Youth-Adult Partnership Activity

Seed to Tree Continuum: Nourishing the Seed

The “nourishing the seed” metaphor (seed to tree) is used to ground our understanding of how to build a school culture based on youth-adult partnership. While there is a clear continuum of youth-adult partnership, know that it is free of judgment and that learning and teaching contexts and tasks require different levels of partnership, in varied doses.

Setup:

You’ll need copies of the Seed to Tree diagram for participants to reference. Also, make or print signs for each stage (“Sun,” “Soil,” “Seed,” and so on). Including a brief description of each section is a good idea, too. Hang those up around the room with tape or sticky tack.

HOW IT WORKS:

1. First, explain the sections of the metaphor. Facilitators or participants can take turns reading each section.
    - **SUN:** Youth Voice and Agency - these are the rays providing the possibilities to progressively build and deepen youth-adult partnership over time, if the conditions are right.
    - **SOIL:** The soil provides many of the essential nutrients to nourish movement toward partnership.
    - **SEED:** Youth as recipients: Adults inform and/or direct youth. Ideally, adults support expression and actively listen to youth. Decisions are generally done “to and for” youth in this seedling stage. The potential value of youth voice and agency is recognized, but has not yet been provided the nutrients to flourish.
    - **SPROUT:** Youth as consultants: Adults actively seek and consider opinions of youth in learning and decision making. Adults listen to youth during this period of germination of new roles and responsibilities. The seed has been provided the nutrients to begin to grow and develop. Once the seed has found the right conditions, it will secure itself. The first root breaks through the seed, anchoring it and taking in water for the developing plant. Youth begin to understand the value of their input and how to offer it to adults, rooting a new role in their learning experience. Adults begin to better understand the importance of integrating youth perspectives into decisions, honoring and optimizing these new roots.
    - **SAPLING:** Youth and adults as emerging partners: Youth actively participate in a decision making process that is designed and guided by adults. The length of the sapling stage depends on the tree species, but saplings have defining characteristics. For one, they have flexible trunks - mental models of adults and youth are shifting over time. The sapling grows stronger when subjected to the elements, but also appreciates protection and support during this period. A new and deeper root system creates evolving stability and strength. Sprouts also have smoother bark than mature trees. The decision-making process is generally smoother when designed and guided by adults, but may lack the richness of a “rougher” and more negotiated process. An inability to produce fruit or flowers - not yet a fully equitable process

- **MATURE TREE:** Youth & adults as full partners: Learning, teaching, and school leadership are founded on equitable, respectful trusting cross-generational relationships characterized by shared power, voice, and responsibility. A tree becomes mature when it starts producing fruits or flowers. This is when the tree is at its most productive and has realized its full potential. A well developed root system and developed trunk contribute to the strength and resilience of the tree.

2. Next, ask participants to move to the sign in the room where they feel their school is in general on the seed to tree continuum. Ask these questions and get a few volunteers to share out with the whole group:
    - Turn to a person next to you and share why you are standing where you are.
    - Turn to another person and ask what might you or your school need to move further along on the continuum towards more YAP?

3. Finally, it's time for a whole group discussion. Bring everyone together in a big circle or where everyone can otherwise see one another. Lead the group through the following questions:
    - What was it like to think about your schools in this way?
    - What areas need nurturing as we nourish the seed?
    - What can you take away from this activity to help your schools/work?

Once the norms of youth-adult partnership have been established, the capacity of youth as consultants and emerging partners is amplified. There will predictably be discomfort in the process of youth and adults assuming new roles. It is important to have a language to talk about the evolution of the role shifts over time. This graphic may serve as a useful reference point in that process.

SEED TO TREE GRAPHIC

