



ACTIVE & SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL / ÉCOLIERS ACTIF ET EN SÉCURITÉ

A Guide to
Child & Youth Engagement
in Active School Travel Projects



photo: Arthur Orsini

Larissa: *Student Leader, Walking Group Captain, 9-year-old*

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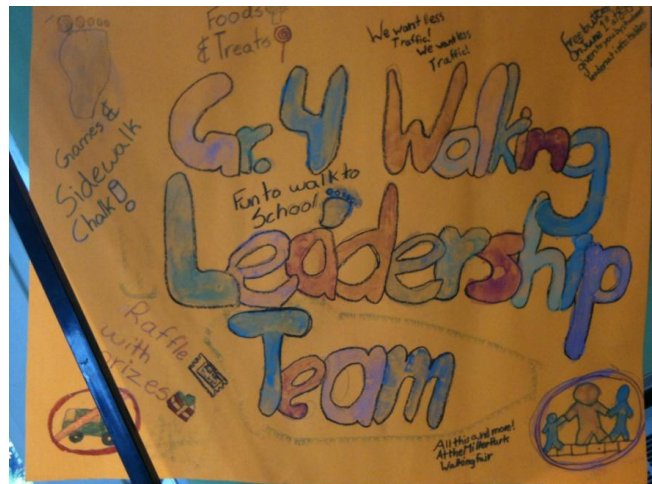
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Introduction

Learn from those you 'teach'.

Arthur Orsini

Training and supporting groups of student leaders is an exciting way of engaging schools in walking and cycling promotion. Child and youth engagement has proven effective in the promotion of sustainable transportation with student leaders – from as young as Grade 4 through to Grade 12. Authentic collaboration with student leaders will ensure that your strategies and activities are ‘cool-proofed’ and fun.

This guide is intended to offer some preliminary, and preparatory, considerations before setting up a child or youth engagement project. For more information, or to sign up for workshop training and/or support, please visit www.urbanthinkers.ca and the other resources in the final section of this guidebook.

There are a variety of reasons for choosing to implement a child and youth engagement component of a school travel project. Two of the more significant rationales are that it is ethical and pragmatic.

1. *It is ethical: In a democratic society, those whose ...environments... are at stake should be consulted and involved in the decisions that affect them directly.*
2. *It is pragmatic: Support for programmes and policies often depend on people's willingness to assist the process. ...*

Sarkissian et al., 2009, p. 47

The Adult Facilitator

From the start, it is important to realize that many of the subtleties of working on child and youth engagement projects will be better understood through hands-on experience and active learning. If you are new to the world of child and youth engagement, it would be worthwhile to seek a training workshop at a local youth-based organization.

PeerNetBC defines youth engagement as “*making a typically adult environment more welcoming and accessible to young people in order to encourage involvement*”.

However, in regards to student engagement in school travel projects, it might be more appropriate to recognize that the school community is already a welcome, accessible and familiar place for students. Instead, the adult entering into this environment will benefit from being aware of - and responsive to - student observations, needs and recommendations.

The Adult Facilitator wears several hats while leading a child and youth engagement project. However, these roles might be better illustrated as bold slogans on t-shirts worn during the engagement processes. There is a *supporting* t-shirt, a *shared-power* t-shirt, an *affiliation* t-shirt, and a fourth-shirt –an undershirt– which if visible would read; *lifeguard*.

1. **The supporting t-shirt:** *for sure. absolutely. ride-on.*
As a supportive mentor, your commitment is intentional and sincere. You want to support the child & youth leaders in achieving their goals. If there are times when you do not agree with the particular details of their ideas and initiatives, always seek to respond to their underlying intentions.
2. **The shared-power t-shirt:** *of course you're a better judge of cool*
Let them make it cool. Don't presume that you remember "what it is like..." Because the on-the-ground look and feel of a school travel project needs to make sense to the student leaders, they need to share power in decision-making. Make no 'creative' decisions without authentic involvement from students.
3. **The affiliation t-shirt:** *it's begun ...but it could be funner*
Re-assure the student leaders that they need not *re-invent the wheel*. You are a Resource to connect their efforts and intentions with a widespread and creative movement where many tools, strategies and ideas have already been implemented. These activities and events can be locally adapted, and improved upon to make them ...funner.



4. **The undershirt:** *lifeguard*
At all stages, it is important for an adult facilitator to do their best to ensure the emotional and physical well-being of the student leaders. As an adult working with children and youths¹, there is responsibility to maintain a healthy group dynamic. Like a lifeguard constantly scanning the pool and assessing the strengths and needs of each person under their care, the adult facilitator will quietly observe and monitor the social dynamics, always prepared to take action if needed.

These t-shirts have been modified from ones 'worn' while the author was working on the Secondary School Off Ramp program at BEST, which themselves were hand-me-downs from a variety of *Motivational Theory* sources.

Overall Goals of Child & Youth Engagement

Given the proper opportunities ... youth(s) can always make a significant contribution to the development of the communities in which they live.

~ John Kretzmann & John McKnight, 1993, p. 29

¹ The word *youths* is used as the plural of youth as it "acknowledges that youths are diverse individuals with

Two sequential goals guide the work of an adult facilitator to engage children and youths in the promotion of active school travel. Initially, the adult facilitator will work to generate an overall framework of training, resources and support to guide student leaders in the implementation of a sustainable transportation project within their community.

As that becomes realized, responsibility will shift towards the student leaders. Their goal will be to implement actions and events that will change attitudes and circumstances so that their peers increasingly walk, cycle, take transit or carpool to school.

School Protocol

Challenging the system, or even encouraging critical thinking, has never been a hallmark of public education.

Wagner et al., 2006, p. 68

Before approaching any school to suggest student engagement, it is important to understand and be respectful of existing processes and priorities. At every school door, you will be reminded that you are a ‘visitor’ and must check-in at the office. And as a visitor, you rely on the support and collaboration of the school administration to begin, and continue, your work.

