

CHAPTER 33

Organized Youth Activities as Contexts for Positive Development

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SOCIAL REFORMERS in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries developed a new set of contexts for youth that were specifically aimed at the goals of positive psychology. Community youth programs (scouts, Y's, youth clubs) and school-based extracurricular activities were created with the objective of preparing young people to be psychologically vibrant adults who contribute to the well-being of society. Advocates argued that these organized activities would promote youth's development of fundamental personal and social resources that are typically not acquired in school, such as initiative, motivation, connections to adults, and, more recently, multicultural competency. As we enter the pluralistic and rapidly changing global world of the twenty-first century, these personal and social resources are more important to adulthood than ever (Larson, 2002; Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002; Parker, Ninomiya, & Cogan, 1999). But school curricula remain focused on promoting a limited set of individual cognitive skills that can be measured by exams (Youniss & Ruth, 2002). Thus, organized youth activities have an important role to play in adolescents' preparation for adulthood, and developmental researchers—who have given limited attention to these contexts—have an important responsibility to provide theories and research on how they facilitate the growth of these diverse resources.

Existing research suggests that participation in organized youth activities is related to general indicators of positive development, but it provides little evidence on how development occurs. Controlled longitudinal studies show that participation in youth programs is associated with increased self-esteem, later educational achievement (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Marsh, 1992), participation in

voluntary associations at age 30 (Hanks & Eckland, 1978), and occupational attainment at age 40 (Glancy, Willits, & Farrell, 1986). Some studies suggest that effects are greater for disadvantaged youth (Mahoney, 2000; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). A fundamental limitation of nearly all of this research, however, is that it has treated youth programs as a "black box." Most studies provide little or no assessment of what goes on inside programs: what youth experience, how development occurs, or what effective youth practitioners do to support development (Eccles & Templeton, 2002; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002). As a result, we lack the *theories of change* that are needed for useful evaluation research, and we have little information that is helpful for the designers and practitioners of youth programs because research findings are not related to variables that they control.

This chapter describes our program of research aimed at understanding the *developmental processes* occurring within organized youth activities. What happens inside the activities that leads to positive change in young people? A guiding premise of our work is that youth programs are a context in which youth are active producers of their own development. We and others have found that when adolescents are signaled across the hours of the day, organized activities stand out as settings in which they report a psychological state of high motivation, attention, and challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Larson, 2000). Youth experience themselves as deeply engaged and agentic in a way that rarely happens in other parts of their daily lives. These are psychological conditions under which they can be expected to be active learners: to be self-organizing. Indeed, in a preliminary focus group study, we found that youth described themselves as actively engaging in a wide range of development experiences within organized activities (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). Furthermore, adolescents in our survey research reported higher rates of personal and social learning experiences (related to identity, initiative, emotion regulation, teamwork, and adult networks) in youth programs than during their daily school work and interactions with friends (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). So organized youth activities appear to be a particularly fertile context for self-generated change.

In our current research, we are developing grounded theory on how this change unfolds. What are the developmental processes that young people engage in within organized activities, and how do effective adult leaders of activities support these processes? In the first section of the chapter, we describe the longitudinal qualitative methods we are using to do this. In the middle section, we report the processes of change we have found in five domains of development. Last, we examine the role that adult leaders of youth programs (often called *youth practitioners* or *youth workers*) play in facilitating these developmental processes.

FOLLOWING DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGE IN THREE YOUTH PROGRAMS

To study these developmental processes, we carried out in-depth investigations of three high-quality youth programs. Participants and adult leaders in the programs were interviewed and observed over a 3- to 4-month natural cycle of program activity. Heath (1998) has found that effective youth programs engage young people in activities that they describe as "work," and the youth in all three programs were engaged in working toward some type of goal or goals.

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THREE PROGRAMS

Clarkston FFA: A Rural School-Based Program The first program we studied was a local chapter of the National FFA organization. This is an after-school program for high school students in the United States, oriented toward promoting leadership and preparing youth for careers in agriculture, food, fiber, and natural resource systems. We chose the Clarkston FFA chapter, located in a nearly all-White rural high school, because the two agriculture teachers who were its advisors placed high value on youth leadership and had reputations as effective mentors. The structure of the program provides many leadership roles and ways for youth to actively contribute. We studied this program during a 16-week period when the youth were involved in planning a summer day camp for fourth graders. The goal of the day camp was to teach these children about agriculture and to interest them in joining FFA when they reached high school. During this period, youth also participated in several regional and state FFA competitions (e.g., in poultry judging) and undertook several community service projects.

Art-First: An Urban Arts Program We chose the second program, Art-First, because it was recognized in the youth development community as providing high-quality art education to disadvantaged youth in a large city. The program draws ethnically and racially diverse students from all over the city. In addition to studio courses in visual arts, Art-First offers programs to help young people prepare for college, gain practical job skills, and learn about careers in the arts. We studied youth participating in Art-First's two-part summer career development program, coordinated by a dedicated young social worker with extensive experience working with teens. The first part of this program was a six-week course in which high school-age youth participated in various hands-on activities aimed at developing job skills related to arts careers. In the second six-week part of this program, students worked 20 hours a week in two principle activities: an arts-related internship in a business or nonprofit organization and a group arts project. This year, the arts project was creating a set of murals to be mounted on the local train platform.

