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Teachers should give students a far greater say in how schools are run and focus as much on relationships as they do on subjects, according to the largest survey of young people ever undertaken. Education systems in many countries have become so driven by structures and standards that they have lost sight of the target, which is their students, according to the expert behind a poll of more than 1 million school-aged children in the UK and the US. Schools must now focus on incorporating much more student voice into their decisions in order to engage young people and allow them to enjoy their education, argues Russell Quaglia, leader of the research project, which has taken 25 years to compile. The annual surveys have revealed that students want three main things from their schooling: to feel that they matter individually, that they matter as a group and that their teachers care, Dr Quaglia said. We need to prioritise students and relationships and expectations to the same degree [that] we prioritise reading, writing and the sciences, he told TES. We need to prioritise the importance of the students and who they are. What I tell teachers is, you have to let students know that they matter to you, that you expect them to do really well and that you care for them. Dr Quaglia said that student voice - which can involve considerable power and responsibility being handed to young people - was undervalued in schools. [The] school council is incredibly outdated; you should have to elect people to get student voice across, he argued. Give them some real responsibility, not just planning a dance. Get them involved in curriculum matters or the hiring process. Its not a take-over or giving teachers more work to do, its about teaching and learning together. The issue of student voice is highly contentious, with vocal supporters and opponents of the concept, which at its more extreme end can lead to students being included on interview panels for school staff. Half the students we survey get the sense that they dont matter as an individual. They want teachers to care for them, Dr Quaglia said. Then they want to matter as a whole, and feel they want more of a voice in decisions in the school. Finally, they want teachers to matter. Teachers have a profound impact on their lives and they want teachers who enjoy working with them, make learning exciting and are willing to learn themselves. Over the years, Dr Quaglia and his team at the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations in Portland, Maine, have used field research techniques including observations, interviews, school data analysis, teacher research and pilot interventions. More recently, they have gathered data through the online My Voice survey, run jointly with the Pearson Foundation. The 15-minute questionnaire asks students about their classes, their relationships with teachers and their schools culture. The questionnaire is focused on the eight conditions that Dr Quaglia believes are needed for students to achieve academic, social and personal success: belonging; heroes; sense of accomplishment; fun and excitement; curiosity and creativity; spirit of adventure; leadership and responsibility; and confidence to take action. In the 2013 US survey, which gathered the views of 56,877 students aged 11-18 in 200 schools, only 47 per cent said teachers made school an exciting place to learn. In the UK, 64 per cent of more than 5,800 students surveyed by My Voice last year said they had a teacher who was a positive role model, but only 57 per cent said their teachers cared about their feelings. The survey showed the need for teachers to spend more time caring for those in their charge and listening to their views, Dr Quaglia said. He is due to present his findings today at the Oppi education festival in Helsinki, Finland. Peter Kent, headteacher of Lawrence Sheriff School in Rugby, England, said that student voice was an integral part of school life. Students are an important constituency within a school and their voice is tremendously powerful, he said. Learning is not just something that is the job of teachers - everyone must do it together. But Claire Fox, director of thinktank the Institute of Ideas, described student voice as patronising and an abdication of adult responsibility. The whole purpose of education is that students are there to learn and access knowledge and the people with the authority to pass that on are teachers, she said. Giving students a role in teacher recruitment was even more preposterous, she added. They cant possibly judge them on their subject knowledge, only on shallow, superficial characteristics. It totally undermines the teachers authority. A safeguarding report published last month saying racism was a "likely" factor in the strip-search of a black 15-year-old girl by police at her school has resulted in protests and discussions across London. The report found the search of the girl, known as Child Q, without an appropriate adult present was unjustified, external Child Q is suing the Met Police and the school in Hackney over the incident and the head teacher has stepped down for health reasons. Meanwhile, groups such as social justice charity Voyage have been working to empower young black people with