An outside adult facilitator (i.e. someone other than a teacher or parent) you will need a staff contact person to act as liaison and ‘watchdog’ and thereby ensure all of your proposed initiatives and strategies lie within school guidelines. If your implementation plans are relatively clear at the outset, then you can make these known to your staff contact person. However, the nature of student engagement is to share power and cultivate the students’ creative and adaptive responses to local issues. Although you will not be able to anticipate the students’ plans, you can be clear of your intention to honour the students’ ideas.

Of course, the students themselves can be expected to be familiar with what is, and what is not, appropriate behaviour within their school.

Again, as an outside adult facilitator, you may be called upon to remind them that they are still ‘in school’ and thereby required to adhere to the school’s guidelines.

Sustainable transportation planning practitioners new to working in schools will also be encouraged to:

- get a criminal record check from the Police Department in your home jurisdiction;
- wear a nametag with your name, job title and employer (if not the school);
- use only the staff washroom - never use the students’ washroom;

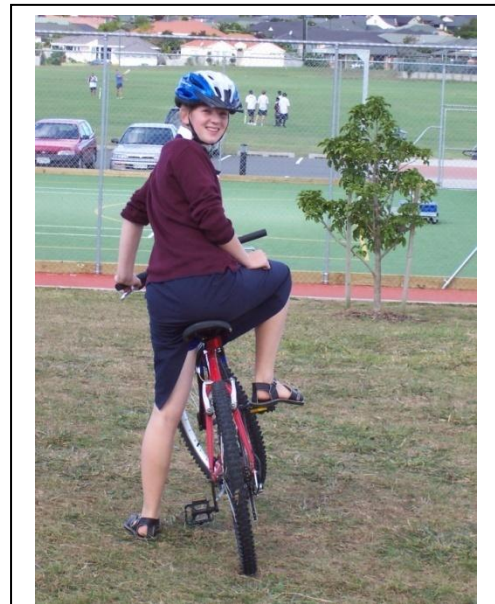


photo: Arthur Orsini

Rebecca (16) was successful in altering uniform regulations for female cyclists at her Manukau, NZ secondary school.

- arrange to hold your meetings in open and visible areas - library, cafeteria, foyer, hallway, etc.; (i.e.; try to avoid being the only adult in a classroom with students, and do not be alone with a single student in a classroom);
- if involving students in WalkArounds, traffic counts and walkability assessments, try and situate yourselves on school property and thereby prevent the activity becoming a ‘field trip’ which may require additional forms, procedures and parent volunteers
- submit a letter to the Principal or School District requesting that the School District assumes all liability for the student engagement activities, and request that they confirm the protocol for having activities be approved by the principal or contact teacher;
- clearly outline any activity you plan to implement with your staff contact person and/or the principal *before* delivery – if you have handouts or other materials, ensure that they are reviewed *before* being printed; and finally
- greet all teachers, staff and students with a smile – it is important that they recognize who you are and what you are doing. If your demeanour presents you as a ‘friendly person’ they will be more likely to advise you of any opportunity that you could not have foreseen.

Assessing the Character of a School

Although most schools will seem similar, every school community is unique. This uniqueness will reveal itself in a variety of readily apparent, and subtle ways; the urban form of the community, size of the school, environmental leadership shown by the principal and administration, involvement of the staff contact person, dynamism of the school’s extra-curricular clubs, parent involvement and the personal interests and character of the students attracted to your call to become involved in a school travel project.



photo: Brenda Walker

Restricting traffic flow through a school drive-thru can be a contentious issue. However, public support can be greater when parents learn that the principal is acting follows on recommendations from a student leader group.

Your early visits to a school can guide your opportunities. Be on the lookout for what this author calls; *looking for clues*. Your perceptions of the barriers and the allied forces will help to set the foundation for your approach.

- Are there bike racks?
- Is there a recycling program? Is it student-led?
- What type of vehicles are parked in the staff lot?
- What artwork is on the walls? which mediums? what themes?

- How large are the garbage pails, and how much single-use disposable plastic is in them after lunch?
- How are you introduced within the school, and what level of interest does this generate with staff?
- Will the school allow you to set student leader meetings within class time, or will the students have to meet over lunch? ...after school?

There is no single pre-determined timeframe for beginning a child and youth engagement project at a school: in some circumstances it may seem quick and effortless, and in another school it can move slow and be plagued with frequent re-scheduling. If the school already has an Environmental or Global Issues Club, a school travel project is a logical extension, or sub-committee of that club.

To recruit student leaders, ask the principal and your staff contact person to suggest some students. Additionally, hand out flyers at the bike racks, or at a school gate away from the drop-off zone. (Wear a *Visitor* badge and get permission from the principal beforehand.) You can start small – remember that as few as four to six committed students are enough to start a student-led team. Be open to chance – the recruiting process can parallel *Open Space Technology*. Whoever shows up: they are the right people!

If there are significant language issues, consider the importance of visuals in your promotion and recruiting resources; artwork, posters, collage, and graphic icons. Make use of posters that convey a sustainable transportation message without words – and then post some of these same images with text in languages that represent the student population.

Authentic Child and Youth Participation

The entire school community benefits from an authentic participatory process engaging student leader in walking and cycling promotion. Very often, students are the experts on the local conditions relating to their needs (Chawla, 2002) – especially as they relate to the daily commute to school. These unique and necessary perspectives can remain unnoticed to adults working on school travel projects without the patient and age-appropriate engagement of children and youths.

Child and youth participation processes can be considered authentic when children and youths;

- choose to take on roles that they clearly understand,
- are supported and trained so as to fully participate,



photo: Arthur Orsini

The Thursday morning walk to school involves navigating around garbage bins – something that the principal and City Engineer were not aware of.

- experience an environment of respect that will allow them to express their views and ideas freely, and
- are offered formal channels –within their comfort range– to assess, contribute and advise.

Roger Hart outlined eight degrees of participation to describe interaction with young people. The diagram below lists these eight levels as rungs of a ladder. Note that the lowest three rungs; *tokenism*, *decoration* and *manipulation* do not represent ‘participation’.