Youth Action: An Urban Civic Program The third program was a youth activist organization in the same large city, which also had a positive reputation in the youth development community. Students in this program undertake action campaigns, often to alter policies in the city's public high schools. During the four months of study, their efforts were largely targeted toward changing the schools' zero tolerance policy and expanding sexuality education. Youth spend a considerable amount of time researching issues and learning about activism; then they put this knowledge to work. Participants in the program are primarily youth of color, including Latino, African American, and biracial teens. The adult leader was a committed Arab American young man who has earned the respect of the diverse youth he works with. We followed members in this program as they organized a city-wide Youth Summit, during which 300 youth from across the city took part in all-day, youth-led workshops. A panel in which youth voiced concerns and demands for school reform to a state senator and a representative from the school system was also included in the Summit. In addition, during this period, members of Youth Action were involved with a coalition that organized a rally for fair school funding, and they held a meeting with the superintendent of the city's schools.

GATHERING DATA ON DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

Our primary objective was to understand developmental experiences in these programs over the cycle of program activity. Because we are interested in youth as producers of their development, interviews were the method of choice. We wanted to understand how the young people experienced and conceptualized processes of change. At each program, we asked the adult leaders to select a sample of 10 to 13 representative participants, including approximately equal numbers of girls and boys. Our staff members then conducted biweekly phone interviews with each youth as well as longer face-to-face interviews at the beginning, at midpoint, and at the end of the study period. The open-ended interview protocols were developed from focus groups conducted with youth workers, the youth development literature, and a prior study with high school students (Dworkin et al., 2003). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Across the three programs, 206 youth interviews were conducted with 34 youth.

To help understand the adult leaders' role in facilitating this change, we also carried out biweekly interviews with the adult leaders and observed program sessions. The interviews with the leaders followed the same schedule as the interviews with the youth. A total of 33 leader interviews were conducted with the four adult leaders (including both FFA leaders). The observations were conducted biweekly or weekly, using techniques of participant observation. Observers took detailed notes following standard ethnographic protocols. Twenty-four observations were conducted across the three programs.

FROM DATA TO THEORY

Our analysis of the interviews and observations was guided by the grounded theory approach. This approach involves generation of coding schemes from the data that profile the themes and concepts and then conducting further steps of analyses to identify the relationships among concepts. Used by researchers across many disciplines, the purpose of grounded theory is to construct inductively derived theory that is grounded in qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The analyses were carried out by five analysis teams that focused on five distinct domains of development and by a sixth team that focused on the actions of the adult leaders. The first stage of analysis entailed coding and sorting out all material from the transcripts that fit into the domains of each team. NVivo, a qualitative data management program (QSR International, 2001), was used to aid in this process. In the second stage, the teams carried out a process of discovery focused on the material in their domain. Team members read the text for themes and underlying concepts in the participants' and leaders' interviews and in the ethnographic notes from the observations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Team members also kept notes on issues, themes, and ideas that arose from their work.

The final stages were then aimed at testing and further refining these preliminary concepts. The teams developed coding schemes for classifying themes and constructs in the narrative data (Charmaz, 1983) and then used grounded theory methods to examine how the different themes and constructs related to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As new material became available, they tested whether the new data fit with prior codes, concepts, and theories and modified the latter as

appropriate. This process allowed them to refine and verify the emerging conceptual ideas. We turn now to providing summary accounts of the teams' findings, first, on the five developmental processes, then, on what adult leaders did to support these processes.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES IN ORGANIZED YOUTH ACTIVITIES

PROCESS 1: DEVELOPING INITIATIVE

Initiative is the capacity to get things done—to organize your efforts over time to achieve a goal. This capacity is becoming increasingly important in the global twenty-first century. The greater fluidity of society requires that adults be more able to direct their lives and that communities have people capable of social and economic entrepreneurship (Larson, 2000). But obtaining the capacity for initiative is no easy achievement. Youth have limited skills for developing and executing plans (Gauvain & Perez, in press); indeed, the majority of adults are not very good at sticking with and achieving instrumental goals (Gollwitzer, 1999). Our survey research (Hansen et al., 2003) and the current study suggest that youth programs are a context where adolescents have some of their best opportunities to develop and practice components of initiative.

All three of the programs we studied engaged members in working toward goals, and youth's development of initiative skills appeared to grow from the challenges they encountered in striving toward these goals. We asked the youth at each biweekly interview what "challenges and obstacles" they were facing in their work. At a basic level, they repeatedly reported struggling with the challenges of "just doing it," of mobilizing their time and effort. Students in the Clarkston FFA, for example, encountered difficulties with finding time and not being sidetracked by other distractions in their lives (Larson, Hansen, & Walker, in press), challenges that were frequently encountered in the other two programs as well. Youth in Art-First reported being daunted by the size of the canvas they were given and challenged to get their murals done with a tight deadline.

As the weeks progressed, the youth recounted developing strategies for addressing this basic challenge of mobilizing their time and effort. The most frequently reported learning experiences in this domain involved learning that success in their projects was related to starting early, managing their time, and working hard. One youth in Art-First reported, "I basically learned how to just keep at it, you know, and once in awhile, just step back, and clear your head, and then get back at it." Similarly, Rosa, at Youth Action, said she learned:

Not to give up, oh my god, you know, how many times? It was just like, let's just forget it and start something new. It's not going to work. It's too hard, you know. But, I mean we just kept going and pushed forward and we got it!

The underlying insight reported by many youth was, "Hard work pays off"—success in a project is correlated with the effort invested. In close analysis of the Clarkston data, we found that the youth were beginning to think about time and effort as *quantities* that can be deliberately allocated to achieve a goal; they were beginning to think about future time—the days and weeks ahead—as an arena in which their effort can be deployed (Larson, Hansen, et al., in press).

