

## Youth Program Quality Pro-Tips: ENGAGEMENT

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### What is the YPQA (Youth Program Quality Assessment?)

The [Youth Program Quality Assessment](#) is a nationally recognized, research-based assessment tool developed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. After School Matters uses the YPQA to assess program quality over time, offer supports and resources, and guide coaching. Assessments may be conducted by your Program Specialist or by an External Assessor. All assessors are trained as reliable raters, to ensure that they use the assessment tool objectively and accurately. You can view the full tool [here](#). After School Matters uses this assessment as part of the Youth Program Quality Improvement process: to assess, plan together, and implement improvement supports and goals in programs to ensure positive outcomes for young people.

### What do we mean when we talk about “Engagement?”

There are four domains in the Youth Program Quality Assessment: Safe Environment, Supportive Environment, Interaction, and Engagement. You can read more about the other three domains [here](#).

The engagement domain measures the following opportunities for youth development:

**Planning:** Young people have opportunities to make plans and get to use multiple strategies to make plans (for example: writing, drawing, and discussion).

**Choice:** Young people have opportunities to make both content (what they are learning) and process (how they are learning) choices.

**Reflection:** Young people have opportunities to practice intentional reflection. They get to use multiple strategies to reflect (for example: journaling and discussing). They have structured opportunities to provide feedback to their instructor about the program, and they have structured opportunities to present to a group.



### Pro-Tips: Engagement

#### Planning: Involve youth in planning and use multiple methods to plan!

- Involve your young people in planning. There are big ways to do this, like having your teens take the lead on planning a project or performance. There are also more daily ways to include young people in planning, like asking your group to help set the agenda for the next day.
- Use multiple methods to plan, and post your plans in your program space! For example, if you do visual mapping and writing to plan part of your final showcase, post those around the room. This helps teens keep their ideas in mind, and shows new teens and visitors the process the group has used for planning. Examples of planning methods might include word webbing, journaling, drawing/storyboarding, and small or large group discussion.

## Choice: Let your young people guide their own learning!

- **Content choice** means giving your young people a say in **what** they learn. An example might include: giving your teens in an astronomy program a choice on what planet they do their final small group project on.
- **Process choice** means giving your young people a say in **how** they learn. For example, young people pick their own roles for a group project or help decide the order of activities for the day.
- **Remember, every choice counts!** Think about letting your youth choose and lead opening or closing activities, choose the music you listen to, or choose roles for group work.

## Reflection: Making Meaning Matters!

- **Daily, structured reflection** is a staple of a great after school matters program. This means taking time **every program day** after an activity or at the end of the day to come together and reflect on the day. What went well? What was challenging? This helps teens understand, and ultimately self-direct their learning.
- **Take time to intentionally reflect.** You can find some great ideas for reflection on page 8 and 9 of the instructor activity [booklet](#) and this resource from [edutopia](#). Find the check out or reflection activities that work for your daily routine, your program, and your teens!
- **Feedback is a two-way street.** We give our teens a lot of feedback as they grow and develop skills. Take time each day to ask your teens for feedback: you can do this during a daily reflection activity, or by providing a suggestion box available throughout the program.
- **Opportunities to present** to the group are a key part of developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills! Over the course of your program, make sure all young people get the opportunity to present to their peers. Think about opportunities to share work with parents, families, and communities through presentations as well.

## Ask an Instructor...



**David Gauna, Art instructor, Humboldt Park**

### How do you make Reflection part of your daily routine? How do you use multiple strategies to reflect?

“My young people know as soon as they walk in, that they will start a written reflection in their black sketchbooks. They may draw something or write something [or both] based on a prompt on the board. I connect the theme to what we are doing that day, or what we did the day before. Then we circle up and everyone starts to share their own perspective of that topic. Before we share on the topic, we do a quick check in: say what you need to say, share how your day is going and how you’re feeling.”

### How do you get daily feedback from young people in your program? How do you incorporate teen feedback?

“At the end of the day, we do a circle check out: What did you like? What did you not like? To dive deeper into that feedback I ask them why; this helps me find out if a topic was too complicated, or if there was something they were missing. My reflections are always connected to what we are actually doing that day. Most of my planning comes from my reflection sessions with young people. What did they like, what did they want to change? What are some of their ideas?”

**Do you have additional Questions about the YPQA, or a pro-tip to share?**

Contact [emily.nott@afterschoolmatters.org](mailto:emily.nott@afterschoolmatters.org)! Let’s talk.

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