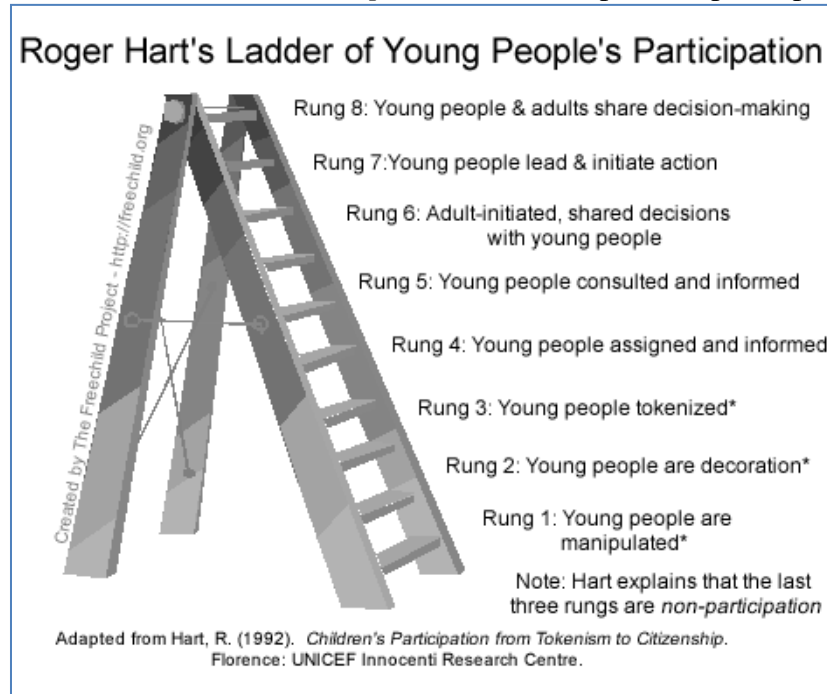


image from <http://www.freechild.org/ladder.htm>

The ladder might imply a hierarchy of participation where the highest rung is necessarily the goal or aim. However, there will be valid instances where each of the participatory levels can adequately suit particular child and youth engagement activities. An example of the top five rungs is listed below:

| <u>Rung #</u> | <u>level of participation</u> | <u>school travel project example</u> |
|---------------|---|---|
| Rung 4 | Young people are assigned a role and informed about why they are involved and how their findings will be used | School WalkAround – students are given a task to assess the traffic and safety conditions around their school. Their findings will be included in the Report to the City Engineer and School District. |
| Rung 5 | Young people are consulted and aware of how their input will be used | Bike Rack Placement – students are consulted about the “best” location for new bike racks. Their suggestions will include a brief account of the factors influencing their decisions. |
| Rung 6 | Adult-initiated, with shared | School Travel Planning Student Committee – students are invited to participate and |

| | | |
|--------|--|--|
| | decision making | offered training and support. Their decisions are respectfully considered within the overall School Travel Plan. |
| Rung 7 | Young people-initiated and directed – adults in support-role | Starting a School Bike Club – students identify a need and respond to address it. |
| Rung 8 | Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults | Walking Groups – student-led activity with support and resources from parents and School Administration. |

This *Ladder of Young People’s Participation* is often referenced as an evaluation criterion to measure the outreach of an activity, project or consultation. However, it is important to consider the context around a project’s youth involvement. Kara (2007) cautions that some children and youths who may be new to participatory processes can walk away flattered and feeling rather optimistic at tokenistic meetings where the free food, formality and opportunity to speak created only an illusion of participation.

Six Principles of Youth Development

According to Arthur Orsini, founder of Off Ramp, “Stress is an increasing factor in the lives of teens. And for the young people drawn to (school travel projects), their commitment to environmental and social issues can intensify that burden. Increased awareness of climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, loss of farmland and the social costs of our car culture, while motivating and empowering in the long run, can ride heavy on young idealistic shoulders. In any program such as this, work must offer a balance of play and fun.”

Toor & Havlick, 2004, p. 261-262 .

The *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (New Zealand) outlines six principles to support adult facilitators in guiding the positive development of young people. These guidelines can be used as a checklist, or as a tool for engaging child and youth leaders. The following principles have been adapted from

<http://www.myd.govt.nz/YouthDevelopmentStrategyAotearoa/theprinciples.aspx>

1. **Youth Development is Shaped by the ‘Big Picture’**
Including: values and belief systems; social, cultural, economic contexts and trends; international obligations such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. **Youth Development is about Young People being Connected**
Healthy development depends on young people having positive connections with others in society. This includes their family, their community, their school, training institution or workplace, their peers and adults who are not teachers or parents.

3. **Youth Development is based on Consistent Strengths-Based Approach**

There are risk factors that can affect the healthy development of young people and there are also factors that are protective. ‘Strengths-based’ policies and programmes will build on young people’s capacity to resist risk factors and enhance the protective factors in their lives.

4. **Youth Development happens through Quality Relationships**

Child and youth leaders benefit from quality relationships with trainers and mentors. It is important that you feel supported and equipped to sustain (if only for a single year) a successful relationship with young people.

5. **Youth Development is triggered when Young People Fully Participate**

Young people need to be given opportunities to have greater control over what happens to them, through seeking their advice, participation and engagement.

6. **Youth Development Needs Good Information**

Effective research, evaluation, and information gathering and sharing is crucial.



Meeting at a Table, or in Front of a Whole Class

Child and youth engagement in school travel projects is most successful when participation is voluntary - meaning; students are recruited to join, they consider the invitation, they choose to begin, and more importantly, as they learn more about the project and the adult facilitator, they choose to remain.

However, there will be times when teachers or administrators will request that an active school travel project be done with an entire classroom of students. The following chart compares some of the qualities between ‘working at a table’ or ‘in front of a whole class’.

| <i>student leader group (5-7 students)</i> | <i>whole classroom (25-30 students)</i> |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> participation is voluntary, therefore the level of self-motivation is greater | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> participation is not optional |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> students who are not interested will stop returning, graduating students will recruit and train their replacement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some students will want more involvement, some will not be interested |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> facilitator gets to know students’ names, strengths and interests – opportunities for deeper conversations, collaboration, skill-building and mentoring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> most students are anonymous – although students with a greater interest in walking and cycling will become apparent |

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adult facilitator is much more likely to learn | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> greater need for adult facilitator's social skills in retaining class focus |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> contact teacher may be interested in keeping up with the group's progress – even if they cannot attend meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> teacher may be less likely to be involved (i.e. it might give them a 'free hour' in their schedule) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> opportunities for spontaneous and responsive connections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> requires a detailed lesson plan on specific topics |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> potential to evolve over a full season, or entire year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> less likely to follow-through into another or associated topic |

Age 10 or Grade 10: the Pro-s and the Pro-s

Everybody is talented, original and has something important to say.