Several youth in Art-First and Youth Action articulated a more advanced level of strategic thinking, which they developed in response to the logistical challenges of their work. These youth reported gaining insights on how to problem-solve, consider contingencies, and organize steps in the work to effectively accomplish an end. A student at Youth Action, Leon, recounted the steps the group followed in their campaign to change the school system's uniform discipline code. First, they did research: They surveyed students in the schools and gathered data through the school board's office of accountability:

After we got the research, we started having proposals with members of the board. And some were warm toward us; some didn't really care. But after we kept doing it and doing it and getting more and more concrete facts and solid figures, after awhile [it was] too obvious to ignore. If you have research and analysis, then it's like you can't ignore solid research. So eventually they changed it and modified some things.

In contrast to Leon's account of a methodical progression of steps, a student in Art-First reported learning that reaching a goal is often a nonlinear process. He had an internship at a toy company that developed new toys, and said, "There's a lot of going back to the beginning. After you work, you get to step ten, [then] 'Oh, something happened,' so you gotta go back to step zero (laughs)."

At this more advanced level, youth were learning to think logistically about how to organize the multiple steps and components in their work. Research shows that adolescents are just acquiring the cognitive abilities to think about complex, interacting systems (Mascolo, Fisher, & Neimeyer, 1999). These youth reported learning to develop plans that took into account the dynamics of multiple systems: their group, adult organizations (e.g., the school board), and other levels of analysis (e.g., what would be of interest to fourth graders at a day camp). Consistent with this, Heath (1999) found that teens in effective youth programs develop linguistic tools related to this kind of logistic thinking, such as scenario building and use of if-then sentence constructions.

Youth in these programs, then, appeared to be both learning to mobilize their time and effort and acquiring more advanced logistic strategies for organizing this effort. For several students, this increased ability for initiative appeared to transfer to other parts of their lives, including to their career planning. Rosa from Youth Action, who was from an immigrant working-class family, described how their achievements as a group had made her decide to pursue a career in law:

I didn't think I could be a lawyer. I'm like, it's got a lot of schooling, but I think it's really made me say yes, it's a possibility. You can make anything, you know, we've done things. We started out, like a really dinky organization, but now a lot of people are looking to us and they're like: how do you do this and how do you do that? So we've gotten to be, hopefully, one of the greater organizations. And so I believe anything's possible.

The success that Rosa and others experienced through youth programs appeared to build initiative skills and confidence in those skills that they carried into the future. Although these results are preliminary, we suspect that these developmental changes contribute to the finding that participation in youth programs

predicts later educational achievement and adult occupational attainment (Eccles & Templeton, 2002).

PROCESS 2: TRANSFORMATIONS IN MOTIVATION

Interrelated with the development of initiative skills were changes in youth's motivation. Time sampling research has shown that a large number of American adolescents are chronically bored, with the highest rates of boredom occurring during activities that are challenging and require sustained effort such as schoolwork (Larson & Richards, 1991). Yet, to thrive as adults, young people need to learn to be motivated by challenge: They must learn to enjoy work. Because organized activities are the one context in teens' lives where motivation, challenge, and attention consistently co-occur, it has been hypothesized that they provide youth with unique opportunities to learn to enjoy serious, adultlike challenges (Kleiber, Larson, & Csikszentmihalyi, 1986).

As we followed youth's participation in the three programs, we witnessed this type of transformation in adolescents' motivation and began to see how it occurs. We found that many participants joined the programs for extrinsic reasons. They reported entering the programs to please their parents or to hang out with other teens. Many of the students in Youth Action said that they joined because participation provided the community service hours that were required for high school graduation; for a few who were being paid, the money was an incentive for joining. As they participated in the programs, however, most indicated that their motives for participation changed. Rosa from Youth Action said:

When I first started, I wasn't really too interested. One of the things that kept me interested was being paid; I was a youth apprentice. Then I started realizing that I like this kind of work. I'm helping people.

In fact, Rosa and many Youth Action students, including those not being paid, continued participation well after they had fulfilled their required high school service hours. Across the three programs, youth reported that their reasons for participating had shifted. Despite the hard work involved, the great majority of youth we interviewed indicated that they remained in the program because the work had become intrinsically rewarding.

What accounted for the development of intrinsic motivation in this work? When asked to explain week-to-week elevations in their motivation, first, many youth emphasized the special opportunities that the programs provided. They reported that their motivation was raised because they were able to engage in activities that were novel, fresh, and personally enticing: They got to do things that they were not able to do outside the program. Several FFA members pointed to the freedom they had to choose from a wide range of activities; one reported having tried every activity that the program offered. An Art-First student, Marsha, compared her experience in the program with art classes at her school:

My school is so restricted because we're going to be graded; you are always worried about it. But our teacher here said, "Just experiment." So I went crazy, it's all abstract and I had never done that before; I'm enjoying the program very much.

The key idea for Marsha and other youth seemed to be that they were voluntarily choosing activities that were novel and personally interesting.

Second, they described their change in motivation as emerging from the experience of involvement in the activity itself. From week-to-week, they reported getting caught up in preparing for the FFA competitions, working on their Art-First murals, and planning the Youth Action rally. When asked what it was about organizing a workshop that made him so motivated, a boy at Youth Action replied simply: "I've been doing a lot of work, I'm really psyched." Participants repeatedly explained their motivation by saying that the work they were doing was "exciting," "fun," and "enjoyable." A boy at Art-First said, "The more and more I get involved, the more and more I'm like anticipating the next time I get to come back." In short, participation in the activities appeared to be self-reinforcing.