open discussions. Rhoda, a girl who attends the group, said: "Our voices need to be heard in order for new change to actually occur." Young people are the leaders of today and tomorrow, and Mittra (2021) said it best when she remarked. The finest preparation for tomorrow is doing your best now. This phrase is extremely valid and current since modern society has demonstrated that young people must be shown and involved in all aspects of the global talks that take place regularly in order to have a greater future. Being one half of Hackneys young speakers and a member of the Hackney Youth Parliament, I have seen first-hand how listening to the opinions of young people gives us a genuine presence of what matters in the world and the attention we need to pay to certain societal concerns that tend to be overlooked. Furthermore, I think it is vital that young peoples views are heard as resolutions and procedures enacted now has a direct impact on young people as we become heir to the future. Todays youths are powerful, well-informed, and are determined change-makers. After all, youth and children account for over 40% of the global population, which is one of many reasons why youth voice is so important. Having the youths voice in decision-making processes is not only the right thing to do, but it is also the tactical thing to do, as we are all striving for society to continue to be evolving rather than stagnate. It is now up to young people to shift the narrative of how things currently are to how they should be. Making everyone a change-maker one step at a time demonstrates our stance that the future belongs to us, and we have the responsibility of making society a better place for future generations. Our voices and opinions have illustrated that we possess the strength, agility and a wide range of capabilities to bring about the beneficial changes we want to see. I recommend to the government and the powers that be to invest in amplifying and listening to the voices of young people as it gives us a sense of inner belongingness, develops our self-esteem and our leadership skills which are skills we need in both our professional and personal lives. Being a young person myself, I have observed that taking young peoples contributions into account fosters a sense of citizenship in young people, assisting them in the development of key competencies such as cooperation and communication skills, self-efficacy, responsibility, civic-mindedness, and respect for the value of democracy all of which are central to the DofEs mission for young people. Once the government begins to act upon these suggestions for young people, this will be seen as an indicator of young peoples voices starting to be heard. Society must trust us with the keys to the truck and the ability to drive it. Children and young people should have opportunities to have their voices heard and be taken seriously in decisions that affect them. When young people are involved, we know this leads to better decision-making and improved services. Its important to hear young peoples voices because they are going to grow into the world that everyone else is leaving behind, so you want to take that input from them to make that world a place that they want to be in. Our 2024-27 Strategy places children and young peoples voices and lived experiences at the heart of everything we do. Here are a few recent examples: This year, we supported young people to call on the new Prime Minister to be a champion for babies, children, and young people, and to put them at the heart of Government as part of the Children at the Table campaign alongside Action for Children, National Childrens Bureau, NSPCC, and The Childrens Society. Young people have been front and centre in the development of our new Strategy and brand including participating in our initial research and co-creating parts of our new brand. Young people are involved in recruiting new colleagues at all levels, from project workers to the most senior roles like the recruitment of our CEO, Lynn Perry. I appreciate you giving us the space and making us feel heard by reassuring [that our voices] will be used to improve services. Daisys NHS Youth Advisory Network member Across all our work, we create opportunities for young people to help shape their future. Our B-Amplified Network is a group of young people from across the UK who currently get support from, or have previously been supported, by our services. Theyve volunteered to get more involved in shaping our work, which includes taking part in our national policy influencing work, supporting our fundraising, and engaging with our senior leaders and trustees on what they want to see from our work. As part of our B-Amplified Network, our SEEN Ambassadors are a group of young people who are committed to creating systemic change across the UK. Their projects focus on challenging structural inequalities that get in the way of a fair future for children and young people of African, Asian and Caribbean heritage. Also part of our B-Amplified Network is our NHS Youth Forum and NHS Youth Advisory Network. These are platforms for young people to share their views and experiences to make change within NHS England and wider health services. The NHS Youth Forum is made up of 25 young people who work on specific