

Teens as Changemakers: Empowering Social Entrepreneurs

TCR 2019 Track Chairs: Melissa G. Bublitz, Lan Nguyen Chaplin, and Laura Peracchio

This track of the 2019 TCR Conference will examine how, when, and why teens are motivated to lead social change efforts on a wide array of important issues of global concern. We adopt a relational engagement approach (Ozanne et al., 2016) to work directly with teens serving as changemakers and social entrepreneurs. Collectively we will examine the path to engaged activism with an eye toward formulating a framework that not only helps us understand the motivations and enabling factors that fuel the success of these emergent social entrepreneurs but may also help activate and engage more teens in social change efforts.



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What I would say that you should know about students across the country is that we are resilient. We are not going to give up, and we will not stop until we have common-sense gun laws. (Quirmbach 2018)

*Tatiana Washington, 17, Organizer of 50 Miles More
Student at Milwaukee's Rufus King High School*

On April 20, 1999, the country watched in horror as armed officers rushed stunned students out of Columbine High School where 13 people died and 26 were injured in a school shooting. It wasn't the first school shooting in the United States, and as we are brutally aware, it wasn't the last. A generation of children has grown up in a post-Columbine environment, and it is notable that we, their parents, teachers, and politicians, the adults of this nation have not been able to provide them with a safe school environment. Almost 20 years later, following the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, one teen called adults out stating: *"Clearly people have failed us in the government, and we must make the change now because we're the only ones who are going to,"* launching a movement of teen activism aimed at reducing gun violence in this country (Calfas 2018). These teens are part of a growing number of young changemakers and social entrepreneurs working in a wide array of sectors to take an active role in shaping their own future and changing our world.

Track Overview: What does it mean to be a teenager in the 21st century? Many categorize teens as self-centered with a limited world view and a focus on short-term goals that guide their behavior and actions. When we examine teens as consumers we focus on their propensity to spend their money and time on friends, fashion, music, sports, video games, entertainment, social media, and food (Prah 2011). However, there is increasing attention in the mainstream media on teens that not only care greatly about the world in which they live, but also have an amazing capacity to convert that empathy into coordinated action in an effort to change our world.

In this session, we adopt a relational engagement approach (Ozanne et al., 2016) to work directly with teens serving as changemakers and social entrepreneurs. Our investigation will not only examine the motivation and enabling factors but also the dimensionality of how teens organize, how they build support and gain credibility, as well as how they develop and mature as leaders. We include these teens in our research process from the project's inception, during the TCR conference, and throughout the writing process to disseminate these ideas to a wider audience. Including these motivated teens in our research process helps us to avoid applying *our* lens of developing and executing entrepreneurial ideas to their unique experiences. By systematically investigating how teens design and execute their entrepreneurial endeavors, we hope to identify points of similarity and difference relative to the current models of social entrepreneurship. Further, we hope to develop a conceptual framework of the emergent youth social entrepreneur movement that can activate and engage more teens in social change efforts.

Our goal is to develop a research paper that includes an integrative conceptual framework for teen changemaking and social entrepreneurship based on our relational engagement research efforts and a review of the extant literature.

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Track Goal: This track of the 2019 TCR Conference will examine how, when, and why teens are motivated to lead social change efforts on a wide array of important issues of global concern. Further, we examine the path to engaged activism with an eye toward formulating a framework that not only helps us understand the motivations and enabling factors that fuel the success of these emergent social entrepreneurs but may also help activate and engage more teens in social change efforts.

Selection of Participants: Approximately 4 academic researchers with a demonstrated interest or prior work in the areas of social entrepreneurship, community activism and/or psychosocial development of teens along with 2-3 community action partners directly involved in empowering teens as social entrepreneurs in local efforts as well as national and global initiatives will be selected to participate. We plan to assemble academic participants in various career stages as well as diverse research and methodological perspectives. Similarly, we hope to gather social entrepreneurs who represent diverse issues and structural organizations.

Tentative Schedule: Pre-conference Activities

Knowledge building: Working under an established timeline, track team members will participate in online discussions and each recommend social change organizations/websites, news stories, and academic research that will provide a broad-based understanding of teens as changemakers. In addition, we will gather and discuss research from other relevant perspectives including: community engagement and activism, government as a partner and road-block, community/policymaker attitudes towards teens as leaders, organizing for change, psychological development of teens, and measuring social impact.

Participatory Action Research: Track participants will work to systematically investigate teens as social entrepreneurs. After developing a semi-structured interview guide to facilitate in-depth interviews, researchers and community action partners will individually collect data to uncover and understand what makes teen changemakers unique with an eye toward understanding their deeper motivations, organizing successes as well as their plans and expectations for the future.

Shared learning: Each track participant will then summarize and share what they learned from the teen changemakers interviewed and programs investigated. Through online discussion and document sharing, the track team members will begin to layout an actionable framework for understanding and empowering teens as social entrepreneurs. Further, we will also examine patterns that reveal opportunities to teach other teens how to lead social change efforts on an issue they believe will help to create a better world for all of us as global citizens.

Tentative Schedule: Conference Schedule

Day 1 – Morning Session: During the morning session, the track team will organize, categorize, and synthesize the information and insights gathered during the pre-conference activities including: review of secondary and primary research data, and discussion of larger questions about social entrepreneurship in general. We will focus more on how teens in this role may be different from the current models of social entrepreneurship to develop a preliminary map of our conceptual framework.

Day 1 – Afternoon Session: After lunch we will map out a framework individuals and organizations can use to inspire, activate, empower, and develop teens as changemakers. We will develop a poster along with a brief presentation to explain the research used to develop the framework along with larger questions about how to empower more young social entrepreneurs to lead change efforts.

Day 1 – Evening Session: Poster session, integrative learning across the diverse TCR tracks.

Day 2 – Morning Session: During day two, we will discuss the feedback we received as well as ideas gleaned from other TCR tracks. Using these insights, we will refine our conceptual framework and develop a short presentation for closing. In addition, we will develop a plan of action for writing a competitive journal submission and discuss alternatives to disseminate action oriented information and our framework directly to community partners working to empower teens as changemakers.