This transformation in motivation—this new experience of enjoying work—can be provisionally explained with Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1990) theory of flow, which presents intrinsic motivation as growing out of the experience of challenge. These youth programs provided a range of activity choices that allowed students to select activities that, in Csikszentmihalyi's terms, had personally engaging "opportunities for action" or challenges. In the FFA, a number of youth emphasized the regional and state competitions as the source of challenge, and across programs many youth were engaged by the challenges of doing well: creating a beautiful mural, having an effective rally, and organizing a successful day camp. Taking on these challenges required concerted effort and, as youth got into the work, a number reported discovering that they were skilled at it. The core of Csikszentmihalyi's theory, supported by much research, is that when people experience their skills as *matched* to the challenges of an activity, they have the experience of absorption and enjoyment, an experience evident in the students' repeated reports of excitement, fun, and "being psyched."

What is important for our purposes is that this enjoyment of challenge is self-reinforcing. It creates the desire to repeat the experience. And when people are in conditions where they experience a sequence or channel of meaningful challenges that are matched to their skills, Csikszentmihalyi finds that they experience sustained deep enjoyment or *flow*, which is repeated each time they participate in the activity. Our data suggest that youth programs allow young people to learn to enjoy work because they provide flexible and supportive conditions for youth to find this channel—to discover and sustain this matching of challenges with their skills.

Having discovered this capacity to enjoy work and challenge, a few youth reported that it carried over to others areas of their lives. Excited by his experience in working on FFA projects, a boy stated: "I'm going to turn my attention toward other things that I like and work toward them." By his account, the experience of enjoyment in FFA had roused to life a capacity for deep absorption in working toward other types of challenges.

PROCESS 3: ACQUIRING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Adolescent development consists not only in the acquisition of new skills and dispositions but also in the formation of personal relationships, including those with adults. Youth need and benefit from relationships with members of adult worlds who provide *social capital*—who provide information and resources that connect

them to these adult worlds (Benson, 1997; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002). Social capital is also considered to be good for communities, because the exchange of knowledge, resources, and trust creates a healthy civil society (Putnam, 2000). Involvement in youth programs can offer adolescents opportunities to build social capital and tap into the expertise of highly resourced adults.

Youth from all three programs we studied described how activities of the programs brought them into contact with adults from the community. Participants in Art-First developed relationships with adults in professional settings through their internships. Members of Youth Action interacted with community leaders and school administrators as part of their campaign for school reform. In FFA, a student leader, Jeff, described how they interacted with members of the community through their outreach activities:

One good thing that we do is foundation collection. That's when we go around to all the agribusinesses and try to collect money for the state. I really didn't know anyone in this town until I got into there. And we just go around and talk to them and say who you are and say like can we have your money (laughs). But, it's let me meet new people. And this past year as being president, I talked to a lot more people in the community.

As a result of these interactions, Jeff reported that he now would sometimes speak with these adults when he saw them at a store or at community events.

Some of the youth described using these contacts and relationships for information or other purposes. Leon, at Youth Action, explained how he drew on the relationships with adults he met through the program:

I talk to them and, if I have a question about an issue, they'll be able to help me out with it. Since I got to know some of 'em, I had a problem with my computer, and one of them just happened to be skilled at fixing computers. So, I was able to talk to him and he actually fixed my computer free of charge.

In the same vein, a member of the Clarkston FFA described how he was able to draw on his relationship with a local banker developed through FFA to assist in organizing a trap shoot: "The banker in town is a big shooter and stuff—a big hunter. I just called up the bank and he got everything pretty much lined up for us. I called him twice and he called all the rest of the people."

Most significantly, youth at all three programs reported using these relationships in connection to their education and career paths. This was illustrated when a member of Youth Action was told by his school that he had to come back for one class after his senior year, and he would be required to go full time and take a full load. But the boy talked with a person at central administration whom he had met through Youth Action, and this person explained that he could take the course through night school and made sure that this arrangement was worked out. Many students reported learning from adults about college and career choices and sometimes using these adults for letters of reference. An academically talented youth at Art-First, Marco, described the relationship with the supervisor at his internship:

My supervisor has friends at Dartmouth College, which is one of my college choices, and the fact that I'm creating connections—this sounds evil, I don't mean to sound manipulative or anything—to people who know other people that can get to know me can help me achieve my goal of getting into the college that I want.

The contacts that Marco gained were so helpful that he felt like he was doing something wrong, but they were extremely valuable in his ultimate success in gaining admission to a first-rate college.

Across programs, the students repeatedly described their relationships with these adults as "opening new worlds." They had their "eyes opened," had "doors opened," and been brought "out of their shell." They reported learning what a given career world is "really like," as well as learning how real people manage the challenges of those worlds. One student said that these experiences made her more trusting of the adult world; another spoke of having her hopes for the future raised. School and career choices that had been abstract and unreal became tangible possibilities. An FFA member said, "It's definitely given me new options that I've never even thought about or I wouldn't have thought about had I not joined this organization." By developing relationships with adults through these programs, youth were able to draw on the experience of these experts in ways that provided social capital and opened new opportunities for their future.

