

# Insights: How Can We Build Powerful Youth-Adult Partnerships?

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The shared vision of the Teach For All network is that students have the education, support and opportunity to develop as leaders who can shape a better future for themselves, and all of us. Given this vision, it's crucial that we embrace youth as partners in addressing the challenges we face in schools, communities, and as a global society. Engaging them in leading today will advance progress by enlisting their energy and fresh perspectives, and it is also the best way to develop the agency, awareness, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills they'll need to continue to lead in the future.

For over a decade we have been practicing, studying, and learning about youth-adult partnerships and have found that **organizations that have built the most powerful youth-adult partnerships, do these four things:**

## **1. They don't just run programs for students, but run them with students**

Supporting students to live into their full potential and grow as individual and collective leaders is central to our work. However, this is not sufficient for enduring impact. For that, these organizations ensure that anytime they want to run a program for students, they co-design, co-create, and co-implement it alongside the students. This ensures it is relevant to the needs of the young people, and that they have a say in their own learning and growth.

In 2018, Teach For All set up the Student Leader Advisory Council (SLAC) to bring more student voice and perspective to impact the vision, strategy, and work of Teach For All.

The approach was focused on working with the students, not for them. All shared spaces—whether virtual or in person—are co-created and the Student Leaders are active partners in their ideation, design, and execution. The SLAC students design the selection criteria for incoming cohorts, decide priority areas they want to focus on as a group, run calls and workshops themselves, and make the final decisions in selecting the next cohort of SLAC members. They have also co-created Teach For All's Future of Work initiative, served as advisors on the design of the Teaching As Collective Leadership framework, and partnered with the team to inform and strengthen Teach For All's work across the organization in all aspects that impact them.

## **2. They don't just grow students as leaders of tomorrow, but treat them as leaders today**

Students have the agency within them to take informed action to improve a system that severely impacts their education, their communities, and their life. However, it is rare to see examples of students acting on this agency and of adults treating them as leaders today. Youth-adult partnerships give students the opportunity to exert this leadership.

As part of their broader strategy to develop educational leadership at all levels of the Peruvian education system, Enseña Perú has launched a student leadership development program which starts with a

seven-weekend program designed and iterated by students. This program focuses on self-knowledge, social conscience, and collective action. Forty percent of those who finish this program go on to become youth guides and facilitators for the next cohorts. Following this program, student leaders are invited to apply to a year-long follow-on program where they work on innovative projects, collectively impacting over 3000 people. Those who graduate from this program become part of Enseña Perú's alumni, alongside the program's teachers.

### **3. They don't just share their students' perspectives, but create platforms for students to narrate their own unique journeys**

Entities living into authentic youth-adult partnership deeply believe that those who have themselves experienced the inequities we are working to address should guide and lead this work. Students experience the inequities and injustices of our systems daily and thus have a unique and powerful voice that must be heard.

The United Nations' Transforming Education Summit in 2022 provided the network with an opportunity to invite a delegation to participate in these important discussions shaping the global strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). Instead of this being a delegation of adults only, we put together a group of students and teachers from across the network.

At the summit, students and their teachers spoke on panels, led workshops, and shared their journeys:

- Enseña por México student Paola and her teacher Daniela spoke about student wellbeing and mental health challenges
- Teach For India student Shruti shared her journey as a member of the Maya Musical, and the role art and values have played in her education
- Teach First Denmark student Lykke and her teacher Johannes discussed the importance of trust and partnership between students and teachers to ensure an effective and safe learning environment

### **4. They don't just involve students, but make sure they have well-defined and important roles to play**

Youth-adult partnership is not authentic if the adult holds all the power and only involves students in superficial ways. For the partnership to be meaningful and powerful, the youth and adults must both have clearly defined responsibilities that have a critical impact on the final outcome—as illustrated in the partnership between Teach For Nigeria student Esther and her teacher Afeez:

“I live in a community where boys drop out of school, and end up becoming poor fishermen, and young girls end up becoming teenage mothers. This cycle has been damaging our people and our community for decades!”

— Esther

Together, Esther and Afeez decided to establish a Community Tech Lab, a project that empowers students with digital and life skills to prepare them for the future workforce, prevent student dropouts, and give them an opportunity to access greater earnings. Both Esther and Afeez took on different roles within the project. For example, Esther conducted the needs assessment, oversaw the construction of the Tech Lab, and led the stakeholder engagement. Esther not only convinced their principal, community leaders, parents and other students to support this work, but the entire community came together after school and on weekends to

collect local bamboo and physically build the lab from scratch. Afeez, on the other hand, took on the responsibility to train the students, mentor them, and connect them to resources and expertise, as well as organizing community outreach and the development of learning materials.

## Learn More

- Additional details on [conditions that foster authentic youth-adult partnership](#) in classrooms and organizations—including explanations, tools and examples.
- The [Student Voice Accelerator](#) is a program designed to deepen students' self & social awareness, grow them into powerful communicators, and then support the organization to connect the students with local and global advocacy opportunities, while being part of an interconnected global community.
- For any questions related to youth-adult partnership specifically, or student leadership generally, please reach out to [sanaya.bharucha@teachforall.org](mailto:sanaya.bharucha@teachforall.org).