health-related projects in the NHS, while the NHS Youth Advisory Network is made up of about 150 young people across England who engage with NHS teams on specific areas theyre working on. Were also working alongside our partners to create opportunities for young people to have a voice and influence over their decision-making. Our Co-op Youth Advisory Group, which is made up of 12 young people aged 16-25, is informing, shaping and influencing all aspects of our partnership with Co-op from designing digital content and new services in their communities, to fundraising and influencing government policy. Our Child Health Equity Collaborative is made up of 10 Health Equity Champions who influence our work to address health inequalities among children and young people. The Collaborative is a partnership between Barnardos, the UCL Institute of Health Equity and three Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) - Birmingham and Solihull, Cheshire and Merseyside, and South Yorkshire - to shape the way ICSs create health and address health inequalities among children and young people. You can find out more about our approach and goals for our voice and influence work by checking out our Voice and Influence Approach and Framework. Josh Harsant, Barnardos Head of Voice and Influence, explains our approach to working with children and young people with Corinne and Raaghav, two young people who have been working with us to bring about positive change. Blog 31 July 2024 We interview Dasha and Jake, two young people supported by Barnardo's, about what it was like to take our free school meals petition to the government to call for more support for struggling families. In December 2024, we held our annual reception in Parliament where we were joined by Parliamentarians, our celebrity supporters, our partners, and young people to take stock of our achievements over the last year and to lean into the challenges and the opportunities that lie ahead of us, including the continued need to work together to address child poverty. Find out more about the reception Need a helping hand? Weve got you. Explore the kinds of support that we offer through our guidance and services. Find out about our support A legacy-leaving leader will have many different attributes. Purpose, mindset, courage, empathy, agility the list goes on. But without one integral thing, all of this is pointless: Their voice, one that can be distinctly heard from all corners, is the most important asset they can possess once they muster the courage to use it, real impact awaits. Our 25Under25 Award winners know this better than anyone. Theyve overcome barriers and worked hard in order to make their voices heard. Whether thats by launching social enterprises, advocating with community groups, or writing extensively about societal and environmental issues that desperately need to be addressed. When they each attended Common Purposes Legacy Programme, they learned more about the ways they could use their voice to lead with positive impact, and why this is a crucial part of leadership. This understanding has spurred them forward in their leadership journeys, and theyre now inspiring others by using (and sharing) this knowledge. Currently about 16 per cent of people in the world are aged between 15-24, which accounts for about 1.2 billion people, says one of our award winners John Ebong, a young reformer, medical doctor and global health advocate. This is a very diverse large population whose input into todays world should not be overlooked. Francis Koroma, who founded a foundation and became a youth ambassador for Sierra Leone all before the age of 25 is in agreement: There are a lot of young people with brilliant and smart ideas that can change the world who will help us prepare for the next generation - we should have a seat at the table. Similarly Tri Tran, the founder of FinTech startup WeShare, which tackles poverty and climate change through social funding, reiterates that todays young leaders are what the worlds future looks like. Their opinions and voices are truly important for senior leaders and country leaders who could change their actions and consider long term results, rather than short term gains, he explains. Maria Fernanda Marquez Sanchez, who works with a number of migrant and mental health organisations agrees: Using our voices is critical because we can bring fresh perspectives and energy to our society. Our age doesnt necessarily mean we are inexperienced or immature. When we bring our talents and skills together with other people we are not just succeeding, we are achieving greatness. Aaliyah Phillips, a restorative justice advocate, youth representative and program director at Territory Chicago, adds: Our young people know exactly what it is that they need, what it is that they want, and why they want it, and thats why its best not to shut them down when they want to talk, but to encourage them to speak, and to also hold those spaces for them to feel safe and share. Aaliyah, and each of her fellow 25Under25 are living proof of the impact this can make. Keep scrolling for more about why, and how our 2023 25Under25 winners are using their voice for good. Its important for the youth to advocate for themselves because they are the future, they are the people who are