Brenda Ueland

There is very little difference in the process of involving 10-year-olds or Grade 10s in a school travel project (see the three t-shirts above) – the variation is in the details and expectations: some of which are listed below.

| 10-year-old student leaders | Grade 10s student leaders |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> key audience may be the parent community – which they know well | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> key audience is peers – which they know well |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> cross-curricular nature of classes creates opportunities for project work across more than one subject area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> less opportunity for cross-curricular, or class project work relating to group's activities |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> when motivated they are <i>very</i> motivated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> broader opportunity for mentoring |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> require more guidance, follow-up and reminders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> may less time to devote to the project, but can be more productive |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> greater opportunity to miss class time for meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fewer opportunities to miss class time and therefore 'meetings' need to be conducted much more efficiently (without being unsocial & overtly 'getting down to business') |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> can quickly access the principal for requests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> greater life experience with which to build on |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deeply committed to the activities they take on | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> school work & exam periods more disruptive to group schedules |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> can bring in their parent's support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> greater social network to bring to the group |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> will join a group even if their friend will not | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> unless very passionate, their best friend may also need to be recruited |

Orsini Model for Child & Youth Engagement

The spiral model starts with the existing experience of the participants and then builds by looking for commonalities or patterns. New information is added before practicing new skills and applying them in action. The twist indicates that the model is non-linear...incorporating

the element of recurrence—where youth groups form or splinter off existing groups and work together on a specific activity before re-forming in some manner with new members and/or new activity plans.

Orsini, 2010, p. 168.

Regardless of the age of the children or youths, it is important to recall that they will all require support and mentoring in an engagement project. Tasks will be forgotten and deadlines will be missed. This in no way implies that ‘youths today’ are lazy or incompetent: many are very active and extremely capable. It is a reminder that most students are patrons of an educational system only beginning to fully engage students in processes of independent inquiry, critical thinking, collaborative planning and creative outreach.

Experience and interaction with child and youth groups has demonstrated a recurring model that builds on other educational models (Arnold et al, 1991) which value the pre-existing experiences of participants. The model below involves six-stages of development; recruitment, motivation, collaboration, skill-building, achieving goals and recognition.



There are a number of variables that direct the flow within this model – such as; the urban form of the community, the buy-in from the school administrator, the rationale/invitation that brought in an adult facilitator, the level of personal interest of a lead/contact teacher, the age and initial motivation of the student leaders, the amount of in-school time allotted to this project and the character and experience of the adult facilitator.

This model is the framework for adult facilitator training workshops and support offered by Urbanthinkers - www.urbanthinkers.ca The six stages are summarized below along with an example of each from the author’s work experience.

1. **recruitment** – It is preferable to work with a small group of student leaders where attendance is voluntary. In that way, those who attend have already identified some sense of personal commitment to the issue or a new challenge ...or else to a friend who coaxed them to come along. Once a child or youth has shown-up,

the adult facilitator's task is to demonstrate a process that will value each participant's input while offering skill-building and fun, tangible actions.

Sometimes, a school will require child and youth engagement with an entire class. (This removes the 'voluntary' nature of engagement.) In these circumstances, recruitment is already established, but quick motivation becomes a priority.

At an Auckland high school, I was invited in to 'encourage the cyclists to wear their helmets'. I explained that this message would be better received if it came from the cyclists themselves. To do that, we arranged a lunch-hour session start to a bike club. Our only promotion was for me to arrive early that morning and 'hang out at the bike racks' (with the principal's permission & a Visitor badge) and talk it up and hand-out flyers to each person who rode to school that morning.

2. **motivation** – Efforts to motivate student leaders to participate in walking and cycling activities have been grounded on respect and fun. Most important is that child and youth participants recognize an authentic atmosphere that this “work” will not follow a typical student-teacher dynamic.

Luckily, motivation is a natural condition of children and youths. It comes from a natural desire;

- to be involved in the things that have meaning for them,
- to seek value in the things that they do,
- to speak out and be listened to,
- to be recognized for their inherent expertise and abilities,
- to participate in the ongoing development of their community,
- to seek out elements of their education (that do not necessarily happen in a classroom) and
- to be fully engaged.



photo: Arthur Orsini
Student leaders leading a vehicle count – counting the number of ratio of students to vehicles in the drop-off zone.

Before taking a class of Grade 4 & 5 students out on a WalkAround to assess and document traffic issues and concerns, I explained that the City Traffic Engineer would be making the same WalkAround at a later date. Although both reports would be useful, I emphasized that documenting the

student perspective was actually more essential and therefore, their observations were quite important. The teacher later told me how motivating it was for her students to hear this field trip put in such a context.

- collaboration** – The concept of collaboration can be directly related to the New Zealand’s *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* leadership model described above. More simply, collaboration comes from the children and youths recognizing that their contributions are valid, respected, appreciated and beneficial to the community.

If the adult facilitator sincerely believes in the value of the contributions of young people, a partnership can easily be created. A collaborative process also offers a significant asset to the adult facilitator by sharing responsibility with the student leaders. This means that, unlike the teacher-student relationship, the child or youth can ‘set the terms’ for communication preferences; email, telephone, text, Facebook, etc.

Whenever I return to meet with a child or youth group I update them on any follow-up based on their comments or ideas from our last meeting. It never fails to amaze me how surprised and appreciative these children and teens can be when they feel that they have been heard.



Bayan (10) gives a signal of success in realizing his goal of gathering 30 family Walk to School pledges in the after school rush.

- skill-building** - The steps outlined above establish a foundation to engage and develop child and youth groups. In order for these student leaders to better develop and deliver active school travel activities, some attention will need to be paid to their communication skills, confidence, decision-making skills and inclination towards peer-mentoring.

