from experiences. This is facilitated by structured reflection and debriefing and by formative evaluation. It is important to use the opportunity also to let everyone, and especially youth know, that their involvement is valued and to inform the community and public at large about progress and encourage formal recognition and official thanks.

>How optimistic are teens about the future?

As students share their concerns and are more open about asking for support, they also appear to feel more hopeful about their futures.

> From: *The kids are all right: Teens are optimistic about the future*
> https://www.edweek.org/leadership/the-kids-are-all-right-teens-are-optimistic-about-the-future/2022/09
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> "...A new survey of teenagers has found that despite all of the challenges thrown up by the pandemic in the past few years, teens are overwhelmingly optimistic about their futures. More than 80 percent of students said they feel high levels of optimism that their lives will turn out well... Fifty-five percent of students said they were as optimistic about positive future outcomes in life and work now as they were before the pandemic... While teens' optimism is running high, it doesn't mean that the pandemic and all the stressors it brought hasn't diminished many students' outlook toward the future. Around one third of teens reported that they believe they would have been even more optimistic about their future outcomes had the pandemic not happened...."

Are these topics being discussed in your locale?

Please let us know so we can share the info widely. Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu

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>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

Schools and Mental Health: A Position Statement http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fall2021.pdf

About School Adjustment http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/adjust2.pdf

High school students perspectives on their futures
https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/2022/High-School-Students-Perspectives-on-Their-Futures.pdf

Strategies School Leaders Can Use to Create Supportive Environments for Teachers
https://www.wested.org/wested-bulletin/insights-impact/five-things-school-leaders-can-do-to-support-teacher-well-being/

Teens, social media and technology
https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/

About Anxiety, Resilience, and Schools http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/anxiety22.pdf

Short-Term and Long-Term Resilience Among At-Risk Adolescents: The Role of Family and Community Settings https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15374416.2020.1756296

Feeling Needed and Useful during the Transition to Young Adulthood
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jora.12680

National Health Education Standards 3rd Edition – Model Guidance for School Curriculum and Instruction. www.schoolhealtheducation.org

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Rethinking Student and Learning Supports
in the Center's Quarterly ejournal
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/news.htm

A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm

10/5 Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Students Experiencing Homelessness
10/6 How to Create a Safe & Welcoming Environment during Divisive Times
10/6 Family connections
10/6 Expanding mentorships
10/11 Leading toward equity
10/11 Teacher retention
10/12 Elevating the work of Community Based Violence Intervention: The importance of collaboration
    in public safety
10/13 Teaching the Civil War
10/13 Back to School Stress: Tools and Apps to Minimize School Stressors
10/18 Proactive Crisis Planning for Children with Mental Health Challenges
10/20 Protecting our children in the digital age
10/20 How Book Banning Prevents Literacy for All
10/20 Action planning for the adaptive leader
10/25 Basic Requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act
10/26 Toxic positivity: how to avoid pitfalls
10/27 Constitutional Voting Rights

My teacher told me that successful people keep their nose to the grindstone, put their shoulder to the wheel, and keep their eye on the ball .

Well, O.K., but I don't think you'll get much work done that way!

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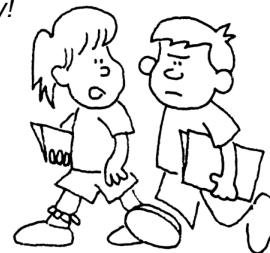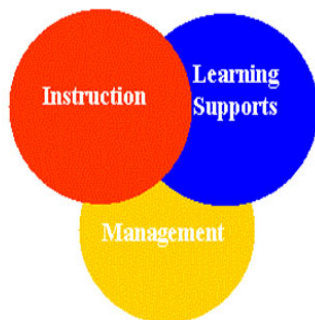
For information about the
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
go to http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.

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*Success isn't a result of spontaneous combustion.
You must set yourself on fire.* ~*Arnold H. Glasow*