

YOUTH AS PARTNERS

Purpose: To provide participants with a framework to have them approach young people as partners. To have participants practice with case studies the approach of youth as partners.

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: Handout: “Case Studies”; signs on the wall: Youth as Objects/Youth as Recipients/Youth as Partners

Procedure:

“There are reasons why we interact with young people in particular ways we do. Often, if we are going to work in true partnership with young people, we need to work differently than many adults who worked with us in our lives. We need to look at where our approach came from, and think about how that needs to change or stay the same. Lofquist (1989) has developed and popularized what he calls a ‘Spectrum of Attitudes’ that covers three different attitudes adults can hold toward young people. Often the attitudes that adults hold toward young people determine the degree to which they involve them as significant partners in decision-making, and believe them capable of autonomy or making decisions about the issues that affect them.”

“Let’s look at each one:”

“The first one is Youth as Objects.”

“If we work this way with youth, ‘adults know what is best for young people and control situations in which they allow them to be involved.’ In this approach the attitude is that young people have little to contribute. Adults may work to keep young people in a relatively powerless position. Adults with such opinions have no intention of allowing youth participation. Adults may truly believe that they need to protect young people from ‘suffering’ from mistakes.

Leader’s Notes

Point to the sign “Youth as Objects.”

However, we know that involvement in meaningful roles is essential to positive growth and the development of successful young adults.”

“In the second - Youth as Recipients - adults allow young people to take part in decision-making because they think the experience will be ‘good for them.’ This has a real focus on young people learning from ‘adult society,’ and that young people need to be guided through their participation in adult society. This attitude is characterized by adults allowing young people to take part in decision-making because they think the experience will be ‘good for them’ and an excellent opportunity to practice for when they become ‘real people.’ Consequently, responsibilities and tasks often delegated to young people are either trivial (it won’t matter if they mess up) or those which adults find distasteful (roadside cleanup campaigns). Adults with such viewpoints on youth involvement often control the terms and conditions of involvement For example, adults invite two youth representatives to participate on a board or committee composed mainly of adults. Such participation still leaves youth in a relatively powerless position. They realize that their role remains trivial and that adults are retaining the position of authority and much of the responsibility.”

“The third piece at the other end of the spectrum represents attitudes where the contributions of young people are welcomed and valued. ‘Adults respect young people as having something significant to offer now and youth are encouraged to become involved.’ Adults feel that young people are critical to the success of a program or, in this case, an organization focused on youth needs and issues. When adults hold such opinions, youth are seen as equal partners in decision-making. Adults who view young people as partners are comfortable working with groups which have equal numbers of youth and adults. Youth are asked a series of questions such as: How do they want to be involved? What kind of training do they need? What would they like to learn? What do they think their role is? What would they like their role to be? As a result of these relationships, programs and organizations are more effective while young people meet real developmental needs.”

Leader’s Notes

Point to the sign “Youth as Recipients.”

Point to the sign “Youth as Partners.”

“In moving to full partners, we are moving to an attitude of *youth as partners*. This is to say that both youth and adults bring strengths to the table and work in an equitable relationship.”

- “Any comments on what you’ve heard here?”
- Can you give examples of how these work in your area?
- What do you think is the biggest challenge to having an attitude that a young person is a partner in his/her own development?”

“To work a little with this approach, we are going to break you into groups and give you a case study to respond to in a ‘youth as partners’ approach. To help you with this, I’m going to read a sample for you.”

Read the following case study. Ask participants what they would do in a “youth as partners” approach. Read what this case study says as a “youth as partners” approach and ask people what they think. Ask if they’d like to hear “objects” and “recipients” to see the differences.

Case Situation 1: An Activity on Practicing Adult-Youth Interactions

Case 1: Sally is involved in a community project. She has skills in writing letters. She volunteered to write a letter to the Mayor asking for permission to do the group project. It’s time for the letter to be written. What do you say or do?

Youth as Objects: Have Sally sit down and tell her exactly what she should write. “I’ll tell you what to write because I’ve done this before and I know the Mayor, so just do what I say. I know more about what we want from the Mayor than you do. And I know what the Mayor will respond to.” (Adults know best; youth feel put down.)

Youth as Recipients: “I could write this letter, but it will be a good learning experience for you to write a letter to the Mayor. If I help you do it this time, you’ll know how to do it next time.” (Youth will benefit in the future.)

Leader’s Notes

You probably will need to read the case study twice at a slow pace.

Youth as Partners: “What do you think should go into this letter? What do you want the Mayor to do? If you don’t know the administrative procedure that the Mayor needs to follow, I could help you find that out. How else can I be helpful to you?”
(Youth can make a contribution now.)

Explain that this is a model of how you’d like them to think through the case study...knowing that what they are striving to do is figure out how best to approach this with the young person as a partner.

