



Maintaining Youth



2014

Maintaining Youth (Summary Notes)

(Note: Many of the “Engaging Youth” tips also apply here.)

Organizations consistently state that keeping youth 18-29 years of age in programming is a big challenge. Lack of attendance or inconsistent attendance is often cited as a reason why specialized programming for this age group is not successful. Although there can never be a one-size-fits-all approach to youth programming, there are some elements that might be helpful in providing successful programs.

Program Design

A report titled, *Engaging Youth Within Our Communities* outlines a summary of the driving forces behind youth engagement, based on the project staff’s experiences working with youth. This report identified the following list. Youth need:

- To have a vision (to have a cause)
- To feel competent (to contribute using their own strengths)
- To have responsibilities (to have clear roles and course of action)
- To be recognized (to receive feedback)
- To have influence (to express opinion)
- To be supported (by community sources)
- To be creative (to learn using creativity)

“We noticed when the seven forces are present, young people are committed and their participation is maximized.”

Innovative Approaches

More recently, employers identified that people’s lack of problem solving skills and lack of team working skills are hindering the labour market. By developing programs that embrace creativity and collaboration, we can build the identified skills. Combine this approach with content that’s easy to understand, interesting and caters to individual learning needs, and we’ve got a recipe for success.

Literacy programs in the London, Ontario area have been integrating technology, collaboration and creativity through a variety of approaches. Literacy programs have been delivering skill building sessions using devices such as a MaKey MaKey, (www.makeymakey.com), podcast speakers and Arducopters. Through this innovative approach, programs have been able to show that learning literacy skills can be accomplished in a creative, hands-on and collaborative way. Other areas to consider incorporating creativity into programming might be through the arts, such as theatre,

music, poetry or video storybooks. When incorporating some interactive devices or creative approaches, you can deliver programs that are more likely to maintain the attention, and attendance, of youth. Meanwhile, you not only have a dynamic way to deliver your key messages, but you also build on the technology skills, problem solving skills and social skills of youth.

To stay engaged in a program, youth like to understand what the expectations are and they like to see progression, the result of their efforts. They like to have shorter goal timelines, which leads to seeing progress quicker (short-term goals are an important factor in program development as identified through recent youth/literacy pilot programs). A program that incorporates elements of Gamification can address these preferences. Gamification isn't about making the program into a video game - that is viewed more as "gamed-based learning." Gamification is about incorporating into programs the foundational elements of gaming that engage and motivate gaming participants. This includes (but is not limited to) incorporating the idea of levels, collaboration, competition and reward. The design of literacy programs in Ontario naturally leads itself to Gamification. For example, points could be accumulated for tasks that are successfully completed, levels completed, for time spent in a program and/or for helping another learner. To promote the spirit of competition and collaboration, a reward could be offered to the group with the most points. Gamification is part of our daily life now, directing us and motivating us as consumers (for example, Air Miles and Shopper's Drug Mart offering customers reward points, or Drop Box offering free storage space when you have friends also sign up). It's conceivable to think that Gamification can be successfully applied to educational environments as well, to guide and motivate learners.

During one youth focus group we explored attitudes towards participating in strictly online programs. This idea wasn't favourable to the youth we spoke with. They felt that they may lack the motivation and discipline to succeed. The youth also stated that their home environment was too distracting to be successful with online learning.

The youth that we are trying to attract, engage and maintain in programs are raised with technology, gaming devices and dynamic communication tools. Studies are showing that because of this, youth today process information differently and interact with those around them differently. Through technology youth also are stimulated in different ways than those who have gone before them. By incorporating technology, creativity and innovative approaches such as Gamification, we can meet many of our current youth's learning needs while achieving our program outcomes.

Reflection and Feedback

Results of pilot programs that focussed on youth/literacy reported that, “Targeted programs that include goal setting, self-assessment and self-exploration are very effective with youth.” Self-assessment tools are valuable to help youth determine what their strengths are and where improvements are needed. This can prove for greater buy-in from the youth involved in a program.

Several project reports identify that incorporating the time and tools for reflection into the program is part of a successful practice. By doing so, youth can continue to connect the reason why they came to program (their goal) to the content they’re learning. This will reinforce the reason to attend a program. *Involve Youth 2*, published by the City of Toronto, suggests that this reflection could be part of a discussion that’s scheduled with participants (individually, confidentially) throughout the program. Reflective programming helped youth to learn more about themselves and to build self-esteem.