going to keep the world running, and thats not far from where we are today. Prince Jimmar, Co-founder of Rebels for Peace, ayouth organisation offering a way out from the circle of violence, retaliation and poverty based in Chicago. Young people being able to know what their voice is, and to know where their authentic voice is coming from and what its saying, and then feeling empowered to go out and use their voice is critical not only for themselves to feel like they are being authentic to themselves, but also because the decisions that are being made need our opinions and our perspectives. Joana Baptista, social entrepreneur, public speaker and activist. Using your voice plays a significant role in making sure organisations have a realistic understanding of young people. This means organisations that work with young people are more likely to have a bigger impact with young people. -Hasibul Hasan, youth social worker, environmental activist and peace advocate. Youth engagement in climate talks is crucial, especially in this digital age. Asemerging leaders, we need to think beyond the person, we need to think beyond oneself, and we need to value the lives of others. What we know now and whatwell learn today will help us make better decisions in the future. - Brian Delos Santos, incoming Executive Director of the Young Environmental Forum. I use my voice today because of the people who went ahead of me and used theirs. This is why I use my voice - so that the people who come in behind me can use theirs. - Titilope Adedokun, founder of SisterlyHQ, a platform empowering Nigerian women to tell their stories, connecting them with resources and opportunities. The power of youth voices cannot be underestimated. Young people have unique perspectives and experiences that are often overlooked in decision-making processes. But in using their voice, young people can make a difference in the issues that affect them, and their communities. Alexis Murillo, entrepreneur, and founder of CultivateYou, which supports first-generation and low-income college students. Its very important when young people use their voices because they are able to advocate for change, they are able to step into key positions to influence decision making, and, they can also support other young people. - Dimma Muhammad Mawejie, advocate for reducing textile waste and co-founder of EcoCrafts Ug. Giving young people the opportunity to express themselves, and to respect other thoughts and ideas is a really powerful tool to create a positive impact, and to start changing communities to form a future you want to live in. - Jolanda Schuurman, social entrepreneur and founder of Student@Night, which empowers young people to share their stories and address social issues. Times are ever evolving, if young people dont chip in and be innovative in the way we develop and move forward, were just going to get stuck in the past. - Josh Duncan, co-director of Horizon Studios, which empowers young people through the medium of music. Being young doesnt stop you from being an expert or having a great idea that needs to be shared. Its unfortunate that sometimes young people feel like they cant contribute, but the reality is that we need to step up and speak up to make sure our perspectives and ideas are integrated in order to build up the world that we live in. Laurny Mwale, writer, researcher and author of The Shuri Effect: Bridging The Gap For Young Black Women In STEM. Young people are the agents of change, we have the duty and responsibility to alert, understand and then tell our stories so that others will understand our own contexts and circumstances in both developing and undeveloped countries. - Mohammad Fadel Mahri, educator and founder of Light of Indonesia, which supports and provides better access to education for marginalised youth. When young people use their voice, it creates value, fairness, equality and inclusivity, which helps to create a more just and equitable world for all. - Nayab Zahra, AI Engineer and a young environmental scientist. Using your voice can really be empowering, giving young people a sense of ownership within their communities and in society more broadly. Young people should be supported to take action and make decisions on their own without adult-led processes. Nehaj Juhari, co-founder of EPIC-Empower People Initiating Change which operates across India and Ireland. Our youth are powerful changemakers. Never doubt our ability to create impact, especially within the communities around you, be a trail blazer and lead change to give others the chance to see the same vision as you. - Shi Zhou Tan, sustainability advocate and regional sustainability executive (Asia-Pacific) of Boller Logistics. Its absolutely essential that there is a seat at the table for the young generation. We should always raise our voices because we are the generation that is most affected by the decisions that our leaders are taking. - Syed Muhammad Aqeel Abidi, medical student and president of Humanity Initiative, which aims to increase health literacy and provides medical assistance to underserved communities in Pakistan. Young people have a unique perspective on the world, and this creates a valuable contribution to our society today. 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