The amount of time and effort devoted to skill-building will depend on the scope of the project; the scheduling and time allocated to school visits; and the age and experience of the children and youths. It is useful to strive to model these skills within the process where a short debrief can help inform the learning.

A simple and effective communication game involves identical pairs of building blocks in small bags. Participants sit back to back (on chairs or on

the floor) and one person is given a minute to assemble the pieces into 'something'. Then, that first person is asked to coach their partner into re-creating the exact same 'something'. For the first few minutes, the second person is asked to remain silent. After that, the second person is allowed to ask 'Yes or No' questions. Finally, if the 'something' has still not been achieved, the pair is given a final two minutes to discuss. Finally, the pairs, and then the whole group debrief and share their thoughts and observations about the necessity and the benefits of feedback and active listening.

- 5. achieving goals** - Motivated, collaborative and skilled child and youth leaders are well equipped to succeed in reducing car-trips to school. What they still need to achieve their goals is a clear direction of where they are heading, a broad perspective of objectives that will move them towards those goals, and a realistic sense of empowerment.

An open-minded (and possibly even opportunistic) approach to the project objectives can generate interesting and unforeseen alliances to achieve project goals.

One goal of a high school Global Issues Club was to raise the profile of cycling. A broad-minded and unexpected 'objective' came to us during a lunch meeting. Over the PA system, the announcements gave a 3pm deadline for entries in next week's Multi-Cultural Fashion show ...and someone joked that Bike Culture should be represented. By 2:50pm, the group had entered the event and they arranged and outfitted one female and one male student in bike attire. So, the following week, after the colourful and graceful kimonos left the auditorium stage, two cyclists rolled on.

- 6. recognition** – It is important to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of a team, and its team members. Not only is this good for morale and sustained efforts – it can help in the collection of both formal and informal feedback by setting time and space for reflection.

Note: if any 'motivational' carrots have been dangled throughout the process, then there really is a need to follow-up in a display of recognition and celebration.

I like to end an engagement project with a card or slip of paper listing a specific thought or statement about each child or youth's contribution. Personally, I veer away from certificates – aside from being commonly handed out in schools, they seem the paper equivalent of a bold announcement, whereas a note or card feels more like a private conversation of recognition.

A Note on Ice-Breakers

Conventional introductions (presenting people to each other using their name and perhaps other information such as their [age, grade, school] maintain the status within the group and does not help to break down social [and hierarchical] barriers. We therefore have to find ways of allowing the group members to see each other as individuals with personal strengths, rather than define them through their status outside the group.

McCarthy, 2004, p. 3

There are many on-line resources for ice-breakers – short, simple activities which “break the ice” amongst a new grouping of people. *Creative Youth Ideas* recommends that ice-breakers follow a SNORE approach; *simple, non-threatening, open ended, relevant, and energizing* (<http://www.creativeyouthideas.com/blog/icebreakers/>).

The final component listed above – energizing – suggests that quick ice-breakers (or energizers) begin each meeting. This can make meetings more fun, and also alert the group to any noteworthy stresses, concerns or distractions with any of the participants. Additionally, it is worthwhile to weave-in elements of sustainable transportation that relate to the content of the meeting.

The *Trust Walk Activity* (<http://www.icebreakers.ws/team-building/trust-walk-teambuilding-activity.html>) is a useful ice-breaker that can be used at the end of the year when soon-to-be graduating students welcome newly recruited youths into the leadership team.

Challenges to Children & Youths in Active School Travel

Education for social change is NOT neutral.

Arnold et al., 1991, p. 41.

In a car culture, efforts to reduce car-trips to school will be met with some resistance. The engagement of children and youths in the promotion of active school travel may generate challenges for the student leaders.

One challenge is the burden of representation. Student leaders should not be asked to *represent* their peers: it is enough that they represent themselves and interact with each other in order to further both their own personal goals, and those of the group. Nevertheless, as the actions of the group aim to change the behaviour of their peers, it is necessary for child and youth leaders to understand the varying attitudes and perspectives within their community. And this is where conflict can arise.

The following list of challenges is not meant to dissuade adult facilitators from working with child and youth leaders, but to suggest that these, and similar, conditions be monitored over the course of a mentoring and supportive relationship. The list has been expanded and adapted from *Educating for Change* (Arnold et al., p. 40-41).

- the overall aim of an active school travel project is to alter the status quo – this can easily lead to some form of verbal or cognitive conflict within a community
- learning is experiential – not textbook based – and therefore prone to mistakes and uncertainty (*i.e. you may need to get 'half-way there' before it anyone else gets a sense that you've even begun*)
- students take a role at leadership, and therefore bear responsibility for the resulting decisions
- students can be 'in the line of fire' when feedback is directed at the project
- added duties outside of class time on an active school travel project can require extra time and effort to catch up with regular school assignments and homework
- conflicts at home can arise between youth leader and family members or neighbours as the newfound passion to live car-free can alter household patterns
- the process engages critical thinking and creative expression which, at times, is not always welcome within the status quo
- students can become overwhelmed from a heightened awareness of environmental issues such as Global Climate Change and its implications
- social tension can result when students' best efforts are ignored or criticized by fellow students
- pilot projects inevitably come to an end and the discontinuation of mentoring and support –*without a decommissioning phase*– could generate a sense of abandonment by the child and youth leaders
- if/when a youth leader's GREAT IDEA is not selected or implemented, the realities, frustrations and limitations of life might make the participant want to either quit the group, or remain ...but in silence



photo: Arthur Orsini
children and youths of all ages
have skills and abilities to
contribute – and they want to
have fun doing it.

Characteristics of an Engaged & Enthusiastic Group

Students are drawn to events and activities for diverse reasons and attention was made to avoid creating cliques that alienated non-members. Some students were initially brought to meetings by their friends with no prior knowledge of the topic. Others came out of a personal interest in the issues. Such a social dynamic required that emotional and physical space be created for both individuals and (pairs) to feel welcome and included.

Orsini, 2006, p. 20.