Providing regular feedback to youth was continually advised in reports about youth programming. The report *Engaging Youth Within Our Communities* states, “Feedback represents an important key to keep youth motivated and engaged. The more efficiently and timely it is supplied, the more responsive youth will be to it.” The process of continually checking in supports and guides youth through programs, helping them identify their successes, challenges and progression, all the while motivating them to continue on their learning path.

Support

Bridges Out of Poverty tells us that for people from generational poverty, relationships are the most important thing and, “because relationships are key to individuals from poverty, it is practical to use mentoring to increase achievement outcomes.” When we asked a group of youth if incorporating mentoring into a program is a good idea, the reactions were mixed. Youth said they would consider being mentored, and thought it might be a motivator for some youth, but they wanted to have a chance to learn something on their own first. Likewise, we asked if youth would be more motivated to attend a program if they could bring a friend. They cautioned us that although it’s a good idea to offer that option, there was a risk that it could be distracting.

Bridges Out of Poverty also tells us that clients may have little procedural memory and an inability to think in sequence. To support clients so they can follow through on directions, there is a “need to have clients or workers write out the steps needed to finish and check them off as they go.” This suggestion can help youth track their required activities and also see progression.

Transition

Considering the clients' lives beyond our programs is one of the final pieces of successful programming with youth. To transition youth successfully, we have been aware of what is required as they move forward. Have we prepared youth well enough for success in the next step of their goal? Do youth know where they are going and what will be expected? If not, their chances of reaching their goals are diminished, and as programs, we haven't truly delivered on helping them. According to the evaluation of a series of youth/literacy pilot programs, "The same percentage of respondents who indicated that they purposefully transitioned clients at the end of the in-year funding initiative also stated that clients successfully transitioned." Supporting youth on the path to their next goal is not only suggested practice for youth programming, it's also our responsibility.

Suggested Readings

Would you like to find out more about some of the ideas referred to in the "Marketing to Youth," "Engaging Youth" and "Maintaining Youth" tip sheets? Here are some resources that can help provide further insight and more ideas for successful youth programming:

Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities

By Ruby K. Payne, Philip DeVol, & Terie Dreussi Smith.

Revised 2005, 2006, 2009. © 2001

This handbook offers comprehensive and thought provoking insights into how our values, perceptions and expectations are influenced by our economic level. Programs and agencies often follow middle class ideologies. This causes a disconnect with clients from a background of poverty. This handbook will help organizations see where the gaps in understanding may occur and how to build a bridge between middle class and poverty class expectations.

This resource is available through Aha! Process Inc. at www.ahaprocess.com. You may also want to explore if there's a Bridges Out of Poverty training team in your area that has copies for sale.

Electronic Youth: Creating the Current

Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board (2011)

This report includes research on how youth (15-30 yrs of age) are accessing and sharing labour market information.

This resource is available at

<http://workforcedevelopment.ca/sites/default/files/CreatingTheCurrentReport.pdf> or by searching under the Project section of the Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board website.

Engaging Youth Within Our Communities

Boscoville 2000; Mobilization Project (2010)

This report contains ideas for youth programming and for youth motivation. Of special interest may be the “Discussion Elements” inserted throughout the report. These questions are meant to guide organizations as they explore their potential for youth engagement.

This resource is available at http://www.youthscape.ca/guide_jeune_ang_web.pdf

In-Year Youth Focussed Programming

A project coordinated by Literacy Link Niagara (2014)

Throughout the Western Region of Southern Ontario, Literacy and Basic Skills programs undertook 27 youth initiatives that were designed to serve a total of 300 young adults. A list of these programs and their corresponding findings can be accessed by contacting the project lead, Literacy Link Niagara.

www.literacylinkniagara.ca

Involve Youth 2: A guide to meaningful youth engagement

Published by the City of Toronto (2006)

This report offers several tips, with supporting case studies, on youth outreach and programming. Here you will also find strategies for difficult situations such as absenteeism, lateness and youth disinterest.

This resource is available at <http://youthcore.ca/download.php?id=114>

This resource is one from a series:
Marketing to Youth, Engaging Youth, Maintaining Youth (2014).

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