Remind them that their task is to come up with a youth as partners approach Break them into small groups and give them about 10 minutes.

Once in a large group, have one group begin with their answer and then have the others add on or reflect on what they heard.

What about this is treating a young person as a partner? Are there other ways you might proceed?

Leader’s Notes

You may want to cut the case studies in strips and give one to each group.

Help people form groups and get quickly to work. Walk around to see if 10 minutes is the right amount of time. End it sooner or a give a minute or two longer accordingly.

(Note: If you are running short on time, have all groups work on the same case study or do the case study as one large group.)

Discussion Questions:

1. What were you thinking when you were doing this activity?
2. What was the most important thing for you about doing this?
3. What does this say to you about your role with young people in 4-H or other organizations that work with youth?
4. How might you use what you have heard and thought about today?

Leader's Notes

All of the case studies were taken from Partners in Community Leadership: Youth and Adults Working Together for Better Communities, Regional Center for Rural Development, Iowa State University, October 1993.

Youth as Objects

Adults know what is best for young people and control situations in which they allow them to be involved.

Youth as Recipients

Adults allow young people to take part in decision-making because they think the experience will be “good for them.”

Youth as Partners

Adults respect young people as having something significant to offer now, and youth are encouraged to become involved.

CASE STUDIES FOR GROUP ASSIGNMENT

Directions: Choose a study that you think is most pertinent to your group. Brainstorm how you would approach this from a “Youth as Partners” perspective.

Case #1

You are an adult advisor to a group of teens planning a party. The group has scheduled a planning meeting. You are the only adult and they are looking to you to get the meeting started. What do you say or do?

Case #2

Your group is meeting to work on the project that has been selected. Instead of getting down to business, the teens are flirting and laughing. You don't perceive that business is getting done. A youth is chair of the committee and is not doing anything about the situation. What do you do?

Case #3

You are a 4-H club leader and the club vice-president, Jan, has approached you about the idea of signing the club up to clean a section of highway as a community service project. This is the first you have heard of the idea, and to your knowledge, there has been no discussion with the rest of the club about this idea. What do you say or do?



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Leader Resource**Case #1**

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Youth as Objects approach:

The adult chairs the meeting. The adult has all the ideas and suggestions. The adult says or implies to the youth that they don't have experience doing this so they are not capable of doing it.

Youth as Recipients approach:

The adult puts the agenda on the board, and then goes through each agenda item asking for ideas from the youth. Adult puts some parameters on kinds of things that can be done (e.g. can't have rap music).

Youth as Partners approach:

"How would you like to plan this party? What do you like to do? How should we pay for this party? In planning events, I have found it helpful to use a guide in planning. Would you like to use it or see it? How would you like to divide up the responsibilities? How can I help?"

Case #2

Your group is meeting to work on the project that has been selected. Instead of getting down to business, the teens are flirting and laughing. You don't perceive that business is getting done. A youth is chair of the committee and is not doing anything about the situation. What do you do?

Youth as Objects approach:

The adult yells out above the noise of the group, tells everyone to quiet down and get to work or it will never get done. The youth chair is ignored and specific directions for doing the task are given to the youth.

Youth as Recipients approach:

The adult talks to the chair and tells her/him what to do to get the group to get the work done. The adult makes a list of what the group should be doing, tells the teens how to do it, and assigns committees to show how the work can be accomplished.

Youth as Partners approach:

The adult and the teen chair have a short session to decide how to get the group back on track. They then involve the group in a planning process, setting goals, dates, responsibilities, etc. so everyone is in agreement about the next steps. The responsibility for accomplishment is shared by all of the group members. The adult works with the group but does not continually “check up” on how well everyone is carrying out their role.

<i>Case #3</i>

You are a 4-H club leader and the club vice-president, Jan, has approached you about the idea of signing the club up to clean a section of highway as a community service project. This is the first you have heard of the idea, and to your knowledge, there has been no discussion with the rest of the club about this idea. What do you say or do?

Youth as Objects approach:

You decide to bring up this idea with the whole club at the next meeting. You have some particular concerns and specific suggestions about how this kind of project ought to run. After all, your club is very busy and you have the big picture which will help the club members set realistic priorities. Kids really don't have the experience to carry out such a long-term commitment.

Youth as Recipients approach:

You bring up the idea at the next meeting. You have spent time thinking about this and have all the options and alternatives lined out ahead of time so the club members don't waste time brainstorming. You have also set some specific requirements for participation: at least 80% of club members must participate in the clean-up activity each year, etc.

Youth as Partners approach:

You encourage Jan to bring this up at the next meeting. In addition, you might suggest things that Jan could do to gather some necessary information to share with the entire club when the idea will be discussed.. How often will we have to clean the highway? What kind of training is required by the state highway department? Who will take the leadership for this each year? How can I help you?