

MOVING BEYOND THE CROSSROADS

A practical guide to having hopeful, inclusive and action-oriented conversations about climate change.

Young people, like all of us, face multiple crossroads in their lives. Some of these are personal crossroads, but they also intersect with societal-level crossroads. For those who migrate, this experience marks a significant crossroads in their personal and family story. On a much larger scale, we are often told that 'humanity is at a crossroads' in terms of responding to climate change.

The Young People at a Crossroads (YPX) project began from this intersection between crossroads in relation to migration and climate change. It sought to explore how migrant-background young people are learning and talking about climate change in Manchester and Melbourne.

The 40 young people that took part in YPX in Manchester and Melbourne had lots to say! As well as sharing their own thoughts and experiences, they became young researchers who interviewed their parents and shared their perspectives. Young researchers wrote about their interviews in a beautifully illustrated creative book that you can download at tinyurl.com/YPXstories

Of course, we cannot stay 'at a crossroads' forever with regards to climate change. So, at the end of the project, we invited young researchers and others from their schools and colleges to join with adults in Manchester and Melbourne. Event participants took part in 'discussion circles'

to respond to the question: **How can we have inclusive, hopeful and action-oriented conversations about climate change in the key places we spend time: homes, communities and schools?**

This guide presents key points from the discussion circles, along with practical tips shared by participants. Respecting participants' honesty and openness, we present both the hopes and frustrations they shared. We hope this guide will help to show **paths forward that move beyond the climate crossroads, into meaningful, inclusive action.**

The support of the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for the work presented in this guide is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks also to Sustainable Consumption Institute, University of Manchester.

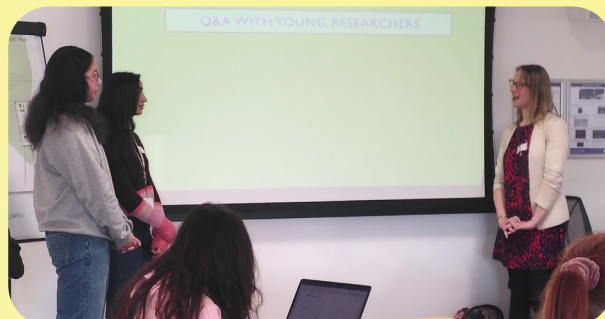
The background image was created by Maisy Summer for the YPX project. You can see more of Maisy's beautiful work at: www.maisysummer.com.

The image on page two was created by Gemma Rohiti for Melbourne Friends of the Earth, and is reproduced with permission. See more of Gemma's work on Instagram @gemijuu and explore the work of Friends of the Earth Melbourne at: www.melbournefoe.org.au.

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION CIRCLE EVENTS

Events took place on 2nd December 2022 at University of Melbourne, and 20th January 2023 at University of Manchester. Over sixty students and teachers joined from the following schools and colleges: Melbourne Girls College, Camberwell Girls Grammar School, University High School, Sunbury Downs College and Academy of Mary Immaculate (in Melbourne) and Levenshulme High School, Loreto College and Xaverian College (in Manchester). These groups included eighteen YPX young researchers and five educators who were interviewed for the research.

Other participants were adults working or studying at University of Manchester, University of Melbourne and other universities in Melbourne/Victoria and Manchester/North West England, as well as Environment Education Victoria, Yarra Youth Services, Melbourne Water, Manchester City Council, Manchester Museum and Manchester Environmental Education Network.