It can be easy to recognize the dynamism of an engaged and enthusiastic student group. Actions and achievements can strengthen team cohesion and continued involvement to give them a real sense of camaraderie, empowerment, decisiveness and accomplishment.

- **They recognize the importance of building CAMARADERIE.**
 - welcoming and feeling included
 - having fun together
 - peer-mentoring
 - recognizing each person's commitment
 - at times ...allowing time and space to chill by drifting "off task" in ways that strengthens friendship and co-operation
- **They feel EMPOWERED.**
 - appreciating their enhanced skills & abilities
 - attempting new endeavours
 - accomplishing tasks that they are proud of
- **Their DECISIVENESS generates harmony and momentum.**
 - creative spirit generates interesting proposals for consideration
 - inclusive atmosphere allows for debate and discussion early in the planning process
 - communicating with other youth groups to share/validate their efforts
 - clear understanding of the who/what/when of handing over each person's contributions
 - confidence to re-envision as they proceed
- **They feel excited about following through on their ACTIONS.**
 - each member understands what the group is trying to accomplish, and how/why that venture was chosen
 - images/visions of what success might look like have been discussed
 - a feeling of pride in affecting change
 - recognizing success (...or the seeds of successes that can follow)
 - seeing their actions and events reported in the local media



photo: Arthur Orsini

Lauren (10) and Larissa (9) staff a table during their school's first Walk to School Day. Their presence as hosts lets the parent community know that student leaders have a strong commitment to reduced traffic at the school.

Setting Goals

If you've come to help me, you're wasting your time. But if you've come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let's work together.

~ Lilla Watson, Australian Aboriginal educator and activist

Picture a room (or picnic blanket) with an adult facilitator and a half-dozen youth leaders about to discuss goal setting. Try and envision the contents of the *thought bubbles* floating over each person's head. (See figure below.) Now, picture the thought bubbles of some of the key partners who are not present at the meeting: school administrator, your funder/manager, police liaison officer, neighbours, other students, etc.



photo: BEST's Off Ramp, 2001

This mental exercise helps to remind a facilitator that various -and changing- motivating factors bring a group together. It also serves to suggest a distinction between two very different sets of goals.

The specific priorities of funders and supervisors are readily common across various active school projects. These *'funded deliverables'* very often include:

- reduce vehicle-trips to school;
- increase the mode share of sustainable transportation – including any or all of walking, cycling, transit and carpooling;
- reduce traffic congestion at the school drop-off, and/or along a specific street; and/or
- improve safety conditions for walking and cycling to school.

Although these may seem the obvious intentions of an active school travel project, it is easy for a small group of child or youth leaders to occasionally lose track of those overall goals. In their minds, other more pressing priorities can take precedence. These preliminary *'foundational goals'* include;

- create an empowered and cohesive child or youth leader group, and
- establish a credible presence and voice within the community (i.e. among peers, administration, teachers, parents, neighbours).

Achieving these latter goals will better enable the overall success of the funded deliverables. Nevertheless, it is important for an adult facilitator to ensure that sight of the funded deliverables is maintained (or at least, routinely re-addressed) in a meaningful and tangible way.

Project Focus

There are a variety of ways to co-ordinate the objectives that children and youths can implement within an active school travel project. The events and activities can be arranged around:

- travel mode/focus;
 - walking
 - cycling
 - transit
 - carpooling
 - environmental & health awareness
 - debunking the car culture
- outreach/impact;
 - quick & easy activities to catch attention
 - in-depth efforts for a classroom or small group
 - big appeal for a large audience
 - individual projects
- strategy;
 - raise awareness
 - generate opportunities for people to try walking, cycling, transit or carpooling
 - disable barriers to walking, cycling, transit or carpooling
 - reward 'good' behaviour

The table below lists some of the activities collected during work at BEST in 2004 in a follow-up program to the Off Ramp program. Although no longer available on BEST's web-site, many of these activities have been updated and available as Resources at www.urbanthinkers.ca



The *How Slow Can You Go Bike Race* is quick & easy to organize, and can attract a great deal of attention – whether at an outdoor quad in Auckland (above) or inside a school cafeteria in Vancouver (below).



photos: Arthur Orsini

| | quick & easy | small group or classroom | mass appeal or large group | independent study |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--|----------------------|
| environmental awareness | 'jar of crud' per km | surveys | Who wants to be an enviro millionaire? | environmental audit |
| walking | walk the labyrinth | walking radius maps | Pied Piper walk | safety audit |
| cycling, 'bladin, sk8 | How slow can you go? race | chopper bike building | mass bike ride | getting bike racks |
| transit | transfer draw | transit scavenger hunt | How do you get to... quiz show | getting bus shelters |
| carpool | carpool haiku | mapping audit | carpool dating game | journal & assessment |
| de-bunking the car culture | dead-ped lay down | car-cost freedom day | 'car ads' | 'zine |

Action Planning

Encourage young people to take the lead in designing and implementing change-oriented actions. There may be some actions that young people develop and implement entirely on their own, and others where they provide the lead with assistance from adults, or still others where they work with adults as partners in the implementation and ongoing management processes.

Driskell, 2002, p. 170.

In a simple comparison, Action Planning can be compared to planning a birthday party. To prevent one's birthday party coming across as *lame* or *boring*, a child or youth 'host' might want to take an active role *leading* the arrangements. This does not mean that they complete every task, but they are aware of the many (or all) of the components *supporting* the plan.

In the action planning of a child and youth engagement project, there is very often one *Lead Leader* (comparable to the person celebrating a birthday). This person oversees how the many components come together for an event, while a number of *Support Leaders* each take responsibility for those components.



photo: Arthur Orsini

Secondary school student leaders from South Auckland (thus the left side of the road) entice their peers to FFOF: walk the Final Fifteen On Foot.

In an empowered and skilled child or youth group, the Lead Leader will be a student leader. However, in the time it takes to build a group's capacity and cohesion, the Adult

Facilitator often takes on that role in the early phases. In time, a student leader will take on increasing levels of responsibility until they eventually take turns as Lead Leader for seasonal events throughout a school year.

