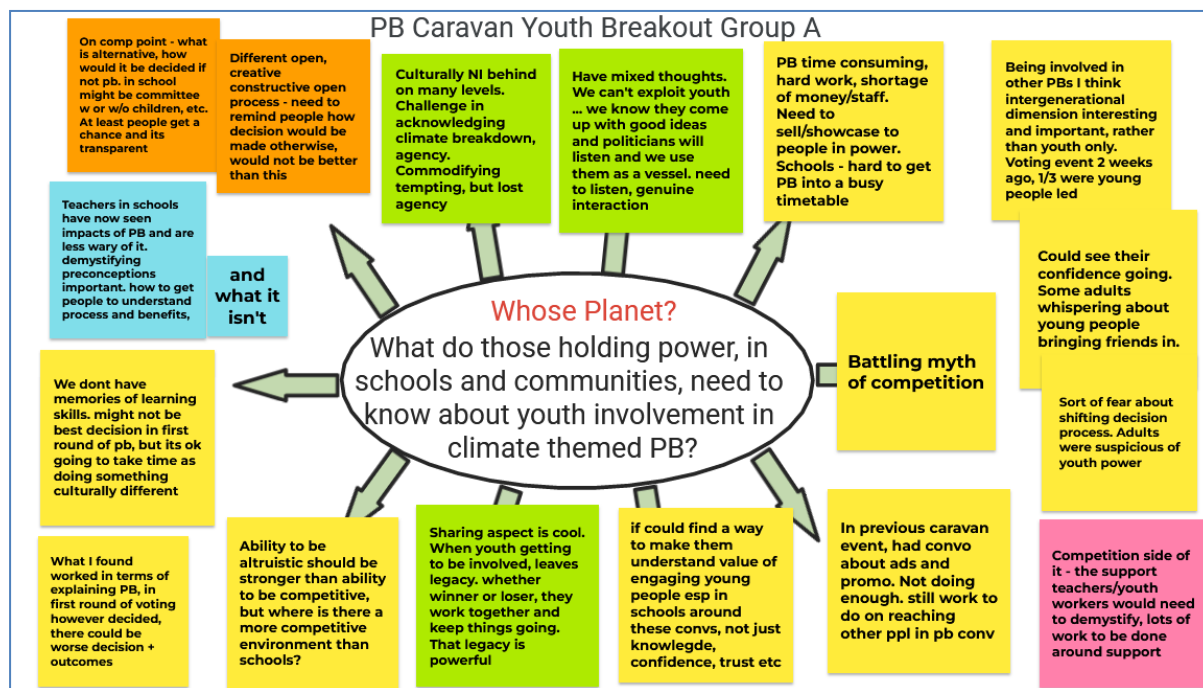


Youth climate PB session notes (during the Green PB caravan).

17th November 2022

Summary by Jez Hall from Jamboard post-its.

Whose planet? What do those holding power, in schools and communities, need to know about youth involvement in climate themed PB?



Culturally different areas may lag behind on grasping the climate emergency, or the need for change on many different levels. There is a real challenge in acknowledging climate breakdown, and the role of individual agency in creating change. Commodifying community activism, by looking only at impacts or value for money, can be tempting, but with that goes lost appreciation of individual or community 'agency' to affect change. Power-holders need to understand the less tangible benefits PB can bring for young people, especially within schools. It's not just about building knowledge, but also about creating confidence and trust.

We must accept PB is time consuming, is hard work, and there is always a shortage of money or staff capacity. We always need to sell and showcase PBs' hidden benefits to people in power. It was commented that teachers in those schools who have seen the impacts of PB are less wary of it. This shows that demystifying adult preconceptions of the nature of PB and its benefits matters. The challenge remains of how to get people to understand the process and those benefits, and also what PB is not. The ability to act altruistically within PB processes should be emphasised as much as any requirement to, make good decisions or succeed in winning funding.

Many people commented on a 'myth of competition' within PB. Schools work to realise the potential in all young people, but are also competitive environments, with their emphasis on

attainment and grading. Maybe the same is true within politics and wider adult society? Our democracy has been built on creating competition, not collaboration. This myth about competition, that PB is about identifying winners and losers has created a barrier to PB's uptake, and points to the importance of communicating the rich stories within PB to teachers or youth workers, with lots of work to be done around getting the framing right.

For one example, in terms of explaining PB, even within the first round of voting, whatever was decided, there could always have been an even worse decision or outcome from using more traditional approaches. How should these difficult decisions be made? Generally within a school, or similar institutions, it might previously be one person, or in a committee, maybe with, but probably without, children involved. In PB everyone gets a chance to have a say and decisions are more transparent.