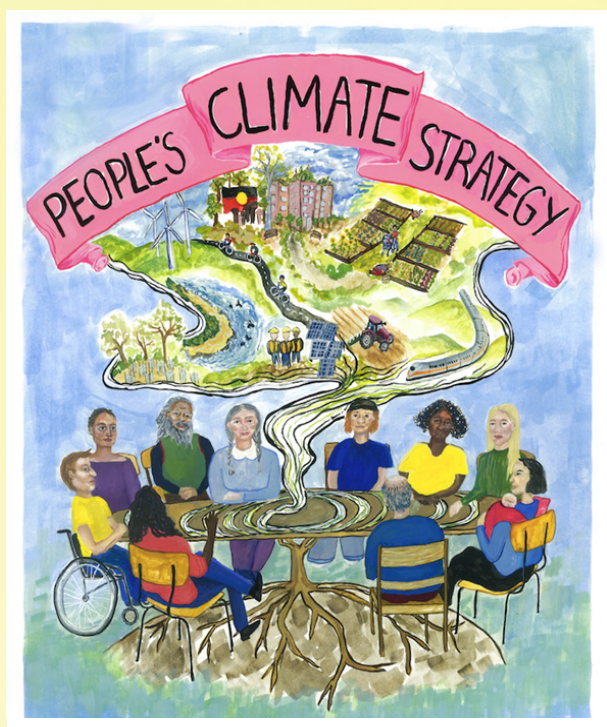


After participants had heard from adult researchers and young researchers about the YPX research, they took part in a 'discussion circles' activity where they rotated between tables to discuss possibilities for hopeful, inclusive and - importantly - action-oriented conversations in three key spaces: homes, schools and communities. Questions used by discussion circle facilitators are shown on pages 3-5.

The 'discussion circles' activity was prompted by the image of a 'People's Climate Strategy' that was designed for Friends of the Earth (FOE) Melbourne's 'People's Climate Strategy for Victoria'. Young researchers had appreciated this image for its inclusivity when they discussed it and other images in YPX focus groups.

In addition, participants in Manchester took part in workshops about understanding eco-anxiety (facilitated by Kit Marie Rackley) and interview training (facilitated by Catherine Walker and Siobhan Stanton). Resources from these activities are available to download from the YPX project resources webpage (tinyurl.com/YPXstories).

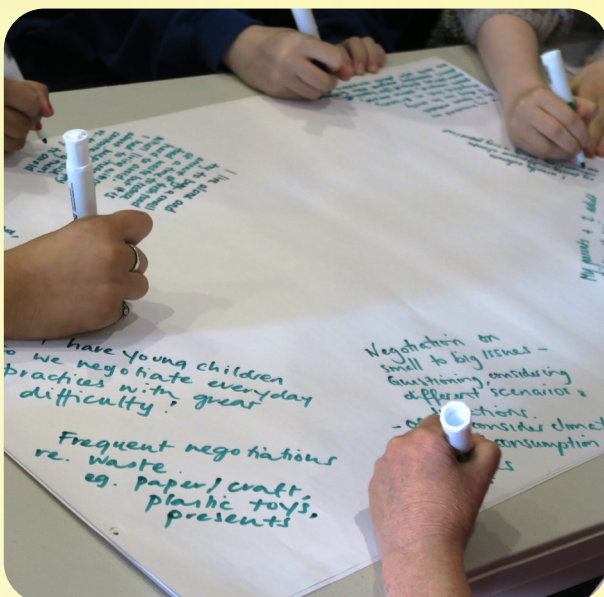
We hope that for people reading this guide, the insights and tips presented on the following pages will help and inspire you to have action-oriented conversations in and about the environments that are important to you.



MAKING SENSE OF PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES

Although every participant came to the day with a unique perspective, there were some similarities that we could see in how they responded to the discussion circles and prompt questions. In both cities, participants' responses were characterised by:

Energy: There was a buzz in the room as people moved around, carrying ideas from one discussion circle table to another. Energy was directed - this was, as one facilitator noted, "energy for making change". Teachers seemed to be energised by the same belief as students that the students' voices mattered and that systemic changes needed to take place. Participants shared experiences of taking direct action, such as one group of students in Melbourne who described how they covered signs on school 'recycling' bins with generic 'landfill' signs after they found this was what was happening to all of the sorted waste streams in their school.



Frustration: One person in Melbourne spoke for many as they wrote that it is "disheartening when voices don't really feel heard/ ideas aren't acted on." As another participant wrote in Manchester: "Climate change shouldn't be a lesson that you write notes about and then nothing is done". Facilitators noted that some teachers and students seemed to be "allies" in their frustrations about wanting school leadership to act more quickly or seriously. There was overall awareness that climate change strategies could take place only through structural changes, as people noted for example that "Households are not the issue" and "The big corporations should take responsibility".