Listed below are three Action Planning resources: the first is a list of items for the Lead Leader to consider, the second is a chart for each of the Support Leaders, and the third is a list of questions to guide a group’s decisions and actions.

Lead Leader Action Planning – to be co-ordinated and overseen by the lead student and/or the adult facilitator, but to be discussed with the entire group. The table below shows an example of “improving the safety for cyclists at our school”.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--------|---|---|---|--------|---|---|---|--------|--|--|---|
| identify your overall goal | improve the safety for cyclists at our school | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| decide on specific objectives – to be co-ordinated by Support Leaders | a) survey cyclists in the community b) assess local safety conditions c) hold safe cycling & bike maintenance workshop d) raise awareness amongst drivers e) cycling safety quiz in school newsletter f) bike safety obstacle course g) give-away reflective straps | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| define the steps | elaborate on what is required for each step, who is the lead on each step, who gets the “results” after this step has been completed | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| create a timeline | when will it happen, what will need to happen in advance, what might be the constricting factors, what are our in-between deadlines | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | spec. obj. | week 1 | | | | week 2 | | | | week 3 | | | |
| | a) | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | | | | | |
| | b) | | | ■ | ■ | | | | | | | | |
| | c) | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| | d) | | | | | | | | ■ | | | | |
| | e) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | f) | | | | | | | | | | | | ■ |
| | g) | | | | | | | | | | | | ■ |
| identify the people | whose permission/co-operation do we need? who are our partners, supporters, gate-keepers? who might donate 'stuff'? | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| re-assess | are our objectives still workable? do we have sufficient time? what other ways of reaching our goal might we consider at this point? | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| seek help | which friends can we bring onboard for larger tasks (get them to schedule it into their calendar), who can we count on as helping hands for smaller things (make a point of reminding them ...without nagging) | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Support Leader Action Planning – to be co-ordinated and overseen by one Support Leader, but to be discussed with the Lead Leader.

activity (*specific objective*) _____

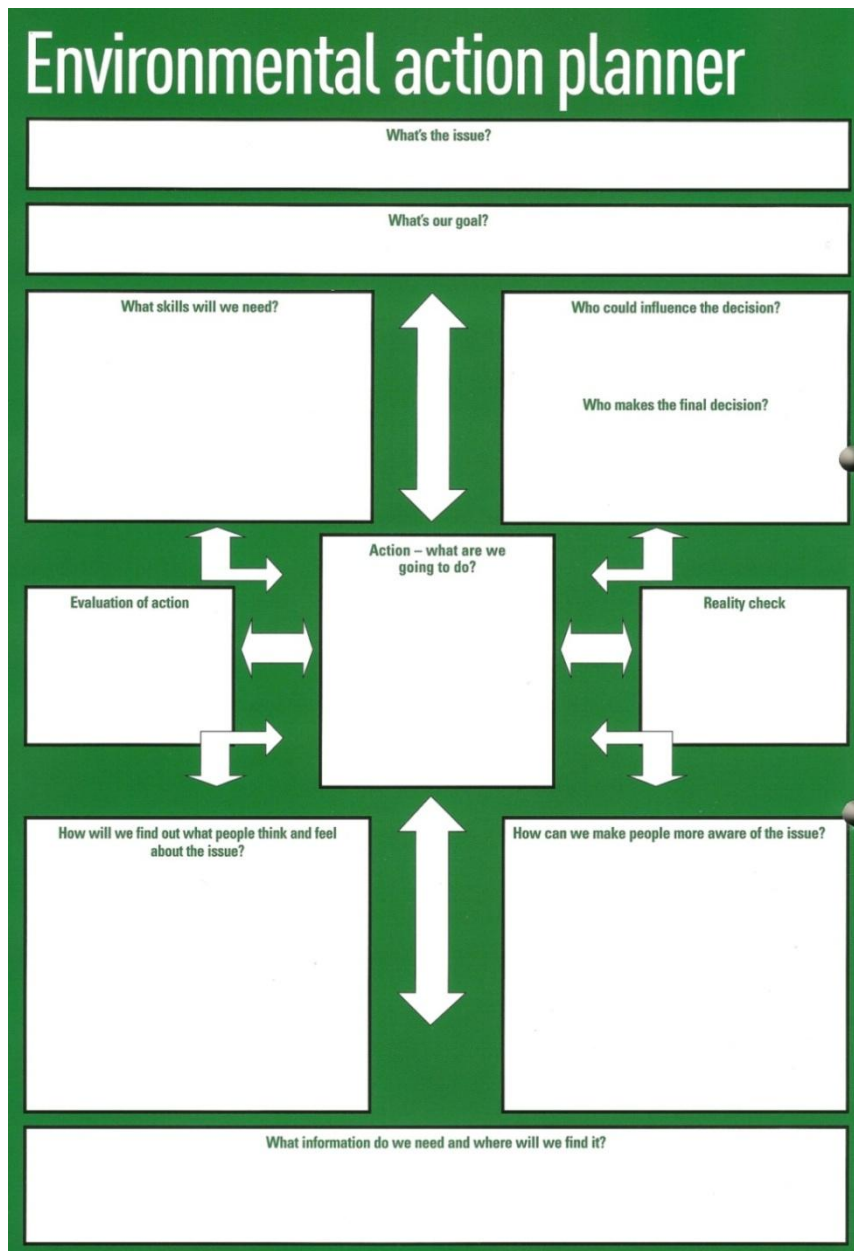
support leader _____

peer support _____
(friend that can be counted on for advice)

| overview | | |
|--|------------------------|------|
| what is the overall goal ? | | |
| what is the goal of <u>this activity</u> ? | | |
| in a brief sentence or phrase, describe what you plan to do | | |
| how does this activity support the overall goal? | | |
| planning | | |
| how will you know if you have completed the preparations for this activity? | | |
| how will you know if this activity was a success? | | |
| where on school grounds will this activity take place? | | |
| what steps do you need in order to run this activity? | 1. 2. 3. | |
| what do you need to complete/report/bring to the Lead Leader? | | |
| when does this need to be completed? | | |
| resources | | |
| what materials will you need? | | |
| where/how will you get them? | | |
| what materials will you produce? | | |
| whose co-operation (or permission) will you need? | | |
| volunteers | | |
| whose help will you need? what will they be doing? when will they need to get started? | name 1. 2. 3. | task |

| | |
|--|--|
| if someone was to run this activity next year, what the best advice would you give them? | |
| several days (or one week) beforehand | |
| have the goals changed? | |
| what new steps became necessary? | |
| add any notes below | |
| | |

Questions to Guide a Group’s Decisions and Actions



Auckland Regional Council, p. 38

Evaluating

Evaluating a child and youth engagement process within an active school travel project can spread beyond the funded deliverables and foundational goals. It is also valuable to tabulate secondary successes, and future values.

