

## What is Youth Voice & The Benefits

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Youth voice is a process that gives youth choice, control, and opportunities for collaboration (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Often in youth programming, adolescents find themselves distressed because of the separation from adult leaders. This type of segregation has been defined by research as “adultism” (Flasher, 1978). Adults tend to see youth as less capable and misunderstand the value of youth voice. Negative perceptions of youth leads to adults thinking there is a fixed hierarchical relationship that entitles them to disregard any of the youths’ viewpoints on a particular matter. Adult-centered programs lead to manipulating and tokenizing young people through youth activities (Hart, 1992). While adults are often more knowledgeable, youth can also be experts about their communities, schools, and other facets of their environments.

Enabling youth to have a voice helps battle negative perceptions of the youths’ lack of abilities and illustrates the capability of youth being co-creators of action (Huber, Frommeyer, Weisenbach, & Sazama, 2003; Ozer, 2016). A great illustration of the importance of youth voice is evident in youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) projects. One of their projects that showcased the need for inclusion of youth voice comes from Guatemala, Voces y Manos, which focused on empowering youth to advance the health and wellbeing of their communities. The youth identified needs in their community and pushed these items onto political agendas in the 2015 elections. This youth-led leadership program has now provided their peers with practical knowledge to implement community projects to improve nutrition, combat deforestation, and promote sustainable agriculture. Youth voice means that youth are respected for their ideas and empowered to share their opinions. In order for youth to have a voice, adults must acknowledge and intentionally listen to ideas of young people (Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011).

### References

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