Hope: Despite the frustrations, there was a lot of hope in the room. One of the YPX young researchers in Manchester commented that "it was uplifting to hear the voices of hope and belief that we can still make a change". The hope in the room was not naive, however. Students' responses show that they know they need advocates and allies in teachers and school management, writing that "[we] need a teacher to back up students and implement their ideas". There was also a strong message at both events that action on climate should be fun, collaborative and creative, both for those involved and so as to "engage people who don't care about climate change".



Anger: Participants expressed anger in response to climate inaction and misdirected targets in climate policies. This was often borne out of personal experience, for example. there was anger about the waste produced by school canteens, despite students' care to use the bin systems correctly. Anger also infused participants' responses to the question of who they would like to interview about climate change, e.g. "I would interview someone who truly doesn't care. CEOs whose corporations emit massive CO2 and people who have an 'it won't be me' mentality". Others, despite their anger, wanted to try and understand perspectives they disagreed with, saying "I would like to interview climate sceptics to find out why they think that way".

Curiosity and empathy: Participants were keen to learn and curious to understand the experiences of people from different schools, generations and parts of the city and the world. One participant in Melbourne noted that "differences between public and private schools in terms of resources can influence awareness and involvement", whilst in Manchester

participants lamented how "only the rich can afford items which are better for the planet." Responses to the question of what interviewing can achieve included: "Listening to other people allows you to think outside the box, come up with new solutions by sharing ideas", and "You get to reflect on something that you may not be explicitly aware of".

Generational tensions: There was no mistaking young people's (understandable) distrust towards older generations. One person in Melbourne wrote "Do households care enough? Older generations, hard to get them to care" and in Manchester: "Adults: Actually take action!". Tensions were softened by the fact that, as one facilitator commented, "Every single adult in the room seemed committed to valuing young people's voices and making space for them to be heard". Participants also shared stories of intergenerational influence, and some praised older generations' frugality, commenting that "looking to the past might assist our future planning to combat climate change".

MOVING BEYOND THE CROSSROADS

Tips for inclusive, hopeful and action-oriented conversations

The following tips are collated from what was shared in discussion circle activities, with direct quotes in italics.

1. **Make gatherings fun and themed around things you value, rather than starting with climate change:**

- ▶ *“Activities like sewing, textiles and recycling objects can be creative and fun and bring people together.”*
- ▶ *“Make it about caring for people and places.”*

2. **Invite people with different perspectives:**

- ▶ *“Would be great to grow the [student climate] group in size and diversity, get more range of year levels and different backgrounds.”*
- ▶ *“Go to groups that are already diverse and involve them in the discussion.”*

3. **Create an inclusive, respectful atmosphere by sitting together and showing through body and verbal language that all voices are valued:**

- ▶ *“Remove jargon to help everybody understand and contribute.”*
- ▶ *“Communicate about climate justice in a fun way, not a ‘telling’ way.”*

4. **Ensure that democratic processes are in place to ensure that actions are assigned and proposals for change taken seriously, leading to change or further consultation (e.g. notes are sent to the head teacher/Principal, or a local councillor).**

- ▶ *“Despite discussing the topic, not much may take place to resolve the issues... it helps but you have to take action.”*

5. **Don’t expect to resolve every issue or to reach one single ‘solution’, but take comfort from not facing issues alone.**

- ▶ *“Communities unite with a cause - should try to do something.”*

If you need inspiration for ideas, why not go to tinyurl.com/YPXstories and take a look at the beautiful stories and images in the YPX creative book.

There is also a video describing the book cover (which shows positive actions YPX young researchers have been a part of, as well as their environmental concerns) and introducing some of the book’s stories.

This resource has been compiled by Catherine Walker (University of Manchester), Nerida Jolley (Environment Education Victoria), Raichael Lock (Manchester Environmental Education Network) and Kit Marie Rackley (Geogramblings.com).

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