PROCESS 4: BRIDGING DIFFERENCE

Another type of interpersonal capital, gained largely through peers, involved developing relationships and understanding across dimensions of human difference. The contemporary world increasingly brings people from diverse groups into contact; therefore, it is essential that young people learn to *bridge difference*—to understand, respect, and forge relationships across religious, ethnic, and other dimensions of human diversity. Yet high rates of racial intolerance and hate crimes by youth (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2000; Youniss et al., 2002) and a rising tide of ethnic conflicts across the world (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998) indicate that many young people are not developing competencies to understand and appreciate human diversity. Youth programs have been identified as potentially unique and important contexts for teenagers to develop these competencies (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002), and our data provided evidence of how this developmental process occurs.

The data suggested that youth learn to bridge difference through a three-step process. The first step involved interaction with youth who were different in some way. At the Clarkston FFA, which was all White, the salient differences that were bridged were those between different cliques and crowds: jocks, brains, punks, and hicks (Watkins, 2003). At Youth Action and Art-First, where students were diverse, we observed interactions across ethnic groups and sexual orientations. The students reported that these cross-group interactions often resulted from work toward the shared goals in the program. An FFA member, Jamie, said:

Cliques will have their different ideas on the small tiny details. You give each a major goal, and then give them each their own part to work on to reach that goal. They're still working together, while having their own individual likes and dislikes.

The FFA youth were not always enthused about working with teens from different cliques, but their individual and group success depended on it. At Youth Action, the students described coming together with youth from different ethnic groups to "basically act as a family and work together for a certain goal." The shared goals provided a common ground for youth with different backgrounds to build trust and have sustained, meaningful interactions.

As a result of these interactions, the second step involved learning about these others and beginning to see them in more human terms. Youth in the programs worked in small groups on specific tasks or projects. The high levels of close interaction and interdependency that characterized the small groups allowed youth to learn about and become familiar with one another. A girl in FFA remarked, "We know each other better because we've worked with each other." Youth were active in this learning process and often initiated learning about one another's interests, values, family backgrounds, and perspectives on different issues. A girl at Youth Action said, "Now I see different races and I try to talk to them and try to be as friendly as I [would] be to my own race." A couple of youth reported the experience of what we have called "discovering the personhood" in someone from a different group. At FFA, a girl reported the change in this way: "Jack, he's a big punk; [but], there's a person inside of him that's completely different from what you see." Similarly, a boy described a friendship he had formed with a bisexual teen at Youth Action, "It's the same person inside. He's really bi and he's cool." These youth learned to look past outward appearance and group affiliation and came to understand the humanity of others. Through meaningful interactions over time, the youth came to know others more deeply and realized that *difference* is only one aspect of a person.

At a third step, youth reported changes in thinking that affected how they interacted with members of other groups. The insights gained in step two seemed to facilitate youth being considerate of differences that had once impeded genuine interaction. A student at Youth Action stated, "I'm a lot more sensitive to issues that affect people than before. I didn't really understand, but now I want to understand why certain people feel this way." This sensitivity was related to changes in their behavior. An FFA member recounted how the level of respect across cliques had risen to the point that, on a weekend trip, they found themselves all hanging out together in one person's hotel room, "Usually we split up, but we were all in the room laughing. It was weird. You just learn to respect people's different ways." Program members also learned to curtail comments that would be hurtful to others. Latasha at Youth Action reported:

The program has showed me to be sensitive to this boy that had a sex change. I used to make fun of him at school like all the other kids do. We had a speaker [talk] to us about queer people. They told us [to] put ourselves in their shoes. I didn't like the feeling of it, so I decided to change and I started talking to him.

The developmental process entailed in these three steps of bridging difference was not always easy. When confronted with differences, youth often struggled, resisted, or denied that they had anything to learn. The adult leaders of the programs worked hard to provide conditions for positive intergroup interactions. These conditions were closely similar to those cited in the research on facilitating relationships between cultural groups: equal status, cooperative interaction,

individualized contact across groups, and support from the adults in the setting (Allport, 1954; National Research Council, 2000). In this environment, youth struggled, but many actively and intentionally engaged in interactions, made discoveries about different groups, and changed how they thought about and behaved toward youth who were different in some way. The sequence of three steps, and the role of programs in facilitating them, is encapsulated in the description from a Latino youth, Miguel:

Youth Action's a cool place to come to. A lot of ethnic groups come together and you meet a lot of people. Like certain people you're going to like, certain people you're not going to like, so you always come together on a certain issue. You might not like them, but when it comes to [reforming] school, you come together. And it opens up the way you think about other people and your skills, the way you talk, your shyness, everything, like it kind of goes away. It starts fading and you make like a better person of yourself.

PROCESS 5: NEWFOUND RESPONSIBILITY

If you ask youth what they must gain to be adults, becoming responsible is one of the primary qualities they mention (Arnett, 2000). Indeed, evidence suggests that the development of responsible behavior is strongly related to success and satisfaction across the spheres of adult life, from family to work; for example, an employee's level of conscientiousness is found to be the personality trait most predictive of work outcomes after general intelligence (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). All three of the programs we studied turned over major task responsibility to youth, and in all three many participants reported a process of coming to feel and act more responsible as a result of this experience.

Compared to adolescents in other cultures, Western youth are rarely in situations where their performance impacts people other than themselves (Schlegel & Barry, 1991). But the three programs we studied were an exception. At the Clarkston FFA, youth took responsibility as members of work groups preparing for the competitions and service projects. At Art-First, youth had duties at their internship. At Youth Action, members took responsibility for facilitating workshops and conducting research to be used for meetings with school administrators. Sometimes youth volunteered for these tasks, and sometimes they were recruited into them by the adult leaders. Often their desire to perform well for the adult leader made them take the task more seriously, as expressed by a student at Youth Action: "That is like another responsibility; I did not want to disappoint Jason."