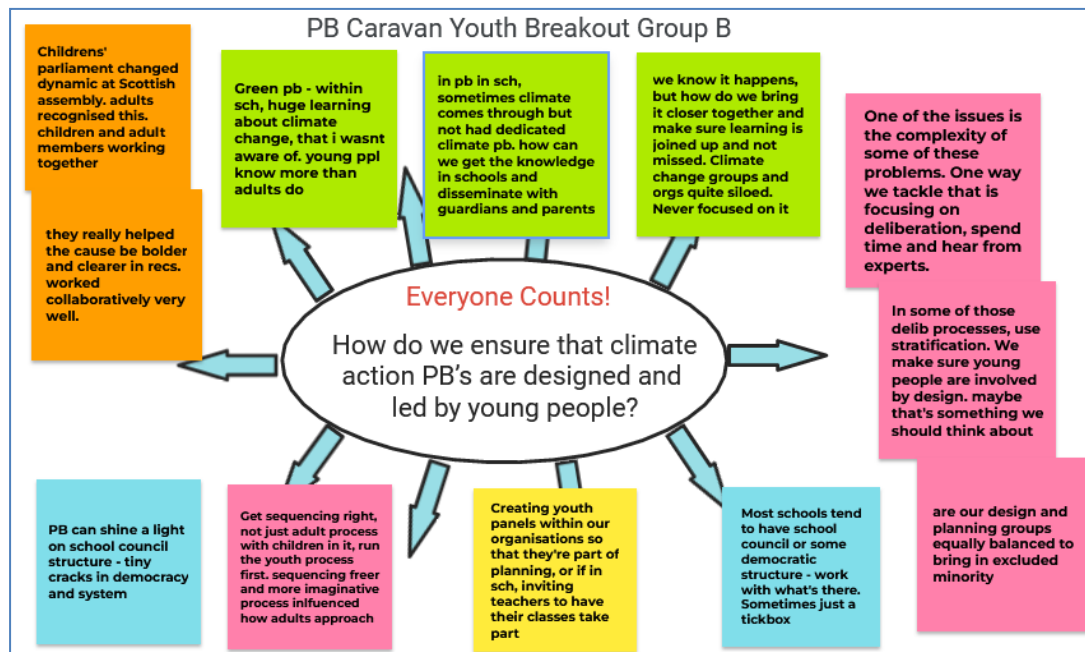
Even while there might not be that ideal decision within a first round of PB, it should be ok to accept it's going to take time to learn. We are engaged in doing something new, and children and young people are culturally different to adults. Adults just don't have strong enough memories of how they went about learning their skills, and that their learning often relied on trying something new and making mistakes.

Adults can find it hard to embrace this different kind of open, creative, and constructive process. PB's sharing aspect, the building of empathy and knowledge of others lived experiences is part of its 'cool', especially so when young people are allowed and enabled to be involved. Whether PB winners or losers, it's been observed young people try as least as hard as adults, and sometimes more, to work together and keep things going. PB leaves a powerful legacy in learning about how to collaborate.

Grasping the intergenerational dimension of PB is both interesting and important. We shouldn't silo engagement through specific youth only processes. Being engaged on equal terms with adults helps to grow young people's confidence. Adults are often surprised by how fair and community minded young people can be.

Finally, there were words of caution about co-opting the voices of young people, with a comment that 'we can't exploit youth', just because we know they come up with good ideas or politicians might listen. If we do this we will treat young people as a vessel for our agenda. Adults need to actively listen, be respectful, be mindful of their own power, and work to ensure a genuinely equal interaction.

Everyone Counts! How do we ensure that climate action PB's are designed and led by young people?



Within schools there is already huge emphasis on learning about climate change. Young people often know more than adults about the mechanics of climate change and why taking action matters. How can we get the knowledge about climate change that exists in schools and share that with adults, guardians and parents? We know it happens organically to some degree, but we could be more ambitious and make sure such learning opportunities are joined up and not missed.

One of the issues about building a stronger more participatory democracy, or of tackling climate change, is the complexity of many of these problems. One way to address that complexity is by focusing on deliberation, spending time and hearing from diverse experts. Children on climate issues are often the missing experts. Or, for example, within many deliberative democracy processes is the use of stratification or 'sortition' to ensure all voices, irrespective of expertise, can be included.

Adopting this sort of 'stratification' approach might ensure young people are involved 'by design' in the planning of PB processes. We need to challenge ourselves to consider if PB design and planning groups are yet sufficiently balanced, and bring in excluded minorities. Or pay sufficient attention to the ideas of young people

It was commented that a missing last group to be identified as 'marginalised' or 'excluded', with 'protected characteristics' are children and young people. We don't devalue someone's democratic participation or deny their vote above a certain age. Why then are children excluded, unless especially targeted through a school or youth process?

In wider society, climate change groups, activists and organisations can be quite siloed. Few have focussed on PB as a tool to tackle the climate emergency, in the way they have adopted climate assemblies and panels, or the role of direct action. However we know the power that came from the school strike for climate movement led by young people. We need to connect up different methods for democratic empowerment, whether direct, deliberative or participatory, and promote ideas such as 'just transitions'.

It was also felt important to get the sequencing right. Not just to plan an adult process with more children in it, or parallel to it, but ideally run the child and youth process first. Beginning with their freer and more creative and imaginative conversations that can set up a longer term vision, or set the values for a deliberation, before getting down into the policy detail.

For example the involvement of the Children's Parliament changed the dynamic at the Scottish Climate Assembly. The adults involved recognised this, and valued how children and adult members working together. That really helped identify the nature of the climate emergency as 'stealing children's futures', and the need for adults to be bolder and clearer in their recommendations. It's an example of where children and adults worked collaboratively very well.

In Scotland, in PBs within school, whilst sometimes climate or green issues comes through we have not so far had any dedicated school climate PB programmes, and that is a gap that schools should address.

Most schools now have school councils or some other form of internal democratic structure that is youth focussed. These are not perfect, sometimes just a tick-box exercise, but we can work with and build on what's there. PB can shine a light onto a school's pupil council structure, illuminating positive, tiny cracks in our often opaque and impenetrable democracy, or those parts of the system where democratic empowerment is not flourishing. There should be more work on creating youth panels within all our organisations so that young people can be part of planning for how we do PB. For example if doing PB in school, invite teachers to enable their classes take part in designing their school's PB process and about what the focus of it should be. It's likely with little encouragement climate change or green issues will then feature highly.