Student leaders might define success in terms of;

- how much fun they had,
- how well their friends perceived the events & activities,
- how well their skills and contributions were recognized, and
- how well they will use their new skills next year.

School administrators might define success in terms of;

- reductions in traffic congestion,
- fewer traffic complaints from neighbours & parents,
- upcoming infrastructure improvements,
- the students' enthusiasm,
- a newly identified parent's commitment,
- the community's growing attention to active transportation & traffic reduction, and
- ongoing or *pending successes* (i.e. if a local park has been identified by parents as a collection point for groups of people to gather and then walk to school together).



photo: Arthur Orsini

Teachers might define success in terms of;

- the ability of the student leaders to keep up with lessons and missed assignments,
- associated contributions from the student leaders in other subjects,
- leadership and strengths of students normally scoring low in traditional, academic achievement, and
- behavioural changes (usually alertness/calm) from their class when increasing numbers of students walk or cycle to school.

An Adult facilitator might define success in terms of;

- continued involvement - i.e. was their minimal turnover within the student leader group? and/or were more students attracted to the group throughout the year?),
- what importance did the school place on the students' contributions, and
- does the municipality/school district/health authority plan to continue or expand this initiative.

In order to gauge the success of a child and youth engagement workshop or project, it is essential to hear from the children and youths themselves. The following is a summary of

evaluation questions posed by participants at Adult Facilitator training workshops in Auckland, Melbourne and Vancouver.

1. the social component of youth engagement

- Did you enjoy today's session? How did you feel about today's workshop?
- When were you most/least comfortable?
- Would you come back to the next meeting? Why? Would you bring a friend?
- What was the most fun/interesting activity?
- What would make the workshop more enjoyable?
- If this workshop were to be held again, what part of it would you give the boot?
- Why is this work important? Why is this project important?

2. preparing for action & skill-building

- What was the most important *thing* you learned today?
- What are some action items/ideas you are excited about?
- What are you interested in doing as a result of today's workshop?
- Do you feel prepared to take action? What information/resource is still missing?
- What can you do with what you've seen/heard today?
- How does this connect with what you are learning in school?
- How is it more important than some of the things you are learning in school?
- What activity was the least/most interesting?

FAQ ...and a few answers that have been useful

Questions Asked by Potential Staff Contact Person

I am already busy with other clubs...

- *as a child and youth engagement initiative, I will be available to offer training and support to the student leaders so that they can take-on a greater organizing role*
- *we have already developed many of the resources – your student leaders will select from our tools and activities, and adapt them to suit your community*
- _____

But so many of our students already walk to school. Why even do this?

- *there are some people in your community who would like to see even fewer vehicles at your school*
- *if your school is lucky enough to not suffer from serious traffic congestion issues, then this project offers an opportunity for student leadership*
- *although students who live quite close to school will rarely cycle to school, they can benefit from safe cycling and bike maintenance skills*
- _____

But I drive to school...

- *are you interested in cycling training, or carpooling to work one day/week?*

- *this is not about generating guilt among car-drivers – teachers’ commuting distances are often very different from students*
- *a teacher who must drive to work can still be an ambassador for sustainable transportation by minimizing their weekly car use through; carpooling, walking or cycling on short trips near your home, combining trips, going car-free on one weekend day*
- _____

I’ll see what I can do to round up some students...

- *let the students know that we offer leadership training*
- *I would be happy to come by, meet your students and show them photos of what previous student groups have done*
- *be sure to mention that they will be invited to work with student groups in other nearby schools*
- _____

Questions Asked by Potential Student Leaders

...um... (possible meaning – “I’m not sure.” or “I don’t know.”)

- *you’ll gain leadership & communication skills about sustainable transportation that the adults in the community will want to listen to your opinions*
- *you’ll get a chance to meet with student leaders from other schools to share ideas*
- *there are lots of activity ideas – you can choose which of them you want to adapt for your school*
- _____

I don’t have any time for another project...

- *then you are obviously a leader that we need to hear from*
- *who else can you recommend?*
- *we’ll be working with some other schools – so many of the tasks can be shared*
- *a lot of activities that can be planned in less than an hour!*
- _____

No one will listen to this...

- *we don’t need to convince everyone*
- *we only need to start by drawing attention in some unexpected ways: game shows, fashion shows, skateboard or bike tricks, prize-draws*
- *that’s our challenge...*
- _____

Questions Asked by Secondary School Principals

But the kids love their cars!

- *that’s the popular notion – but there are always a number of high school students very interested in the ‘counter culture’ – they might be very interested in forming a bike club, etc.*

- *we're not trying to eliminate cars – only reduce the number coming to school each day*
- *that might be the greatest reason to devote to reducing traffic congestion & road safety issues*
- _____

I'll have to run this by my PAC (Parent Advisory Committee)...

- *of course: would you like me to attend a meeting and/or speak with a member of the PAC*

So, what am I agreeing to?

1. *we need to assign one Staff Contact Person as liaison*
2. *we need to recruit about a half dozen student leaders – either from within an existing club (Environment Club, Global Issues Club, Outdoors Club)*
3. *we need to implement three data collection elements; a hands-up travel survey in each class, a family survey from at least a third of the families, and a vehicle/traffic count (both start-up and follow-up assessments)*
4. *under the students' leadership, we will be implementing a number of activities to promote walking, cycling, transit and carpooling*
5. _____



photo: Elaine Orsini

Urbanthinkers' Adult Facilitator Workshop in Montréal, 2009

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