Our data suggested that the development of responsibility from these demands (as with bridging difference) can be described as a three-stage process. The first stage was characterized by youth's taking on a task and being surprised in their capacity to be successful in meeting its demands. At the beginning, they often reported feeling nervous or anxious that the task might be beyond their capabilities. A girl in Youth Action, who had been assigned to lead a group discussion, said, "It's scary to think that I should take over. What do I do? I'm still a little [scared], although I try, and then Jason said he'll help me." Therefore, when youth later executed the tasks successfully, they were often impressed by what they had accomplished. For example, after setting up a meeting and giving a presentation to an important public school official, Gabriella, at Youth Action, reported:

I didn't know that I was capable of doing some of the activities we do here, like setting up meetings with the Board of Education. That's big, you know? I have never been a part of anything like that.

For this girl and others in this situation, there was a sense of surprise and pride that they were able to accomplish what they did.

Over time, the students' continued successes in taking responsibility for tasks were less likely to elicit surprise, and they entered a second stage where they came to see their success as indicative of a stable characteristic of how they are when they are in the program. In other words, they experienced an emerging responsible self that was specific to the program—it described their role identity inside the program but was distinct from their general way of seeing themselves (Wood & Roberts, 2003). This stage was more evident among youth who had been in the program over several years. Jeff, a student leader at the Clarkston FFA, illustrated this stage when he stated:

I'm more disciplined here. A lot of my friends outside FFA seem to get kinda wild sometimes. And, of course, I have to go with 'em. [But] I'd have to say I work harder when I'm in the program.

At this stage, acting responsibly becomes a mode of behavior that youth are comfortable turning on when they are involved with the program but may not employ in other parts of their lives.

The third stage involved generalizing responsibility to other domains. Jeff experienced his responsible behavior carrying over to how he acted at his job, and he anticipated his qualities in the program would eventually be integrated into his general character. After admitting that he was "kinda wild" with his friends, the interviewer asked him which "self" he would be most like in 6 or 10 years. Jeff responded, "I'll probably be more like the FFA [self]. Slowed down and more responsible." In a similar vein, an Art-First youth reported feeling "older" as a result of what he had accomplished there. And a student at Youth Action reported that, although he used to really want to have his own car, his new sense of being responsible, gained through the program, had led him to see saving for college as more important. As a result of repeatedly succeeding in tasks that required responsibility, these youth had come to internalize a general sense of themselves as responsible.

This three-stage developmental process evolved through an interaction between the youth's commitment to the goals of the programs and the support they received from the adult leaders and other youth. Roberts and Wood (in press) show how people's bonds to social institutions facilitate, encourage, and demand development of self-control. Thus, the youth reported that they acted responsibly partly because they did not want to let their peers or the adult leaders down. At the same time, their motivation and capacity to act responsibly was nurtured and directed by the adult leaders. As discussed in the next section, the adult leaders guided youth into tasks they could handle. In some cases, the leader of Youth Action described pairing youth with an older group member who could provide mentoring and support. Thus, although it was the youth who made the discovery that they were capable of acting responsibly, the adult leaders often played a role in shaping conditions for these discoveries to be made.

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF ADULT LEADERS

When we turn to examining the role of adult leaders in supporting these developmental processes, we observed what could be seen as a paradox. Across the five domains of development, youth described themselves as the agents of their own development. They learned about difference through an active process of interacting with others and then reformulating their beliefs and behavior. They came to view themselves as responsible through a process of self-discovery. Yet, at the same time, it is apparent from our data that the adult leaders were active and intentional in creating the conditions to support these processes of youth-driven change. Indeed, we found that when adult leaders backed off and gave youth complete control, the youth's work could stall or become disorganized due to the youth's inexperience, which could then undermine their motivation and learning (Larson, Hansen, et al., in press; see also Camino, 2000). The paradox, then, is that if adult leaders completely stand back, learning can get off track, but if adult leaders take over control, youth will not experience the ownership and agency that drives the developmental changes we have described.

The adult leaders of these three programs, we found, were highly skilled at avoiding the horns of this paradox: balancing youth agency and adult direction. Our data suggest that the adults employed a set of techniques to cultivate youth ownership *at the same time* they were providing guidance and structure to help keep things on track. Elsewhere we described how the two Clarkston FFA advisors used several techniques to maintain this balance in ways that supported development of initiative (Larson, Hansen, et al., in press). Here we describe how the adult leaders used these same and other techniques to sustain this balance in ways that facilitated a wider range of developmental experiences. To provide focus, we give primary attention to how these techniques were used by Jason Massad, the Youth Action leader.

TECHNIQUE 1: FOLLOWING YOUTH'S LEAD

A first technique involved supporting goals and directions that the youth set for the program's activities. At Youth Action, Jason expected the youth to determine what their next action would be. It was the youth who decided to hold a Youth Summit, and, afterwards, to plan a rally to protest a new citywide high school exam. Jason provided support activities to help youth prepare for these events—typing handouts, providing transportation, and coaching several members on how to give a presentation. But he insisted that ownership and "the creative work" for executing these events remain in the hands of the youth. The Clarkston FFA advisors demonstrated the same strategy of following youth's lead (Larson, Hansen, et al., in press).

By reinforcing youth ownership, this technique reinforced youth's role as active agents of their development. Because youth had set the goals for Youth Action, they experienced the challenges of the work as their own; thus, they had to generate solutions to these challenges. As described previously, it was through the process of generating these solutions that teens developed initiative skills. Because youth set the direction, they also owned the mistakes, which induced the process of reflecting on what to do better the next time. After the Youth Summit,

the students in Youth Action articulated a catalog of things they did right and things they would do differently for their next event.

