ELO Expanded Learning Opportunities

Two-Minute Tips

This Week's Topic: Integrating Youth Voice

One hallmark of a successful ELO program is its ability to integrate and honor youth voice by including young people in the creation and implementation of program assets.[1] Integrating youth voice helps young people feel like they belong and their contributions matter.[2] This sense of belonging lays the foundation for developing team-building and leadership skills while in the ELO program. Young people are also more likely to engage when they feel included in the planning and implementation of program activities.[3] You can consistently integrate young people's voice into your program no matter what age group you work with. By seeing young people as capable, innovative co-creators, you will foster an engaging, emotionally safe program environment.

Practice Tips

Here are a few quick tips to integrate youth voice into programing.

The Golden Rule

Our culture teaches us that adults are superior to young people, simply because they're older. This is called adultism.[4] We must all practice balancing children's developmental stages with letting go of our ingrained distrust of young people. Ask yourself if you would respond to a peer in the way you're responding to the young people in your life. If not, and if developmentally appropriate, consider changing your behavior. Always treat young people the way you'd like to be treated.

Welcome Young People's Ideas

Create opportunities for youth to share their ideas with you and each other. You can ask about academics. Example: What do you think we should learn more about here? You can also ask them for their thoughts on how to facilitate activities in the program. Example: Hey Jess, how do you think we should set up the art table today?

Ask, Act, Repeat

Ask young people what they liked or disliked about an activity. Ask questions or follow up questions that solicit more than a yes or no answer. Allow time for meaningful responses, act on the information, and alter future activities based on their feedback. By simply repeating this process, you'll start regularly integrating youth voice into your program.

Focus on the journey

Allow participants to propose ideas or try new approaches. Let go of a *right* or *wrong* way of doing an activity or creating a product. Let youth explore, make mistakes, and fail. Encourage them to work together to find solutions. Work alongside them, ask open-ended questions, and listen attentively to what they are saying.

Tips in Action!

Watch more on integrating youth voice through youth-led activities at Blazing Trails.

Want more two-minute tips?

Check out: https://depts.washington.edu/cqel/expanded-learning-opportunities/

There you will find the latest tips, and an archive of past tips.

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[1] Fredericks, L., Kaplan, E., & Zeisler, J. (2001). *Integrating youth voice in service-learning*. Denver, CO Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED452425

[2] Perry, M. (2017, May 23). *Four principles for meaningfully incorporating youth voice into programs and services*. Retrieved from https://educationnorthwest.org/northwest-matters/four-principles-meaningfully-incorporating-youth-voice-programs-and-services

[3] Ignite Afterschool. *Youth voice and leadership: Building block 3*. St. Paul, MN. Retrieved from https://igniteafterschool.org/bb3

[4] Bell, J. (2003). *Understanding adultism: A key to developing positive youth-adult relationships*. Olympia, WA: The Freechild Project. Retrieved from: http://www.nuatc.org/articles/pdf/understanding_adultism.pdf