Following youth's lead is not easy for many adult leaders because it requires a great deal of forbearance and adaptability. At the last minute, for example, the youth decided to completely redesign one of their Youth Summit workshops. Jason emphasized, however, that for a program to be youth-driven, it was important that he be comfortable with loose ends and teenage spontaneity: "Like if they wanna wing parts of it, they can wing parts of it, and they'll learn from that." He was clear that it was the process, not the product, that was important. By having their goals and directions supported, youth in these programs were more likely to engage in the developmental processes of learning initiative, internalizing responsibility, and other growth experiences.

TECHNIQUE 2: CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF YOUTH INPUT

Another technique used by Jason and other adult leaders involved cultivating norms that emphasized youth input and leadership. All of the organizations we studied had a distinct culture, passed on across cohorts, and from the first day that youth walked in the door, they learned expectations, aphorisms, and norms that reinforced their role in providing input. At Youth Action, this culture included expectations that youth direct events and that their voices be expressed (e.g., through doing raps or reading poetry at events). The strength of this culture was demonstrated when the youth were working with a woman from another organization who expected the youth to follow a plan she had developed. In Jason's words:

She just kind of came in with like, "We have expertise on this issue, we can like provide you with this information, we'll do this for you." And my youth were like, "We've been researching this all summer, we have the information we need, we just want your support."

The adult-directed approach of this woman did not fit the Youth Action culture, and the youth firmly rejected it.

The adult leaders of the programs helped cultivate these cultures in ways that encouraged not only youth ownership but also the responsibilities that go with this ownership. The culture at FFA included structured leadership roles (president, secretary, etc.), along with a history of expectations that individuals in those roles took on. These organizational cultures, then, legitimized youth leadership while providing norms for how it is exercised. They created demand conditions for youth to learn responsibility. Thus, these cultures stressed youth input, but they were also a vehicle through which adults supported a climate for youth-driven learning experiences.

TECHNIQUE 3: MONITORING

While the first two techniques were often directed at encouraging the ownership part of the adult leaders' balancing act, other techniques were directed more at keeping youth on track. Monitoring involved ongoing attentiveness to how the work of the group was proceeding, and intervening as needed. Adult leaders made ongoing decisions about how much they could let youth wing it and when they

needed to provide guidance or intervene in some way because the costs of letting things get off course were too great. Jason had a laid-back approach and provided the youth with many opportunities to drive the work, but if they let things lag, he would speak up:

Like Tuesday, they wanted to goof around (laughs) and I was like, "You guys, we gotta get serious, we have two weeks left before this Youth Summit, we're gonna have hundreds of people coming." But it's okay, they're youth. My role is to make sure that we're serious when we need to be.

When Jason felt things needed to be brought back on track, he would do it. He made many phone calls to check in with youth to make sure they were present at key meetings. If something was not done, he would sometimes do it himself so that the overall momentum was not stopped due to some critical missing piece.

For adult leaders, deciding when to intervene and play this role can be difficult. Adult leaders debate among themselves when they should let youth fail versus res-cuing them to ensure the success of an activity (Zeldin & Camino, 1999). An important concern is that when adults step in too assertively, it can undermine youth ownership (Soep, 1997). Jason's interventions, however, were carefully oriented to encourage rather than undercut the work and the goals of the youth. One teen, Aisha, said Jason was:

Always making sure that you had your plan out just 110%, like know that this is exactly what you were going to do; go for step A and then go for step B. He always made sure that it made sense, like if you had a problem with getting a situation, "Okay, I can see how I can do this."

In a sense, Jason was holding up a mirror to help students see their work better and see what needed to be done. Through monitoring the progress of youth's work and intervening as he saw fit, he and the other expert adult leaders not only kept youth on track but, by doing so in discreet ways, helped reinforce youth ownership (Larson, Hansen, et al., in press).

TECHNIQUE 4: CREATING INTERMEDIATE STRUCTURES

At a higher level of intervention, the adult leaders sometimes structured or reconfigured tasks to make them more manageable for youth. They created structures that helped fit tasks to what they perceived to be the youth's abilities. Thus, Jason would often prepare a calendar that organized the group's preparations for an event or write out the shell of a script for a student conducting a meeting. When Youth Action members met with several other groups, one of the adult leaders came prepared with a set of flip charts that gave the agenda for the meeting and had empty boxes for decisions that the youth needed to make. Although the students might have been able to create the agenda on their own, the adult's structure permitted them to spend the meeting time focused on concrete planning. This kind of adult structuring was most common at Art-First, where, for example, the adult leader carried out the negotiations with the city transit authority to get approval for doing the murals. Although some practitioners might have chosen to include youth in this process, the Art-First leader felt that the complexity of these

negotiations and the limited patience of the city required that she handle it. This prior work allowed her to be able to present a defined and manageable task to the youth on the first day of the program.

Accurately gauging what youth can and cannot do requires experience, and many leaders either overestimate or underestimate youth's capabilities (Zeldin & Camino, 1999). In certain situations, the introduction of an appropriate level of structure appeared to be necessary to allow youth to keep the work from breaking down (Larson, Hansen, et al., in press). Using Csikszentmihalyi's model, adult leaders used this technique to define challenges that were matched to youth's skills and, hence, create conditions for sustained intrinsic motivation.

TECHNIQUE 5: STRETCHING AND PUSHING YOUTH

But the adult leaders did not just match tasks to youth's abilities; they often encouraged, provoked, and pushed the youth to try out new roles and ideas. They nudged youth to go beyond their comfort zones. This included taking on not only new levels of responsibility, as discussed previously, but also new topics. For example, when Youth Action initiated a campaign for comprehensive sexual education in the schools, Jason invited a gay man to talk with the youth about being gay, an opportunity that most of the youth had never had. Many members described this encounter as eye-opening and as a stimulus for changes in the domain of "bridging difference." This pushing was adapted to what the leaders felt youth could handle. Jason recognized that sometimes he pushes too much, and the youth might not be ready for that level of responsibility:

Maybe they weren't ready to do something, you know, and they needed more talent or skill development. Part of it is being able to read people and knowing when to say, "Will you do this?" and they're like, "No, I don't wanna do that," and is it that they really don't wanna do it, or do they just need that push?

Jason reported that he periodically steps back and asks, "Okay, what are people's just everyday human needs?" In sum, these attempts at stretching were created and adjusted in ways that encouraged youth to make new discoveries but without overwhelming them.

THE ART OF PRACTITIONERS

Adult leaders' challenge of balancing youth ownership with guidance and support is not easy. As in other service fields, practitioners face the challenge of reconciling the conflicting professional inclinations to do what their expertise says people need versus empowering them to engage in self-change (Rappaport, 1981). In programs with youth, this means finding a balance between being the adult, who knows more and can do things more expeditiously, and relating to young people as partners—who are likely to be more motivated and learn more when they experience agency. Faced with this choice, the typical tendency is for adults to place greater emphasis on control—on keeping things on track—rather than allowing youth input and ownership (Camino, 2000).

But what was evident from these three programs was that keeping things on track and youth ownership are not inevitably at odds. Jason Massad, as well as the

adult leaders of the Clarkston FFA and Art-First, had developed skills for balancing the two. They supported youth ownership in ways that reinforced youth responsibility. When they created structures or intervened to keep things on track, they did so in ways that often shored up rather than undercut youth ownership. From week to week, they would deploy one technique or another, as they felt necessary, to maintain or restore the balance. In effect, they were helping create a channel for youth's exercise of agency—and thus youth's sense of ownership—that was within the youth's capabilities. In Vygotsky's theory, they were providing scaffolding that helped keep youth within their "zone of proximal development" (i.e., within a level of learning matched to their abilities). In Csikszentmihalyi's theory, they were helping create conditions in which the challenges were matched to youth's skills, conditions in which youth could experience self-sustaining intrinsic motivation in the process of learning.

It was our observation that what adult leaders did was more art than a science. Their balancing act was not achieved by prescription, but by responding improvisationally to the ongoing situation. Expert practitioners learn from experience, build from their own personal strengths, and are responsive to the context and conditions at hand (Larson, Hansen, et al., in press; Walker, Marczak, Blyth, & Bordon, in press). It should also be recognized that different balances of youth ownership and adult intervention may be appropriate for programs with different developmental goals, in different situations, and for different groups of youth. As compared to the Clarkston FFA and Youth Action, Art-First and a theater production we studied recently had a greater balance of adult direction relative to youth ownership, a balance that was better suited to their emphasis on talent development (Larson, Walker, & Pierce, in press). It should also be recognized that we have presented only one of the many balancing acts that the adult leaders performed. They play diverse roles for youth—as mentors, teachers, parents, and friends—thus, their improvisation includes trying to juggle many types of, sometimes competing, goals and imperatives.

CONCLUSION

Human development involves a process of dialectic interaction between the environment and the developing person. A distinctive feature of youth programs is that they provide environments characterized by the types of constraints and contingencies that are typical of adult worlds (Heath, 1998; Larson, 2000). Youth in the three programs we studied confronted the sort of obstacles and challenges people must overcome to reach long-term goals. They were subject to the norms of adult professional worlds (e.g., in their arts internships and dealing with school officials), they encountered the realities of ethnic differences, and they encountered the weight and duties of responsibility to others. These were contexts in which actions mattered.

The important finding of our research was that the youth responded to these environments as active agents in the dialectic process. They made choices, pursued goals, and changed how they thought about and acted on the world. They were active producers of their own development across multiple domains of learning. They responded to obstacles and challenges by developing insights that allowed them to better reach goals. They actively drew on adults to develop knowledge and find their way in adult career worlds. Through collaborative interactions with youth

from different backgrounds, they gained understanding and learned modes of communication for bridging these differences. And through successful experiences in taking on responsibility, they progressively changed their self-concepts to that of being responsible persons. Organized youth programs, our data suggest, can be a fertile context for active processes of positive development in multiple domains.

Effective adult leaders, we have seen, are active as well and play important roles in facilitating this dialectic process. On the one hand, they are representatives of the adult world. They translate, help articulate constraints, or intervene to keep youth's engagement on track. On the other hand, they support youth's ownership of their work in ways that facilitate youth's active processes of development.

In further work, we plan to study additional programs to better test, confirm, revise, and expand the descriptions of processes we have described here. Research using other methods will ultimately be important to filling out and providing fuller evaluation for these findings. Important tasks for the future include understanding how young people's self-selection into programs influences the patterns seen here and evaluating how these processes vary across contexts, types of adult leaders, and the full array of organized youth programs. We are hopeful that information on the processes of development in this context will provide knowledge to better design youth programs and better train youth practitioners so that more youth will be prepared to be psychologically versatile and vibrant adults who make positive contributions to society.

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